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Modern Arab Discourse and Democracy: An Epistemological Critique

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MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY:
AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

By

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2011
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GRADUATE SCHOOL

July 7, 2011

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Ali Saeed Abd ENTITLED Modern Arab Discourse and Democracy: An Epistemological Critique BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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ABSTRACT

Abd, Ali Saeed. M.H., Master of Humanities, Wright State University, 2011. Modern Arab Discourse and Democracy: An Epistemological Critique.

Nearly two centuries have elapsed since the early 19th century modern Arab *nahda*. In contemporary Arab-Muslim accounts, there can be no downplaying the fact that after nearly two centuries, the Arab *nahda* has faltered at achieving its desired objectives. If so, what explains its faltering? Numerous well-read explanations on this bulk in Arab and Western literature; however, I argue that the most important factor behind the faltering of Arab *nahda* to date is the faulty form of Arab rationality dominating *nahda* discourse since its inception: ahistoricity. The entirety of Arab discourse treats the past as ahistorical and sacral to be repeated while seeking to extract from it already-possessed or realized solutions to the Arab problems of the present. I conclude that any hope of resuming *nahda*'s progress is by no means assured without a *nahdazid* mind, one that assumes a healthful awareness of the past which is based first and foremost on a historical consciousness of and critical relation to it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. EVOLUTION OF MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE.....	7
Modern Arab Renaissance: In What Context?.....	7
Modern Arab Discourse: In What Meaning?.....	17
The Consciousness of Backwardness.....	21
The Split.....	32
III. DEMOCRACY IN THE MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE.....	43
The Muslim Model.....	45
The Liberal Approach.....	52
The Nationalist Orientation.....	58
IV. DEMOCRACY IN MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE.....	66
V. CONCLUSION.....	90
WORKS CITED.....	105

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In my home country, when we wish to speak in the fervor of our gratitude for others, we often say that the ‘pen betrays us in the expression of our inner feeling.’ But I have come to learn here, when such an occasion arises, the expression is ‘just say it.’ I find this last sentence far more chilling and potent.

On this occasion, I must thank the Fulbright Exchange Program for providing me a scholarship to the Wright State University. This thesis was possible only through their generous financial support.

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To my little daughter Jannat (*gardens*), may your life be long
to witness *gardens* of modernity greening
on our unhappy land.

I. INTRODUCTION

No introduction can uncover everything to its reader. Nevertheless every introduction should at least expound one issue: subject matter. This thesis deals with a single paradox that we may simply formulate as such: The quest for democracy in Arab region is two centuries old, but Arabs are still the example of the lack of democracy. How to conceptualize this faltering of democracy? This is the question that we will endeavor to answer in this thesis which will begin with locating the beginning of Arab *nahda* (Renaissance) and then analyze the structure of Modern Arab discourse's readings of democracy in its three trends as a condition of the *nahda* project.

The thesis ends with exploring the problematic of these readings. I argue that the reason behind the faltering of democracy in the Arab region to date is the form of the Arab rationality dominating its discourse since its formative phase. The entirety of modern and contemporary Arab discourse on *democracy* treated the past as ahistorical and sacral to be repeated while seeking to extract from it already-possessed or realized solutions to the Arab problems of the present. My analysis of modern Arab discourse concludes that any hope of full modernization is by no means assured without a healthful awareness of the past which is based first and foremost on a historical consciousness of and critical relation to it.

Thesis Synopsis

The thesis consists of three chapters framed by an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter is, in a sense, a *history of a period*, that is, it offers mainly a descriptive account of the formative period of Arab *nahda*. In this sense, the chapter is set to provide an answer to a historical question: when was the beginning of Arab *nahda*? Thus, the chapter is set mainly in Arabic accounts of the modern West and

discusses the formation of the modern Arab self-image during the first direct contact with the modern West. The historical Arab records will show that the modern and contemporary Arab intellectuals are quasi-unanimous in characterizing the time when the Arab world made direct contact with the modern West as a moment of shock. In this respect, the first efforts to modernize Arab thought were largely a by-product of European direct militaristic involvement in the region.

This periodization of Arab *nahda* may provoke some objections. In recent decades, scholars have come to suggest new ways of understanding modernity in non-western societies. Critics such as Albert Hourani, Peter Gran, C. A. Bayly and Timothy Mitchell charge the discourse of modernity with Eurocentrism and raise several doubts about its validity in the study of non-Western modernities. Some scholars even argue that the efforts of modernization in the Middle East date back to the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in 1839 or much older than that date.

I deny these objections by drawing a distinction between institutional modernization and cultural modernity. I will show that these argumentations have a shared understanding of modernity which is reducible to its institutional level, that is, modernity in its quantitative terms, but stay silent concerning its cultural level, meaning, its qualitative plane. Viewed this way, I will draw on Jurgen Habermas's definition of modernity as a cultural project. In his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habrmas makes it lucid that modernity is "based on the major European historical events of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution" (*Tibi Islam's Predicament* 36). Based on this approach, how much influence did these new ideas have on the Middle Eastern societies, or on their "life of mind," to use Gelvin's term? According to Gelvin, it is these new ideas and ideologies that have made a strong impact on and swept the writings of a significant

section of the Arab and Muslim intelligentsia and, consequently, crystallized what is later called the age of *nahda* in the nineteenth century (123). This definition of modernity, as the cultural-based project, sweeps away claims that the modernization process in the Middle East began before colonialism and locates it, instead, in the colonial period and, more specifically, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1789.

Besides locating the beginning of modern Arab discourse, this chapter will still have the task of an analysis of its nature. Most importantly in this stage is that our analysis will be confined to an Arab-Muslim parameter, that is to say, through the eyes of the Arab-Muslim intellectuals. With this in mind, we will try to show that the modern Arab discourse from its very inception has been determined by an awareness of backwardness. As we will inaugurate, this consciousness has been painted in a causal manner as the effect of modern Western ideas bombing Middle Eastern societies in the aftermath of Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798. This date blew up the safety valves in the inflationary Arab self-pride and shook his narcissism to the teeth. In a word, Napoleon's conquest gave the deathblow to Muslim narcissism. The Islamic world realized, for the first time, their imperfectness and inferiority to the Western civilization. But while this realization of backwardness was very disastrous, it was not without fruition: Arab intelligentsias had to bow to hard questions, "What Went Wrong?" and, what is to be done? (Bernard Lewis).

The consequences of these two unprecedented questions would be the splits of Arab elites. Three major trends will flourish, though in relatively different times: Muslim, liberal and nationalist. Each school of thought would appear to have its own diagnosis and corresponding prescription to the question of what is to be done in the hope for re-acquiring some self-esteem. Based on our conviction that a question turns intractable to be tackled unless assessed from within "one selected angle," as Boullata

observes, it will be sufficient to limit ourselves to one procedural selective issue, namely democracy (6).

Thus, the problematic of democracy will be the constituting topic of chapter two. Consequently, chapter two, entitled “Democracy in the Modern and Contemporary Arab Discourse,” can be seen as a *history of problem*. We will involve an analytic investigation of Arab intellectuals’ positions on democracy. The question remains: If Arab intellectuals did (and still do) in fact preach the virtues of a democratic state since the crystallization of the modern Arab Renaissance in the nineteenth century, then, how do they come to perceive it? To this question, the Islamist model, having attributed their backwardness to the abandonment of the true heritage of Islam, would answer by return to *shura*. The Liberal thought, condemning the Arab past, would advocate secular and middle-class based democracy as inspired by European Renaissance experience. The Nationalist democratization project, having seen both Muslim and Liberal habituses as an inadmissible betrayal of and conspiracy against the supreme objectives of Arab unity, is essentially a state socialism (al-Jabri *Arab Discourse*).

Our analysis of these three readings of democracy will provide us a ground for our subsequent critique in chapter three. In this chapter, we will return to the questions formulated in the previous chapters: While the issue of and debate on democracy was one which came, almost, at the first of the list of *nahda* objectives since its inception in the 19th century, Why is it still the non-resolved question? Why is the Arab world still the example of the lack of democracy and human rights? Why are Arab societies the furthest from democratic freedom?

To these questions, we will attempt to search for an answer in an epistemological approach, of course with the provision that this answer will be only

one possible among many others. The objective of this chapter is to uncover the mode of thinking of Arab discourse in its three schools on democracy. In this context, we deem it necessary to reformulate the above-stated question within an epistemological prism: Why did the Arab form of rationality fail to enable Arabs to achieve democracy?

I will argue that the reason is the entirety of modern and contemporary Arab discourse on democracy can be faulty for having treated the past as ahistorical and sacral to be repeated while seeking to extract from it already-possessed or/and ready-realized models. This exercise of resorting to the past-based model is part of a whole. This whole is the problematic form of Arab rationality. Based on this perspective, the central problematic of the whole modern Arab discourse in addressing democracy is analogy. Analogous reason tends to hold that the truth or justification of a claim strictly depends on an old precedent. In a more traditional term, analogy is the deduction of the unknown from the known. The unknown for the three discourses is democracy as a dreamed-of project; it is in all circumstances derived from and in the service of the already-possessed/realized, be it the Islamic *shura*, Western Renaissance middle class, or leftist socialism (*al-Jabri Nahnu wal Turath*). This practice of analogy is an essential component of Arab thought within which and through which it practices thinking.

An analysis and criticism of Arab discourse on democracy will lead to some tentative conclusions. Given the cultural definition of modernity and the primacy of reason on which it is based, the issue of Arab *nahda* in general and democracy in particular can hardly be settled unless attaining this missing part, that is to say, through *nahdacization* of Arab reason. As intelligibly maintained by al-Jabri, there could be no Arab Renaissance before a renaissance mind (‘aql), one that assumes a

critical relation to its past. This is the missing part of Arab *nahda* and it is time for Arab discourses to put the horse (reason) before the cart (past), to use Shayegan's wording (*Cultural Schizophrenia*). Only when they are committed to this goal, does their *nahda* become possible.

II. EVOLUTION OF MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE

Too much ink has been spilt discussing the proper way to approach Arab modernity. Numerous voices and theories clamor to understand when the Arab world became modern and why. This chapter aspires to fulfill two tasks. First, this chapter will direct attention towards locating the formation of the modern Arab period, known as Renaissance. Secondly, the nature or characteristics of this modern Arab discourse will be discussed. Thus the chapter is divided into two separate, but complementary, parts. One will deal with locating the beginning of modern Arab discourse and the other with the analysis of its main components or determinates.

Modern Arab Renaissance: In What Context?

Critics have several names for the movement that took place in the Arab-Islamic world at the turn of the 19th century. It is sometimes called “Revival,” at other times “Awakening,” and “Modernity.” Yet, *Nahda* (Renaissance) seems to be the term most popular in Arabic literary circles. However, in the discipline of Arab-Islamic philosophers, *differences in terms do not necessitate differences in meaning*. Whether it is called Revival, Awakening, Modernity, or *Nahda*, Arab thinkers undoubtedly link it to a specific meaning and to one historical event.

According to the Moroccan philosopher Abdullah Laroui, the term *Nahda*, which is literally translated as “rise,” means

a vast political and cultural movement that dominate[s] the period of 1850 to 1914. Originating in Syria and flowering in Egypt, the *Nahda* sought through translation and vulgarization to assimilate the great achievements of modern European civilization, while reviving the classical Arab culture that antedates the centuries of decadence and foreign domination. (vii)

In this passage, Laroui suggests that *Nahda*, as the first modern Arab cultural phenomenon, emerged in response to Western political and cultural stimuli. Not surprisingly, Laroui belongs to the mainstream of Arab intellectuals who place the beginning of the modern Arab cultural Renaissance in the early nineteenth century, particularly around the time of the French Campaign. Arab and Muslim intellectuals, from the right and the left, quasi-unanimously see the French Revolution as the impetus that stimulated Middle Eastern societies and drove it towards a modern period (Boullata; Tarabishi; Shayegan; Jaber; Khuri; Tamimi; Amin; Hassan; El-Enany; Adonis).

According to Arab intelligentsia, until the nineteenth century, the Arab world was “completely cut off from the non-Muslim world.” Arabs were “totally unaware of what had been happening in Europe during the previous five or six centuries” (Khuri 7). And what has a particular significance in this regard is that “until just before Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, the entire Arab region was Islamic in norms, laws, values and tradition.” It was only with Napoleon’s campaign that “the Arab world witnessed gradual intellectual, social and political changes as a result of the impression left by the modes of thought and conduct brought to the area by the Western colonialism” (Tamimi 16). This is what led Darwish Shayegan to call the pre-Napoleon Islamic world era as a “holiday from history” (12). According to Khuri, the Arab world “had not participated in the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution.” He asserts that even the Turks, who were the Arabs’ only channel to the outside world, were little informed of what was happening in Europe and, so, they did not start to discover Europe until 1720 (7).

The Arabs’ isolation from the outside world, or what the Iranian philosopher Sheygan bitterly calls the Arab’s “holiday from history,” suddenly came to an end in

the early nineteenth century after penetration of the ideas of the French Revolution in the Arab East (12). The first and most important channel through which these Western ideas passed into the Arab Middle East was the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798. Amir Haydar al-Shehabi (1761-1835) wrote several documents on the history of the French Revolution, including the day when Napoleon gave his first proclamation to the Egyptians. Al-Shehabi states that when Napoleon addressed the people of Egypt, a speech in which he talked about the principles of the Revolution and Declaration of the Rights of Man, the *ulema*' (Muslim scholars), notables, and merchants were "amazed at this fantastic address and unknown subject, for it was new to their ears and minds" (Qtd. in Khuri 11).

Of course, incredible literature has been written on the influence of the Napoleonic expedition that shook the environment of stagnation in Egypt. The literature suggests that Napoleon paved the way for many changes, including political, military, industrial, and eventually cultural revival under the rule of Mohammed Ali Pasha (1805-1849) (Kassab 18). The advantage of Mohammed Ali was apparent. As a part of his eagerness to modernize and strengthen Egypt in the face of the Ottoman state, he made strong political ties with the French and sent many educational missions to France. The missions were particularly aimed at grasping the secrets and benefits of France's advancement and superiority. These educational missions inspired a long chain of Arab-Muslim cultural Renaissance thinkers and men-of-letters, from Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) to Taha Hussein (1889-1973) (Khuri 12).

Thus, Napoleon's intrusion in Egypt in 1798 marked, as most modern and contemporary Arab intelligentsia agree, the dawn of the modern Arab Renaissance. Indeed, this sounds, to most Arab and Muslim historians, like a self-evident statement

and a feasible history of the Modern Arab Renaissance. But this seemingly plausible statement runs counter to other views on modernity in general and in the Middle East in particular. In recent decades, scholars have come to suggest new ways of understanding modernity in non-western societies. Critics such as Edward Said, Peter Gran, C. A. Bayly and Timothy Mitchell charge the discourse of modernity with Eurocentrism and raise several doubts about its validity in the study of non-Western modernities.

In his introduction to the book, *Questions of Modernity*, Timothy Mitchell challenges the western scholarly model that views modernity as a universal phenomenon inevitably associated with and triggered by the West. He argues that this approach “tends to homogenize other histories as aspects of the emergence of the West.” Mitchell goes on to offer a corrective approach, which he calls “the narrative of modernization,” asserting that modernity is “purely local, non-Western, and lacking a universal expression.” He argues that more weight should be given to other forces and origins of modernity beyond Europe (xi, xii).

In a similar vein to this approach, C. A. Bayly argues that while modernity evolved in the West, the evolution was “contingent and interactive” and allowed different societies outside Europe to quickly contribute to and empower modernity (12). Bayly’s work reveals the global nature of modernity and how it has occurred since 1780 to the onset of the First World War. From this globalization standpoint, Bayly opposes the approach that views the modern state as a European invention that spread out either by force (colonialism) or by borrowing. He argues that many different forms of modern monarchies (administration and control) were known in non-western societies before the European expansion. Bayly gives several examples of different forms of states outside Europe. For instance, the Islamic world adopted

the “hybrid form” of state, where the authority consisted of “the Byzantine-Islamic sultanate with Western ideas of despotic improvement” (254, 260). This example demonstrates the main argument of Bayly’s work, which is that “all local, national, or regional histories must...be global histories” (2).

Another argument along similar lines is advanced by a professor of Middle East History, Peter Gran. In his book, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840*, Gran strongly opposes the popular claim that Napoleon’s expedition shook the Arab world out of its long cultural, economic and social slumber. Writing about Egypt in the context of the Ottoman Empire in the mid eighteenth century, Gran shows the presence of modern Ottoman institutions under the rule of Ottoman Sultan Selim III (1789–1807). These modern Ottoman practices prove, according to Gran, that the modernization process in the Middle East was internal in nature. Gran concludes that “modern Egypt emerged out of its own internal dynamic in the context of the world market” and, therefore, the modernization process preceded the Western influence in the Ottoman territories (xiv).

In response to the aforementioned scholarship, there is skepticism on the subject of modernity in the Arab Middle East. It is apparent that most scholars have a shared understanding of modernity. They draw on one definition of modernity, which is confined to the institutional level. In his book, “*Fi Naq al-Khitab al- Arabi al-Mu’asir*” (Critique of the Contemporary Arab Discourse), the Arab prominent expert on political economy, Samir Amin, charges these scholars with a one-dimensional approach that he labels the “postcolonial readings of Modernity.” According to Amin, the institutional interpretation entails a visible change in such institutions as state, economy, and military systems. The process of modernization, Amin asserts, should not be reduced to the economic transformations or to the Marxist infrastructure

system. What is missing in the postcolonial school is that its adherents tend to define modernity in quantitative terms, but stay silent concerning its qualitative plane. From this standpoint, modernity has two different, though interrelated, elements:

institutional and cultural. Amin concludes that modernity should be defined in qualitative terms, at a cultural level, and should explore the new way people began to perceive the world and things in it. However, this new worldview, as Amin suggests, was triggered during and in the aftermath of Napoleon's conquest in 1789 (xvii).

Dror Ze'evi writes in the same vein. He also takes issue against the claim that Arab modernization can be traced long before Napoleon's intervention. But, Ze'evi replaces cultural views with epistemological concerns. According to Ze'evi, there are two sides of modernity: institutional and cultural changes. In his attempt to relocate the beginning of Arab modernity, he argues that these two types of change took place in different phases in the Middle East, where "institutional change (such as the new conscript army) seems to have preceded changes in worldviews and epistemology (such as a sense of imagined national community)." When confronted with the fact that the Middle East underwent two different changes at various times, one must ask, when was the beginning of Arab modernity? Ze'evi draws the conclusion that "we may have to identify two different points in time for the beginning of modernity according to the importance we attribute to each set of changes" (76).

By drawing the distinction between institutional modernization and cultural modernization, and showing how the former, steered by European commerce with Middle East, preceded the later, which ushered in after Napoleonic colonialism, we are able now to remove the institutional side of modernity from our area of study, and restrict our attention to its cultural aspect. There is one reason to this removal and

restriction which is the intention to analyze and examine Arab discourse. Now we can enquire: What is, then, cultural modernity?

To this question, Jurgen Habermas offers a systematic definition of cultural modernization. In his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, the content of this cultural modernity is “based on the major European historical events of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution” (Tibi *Islam’s Predicament* 36). Viewed this way, how much influence did these new ideas have on the Middle Eastern societies, or on their “life of mind,” to use James Gelvin’s term? According to Gelvin, it is these new ideas and ideologies that have made a strong impact on and swept the writings of a significant section of the Arab and Muslim intelligentsia and, consequently, crystallized what is later called the age of *nahda* in the nineteenth century (123). This definition of modernity, as the cultural-based project, sweeps away all the previous claims that the modernization process in the Middle East began before colonialism.

Some scholars might raise a further objection to the issue of the beginning of modern Arab discourse and, so, find many beginnings to the reform movements in Arab history. According to Haj, several scholars argue that “Islamic revivalism is neither an innovation nor a novelty, for it is deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition, which conceptualized human history as a continuum of renewal, revival, and reform (tajdid, ihya’, and islah)” (Haj 7). Perhaps, this is what led Albert Hourani (1915-1993) to antedate reform movements to Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1787) and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) (*Arabic Thought* 37). Some scholars link reformation to a prior period, particularly to the work of al-Ghazali (1111) and even to al-Jahiz (868) (Haj 8).

This is such a weak and unreasonable argument. We argue that these beginnings do not eliminate *the* beginning of Arab discourse. But, why the insistence on Napoleon's invasion? One thing that made the Napoleonic period hold a special significance in the initiation of modern Arab discourse into the call for changes can be explained here: These changes were imposed on the Muslim world by a dominant imperialist power. Undoubtedly, the Islamic world had already been exposed to foreign cultural influences, but these influences had not wounded Muslim's civilizational smugness as Napoleon's invasion did. It is true that Muslims had faced several foreign invaders in the past, but these invaders soon converted to Islam. They, therefore, had not had any serious threat to Muslim culture. With Napoleon, the situation is different. It is for the first time, Muslims had been invaded by alien power superior to them and that had little regard of their Islamic culture and values. The French power posed a serious threat to the Muslims, not only politically but also culturally especially by spreading the secular tradition defying the status of the Qur'an as the ultimate source of authority, knowledge and legitimacy. This is what made the Napoleonic invasion of the heart of the Islamic world so wounding. The Islamic world realized, for the first time, their imperfectness and inferiority to the Western civilization. Hence, the dual inflationary task that forced Muslims to inaugurate: They want to decisively transcend "what went wrong?" not only to join the train of civilized Civilization, but also, as al-Jabri maintains, to take the lead of humanity (Al-Khitab al-Arabi 32).

There is a further defense of the view that the modern period in the Arab Middle East was ushered in by colonialism. Even the strongest critics of modernization theory and Eurocentrism, still see the non-Western modernity within the West's universalizing narrative. They fall short of radical criticism of the

connection of the modern Arab era with colonial expansion. For instance, the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said, author of the landmark book *Orientalism*, though following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault's anti-essentialist approach, stays faithful to the liberal, secular, and humanist traditions. Thus, Said does not deny the universality of the Enlightenment project associated with the West. According to Samira Haj, "Said never follows [Foucault's critique] to its logical conclusion in which the universalist claims of European humanism are fundamentally contested" (3). This is to suggest that Said does not erase the real issue of locating the origin of Arab modernity in the period of colonialism. Importantly, Said's work tends only to condemn the dark side of Western colonialism.

The impact of French colonialism on Egypt is also referred to in the work of Albert Hourani, whose masterpiece *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* is still regarded as a major textbook on Middle Eastern Arabic and Islamic themes. Hourani considers, though not so explicitly, the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) as the beginning of Arab-Islamic entrance to modernity. He describes how Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the very heart of the Arab Middle East, marked the time when French revolutionary ideas penetrated into the World of Islam (51). Hourani later repeats his views on the beginning of Arab modernity in his book *Islam in European Thought*. He points to the influence of Napoleon's intrusion into Egypt on Arab thought when he writes that the penetration of French Revolution ideas left "a deep disturbance in the lives of educated men, not only those trained in the new schools but also those formed in the traditional ways of thought; not only do their careers take different paths, but the ways in which they see their own lives begin to change" (109).

But it is Arif Khuri's critique of the Ottoman background of the modern Middle East that is really scathing. To illustrate this point, Khuri takes issue, though indirectly, with Albert Hourani's book *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*. In a chapter titled "The Ottoman Background of Modern Middle East," Hourani makes it clear that one should not omit the pre-Napoleonic period in which the Middle East underwent several important changes that ushered it into the modern age (75). In a response to this claim, Khuri defends the impact of Napoleon's intrusion which caused the Middle East to accept modernity. Khuri suggests that the formal reforms of Salim III, who came to the throne in 1789 (the year of French Revolution), the Ottoman constitutional movement of Midhat Pasha, the "Young Turkey" revolution, and the Kemalist revolution, were all direct outcomes or reactions to the penetration of the French Revolution ideas and principles in the region. According to Khuri, the Ottoman and Arab East during Sultan Abd al-Hamid II (1876-1909) witnessed a "huge caravan of free thinkers who drew upon revolutionary France and its revolutionary men-of-letters, [who] migrated to France and translated French works written by free minds." Khuri concludes these thinkers, along with their translating works, brought the first seeds of the French Revolution to the Middle East (23).

The quick survey of ideas presented above on the beginning of modern Arab Renaissance offers a general, and widely shared, view of when Arab Renaissance came into existence. As noted above, Arab-Muslim intellectuals are quasi-unanimous in the view that the Arab Renaissance occurred during the colonial period and more specifically during Napoleon's colonialism in 1789. Undoubtedly, the importance of the Arab view of the event does not exist only in its depth, but also in its place in Arab intellectual circles: the daily press, periodicals, and books. Of course, one must not forget Abu Rabi's questioning of the Arab intelligentsia, who seem to completely

agree with the Orientalist thesis that modern Arab Renaissance is a by-product of, or at least a direct reaction to, the Western challenge (17). But, if French colonialism marks the beginning of the Arab Renaissance, then how do the Arab-Islamic intellectuals come to construct their discourse? It is this question that the following section seeks to tackle.

Modern Arab Discourse: In What Meaning?

What are the main factors that have shaped modern Arab discourse? And what are its main characteristics? Given the elusive nature of these questions and the incredible amount written about them by many Orientalists and European intellectuals during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it remains difficult to answer these questions. At the risk of adding to the confusion and in the interest of avoiding any potential charge with Orientalism, this section will outline modern Arab discourse in the manner that is the reverse of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. While Said (1935-2003) aims to explain how Western intellectuals have perceived the Orient, my aim is to shed light on how Arab intellectuals have perceived themselves in the context of the West. Furthermore, I will examine how this Arab perception later came to shape their discourse. In so doing, the concern is by no means seen as a critique to Said's *Orientalism*. Rather it is only to understand the impact of Arab perceptions on their modern discourse to establish clarity regarding the nature of modern Arab discourse.

How the West views the Arab world and how it continues to view developments in the Arab-Islamic world are two questions directly related to how the Arab world envisions itself. These are the two central questions around which Edward Said's *Orientalism* revolves. His main argument is that "the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). He brings into

question these Western perceptions of the Orient by providing a detailed discussion of Western literature written on Arabs and Muslims. Examples are in abundance, but one is sufficient for the present purpose. Said demonstrates that Western intellectuals have been obsessed with the discourse of Arab failure and backwardness in the late modern and postmodern eras. Arab-Islamic backwardness, in contrast to Western progress, has been a key rubric for the Orientalist discourse on Arab-Islamic societies.

This backwardness/ progress dichotomy is just one of the Western perceptions of the Orient questioned by Said. Said believes the dichotomy was a reductionism of eastern people rather than a descriptive reality. It was the product of political and cultural bias pervading the Western “mentality” rather than the product of the objective observation of empirical reality (313). According to Said, these distortive perceptions opened the door for a mythology of western superiority that justifies control. In addition, Said demonstrates that these perceptions have been widely shared by Western literary writers, historians, academics, and politicians.

However, Said has been criticized by other scholars for brushing aside in his book the self-image and perceptions of the Orient.¹ According to Bhabha, Said’s studies focus only on the imposition of Western power and do not examine the Arab resistance to it. In turn, this promotes a static model of power relations in which “colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer” and, therefore, leaves no room for the self (Qtd. in El-Enani 2). Of course, Said largely draws his

¹ This is only half the story. While Said largely draws on Michel Foucault in tracing the origins of Orientalism, he has been trapped in a certain essentialism which Said intends to demolish. This is exactly the kind of readings that the Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal al Azm severely criticizes. According to Azm, “in an act of retrospective historical projection we find Said tracing the origins of Orientalism all the way back to Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides and Dante. In other words, Orientalism is not really a thoroughly modern phenomenon, as we thought earlier, but is the natural production of an ancient and almost irresistible European bent of mind”(Qtd. in Kassab 133-134).

thoughts from Michel Foucault's notion of power. Foucault also acknowledges the concept of the other, which can be understood through the medium of power relations.

Concerning this power relationship, Foucault writes:

[A] power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. ("Subject and Power" 789)

This quoted passage raises objection against Said's one-sided reading of power. Undoubtedly, imbalanced power relations between the West and Arab-Muslims should be acknowledged. Though this may be granted, the "other" is not always used as an object of repression, subversion. In several occasions, Foucault emphasizes that power relations "must be productive," in a sense it improves people's performance by increasing their capacities, their affectivity, and their efficiency (*The Foucault Reader* 132). In the pre-modern version of power, for instance, the objective of sovereign power is repression, aiming at breaking and destroying the body, and in this sense its paradigm is reducing the individual's ability and strength and in the end killing him. While the post-Enlightenment power's paradigm aims at "fostering of life and the growth and care of population." Foucault calls this kind of power "bio-power." According to Foucault, power should not be viewed in purely negative terms. Rather, it is productive (*The Foucault Reader* 17, 60). This new perspective on power demands attention towards the fact that hegemony was not the single point recorded in the schedule of the West as viewed by Said.

Also of notice, there remains another missing element in Said's work we intend, here, to highlight in the purpose of identifying modern Arab Renaissance more precisely. Thus, what concerns Said in his study is "the nature of perception- that is to say, the relationship between subject and object, 'self' and 'other' and appearance [phenomenology] and thing-in-itself" (Macfie ix). However, despite our conviction of this distinction, Said's vocation and concern is to push this distinction further. Said misses or pretends to miss that the essential interrelation between self and other is an indisputable fact- that is to say, "other" is conceived, especially in the case of Arab-Muslim Renaissance, as one that can play an important role in constituting selfhood. The French philosopher Paul Ricœur, in his book *Oneself as Another*, makes it clear that selfhood also implies otherness to the extent that one cannot think of oneself without thinking of the other. In Ricœur's view, "the 'as' that connects the one and the other is not only that of a comparison (one similar to another) but also indeed that of an implication (oneself inasmuch as being other)" (Qtd, in Schildgen 8). This is what led the Moroccan philosopher Abdullah Laroui to say that "[h]aving started from the question, 'Who are we?' we are facing another question, 'What is the Occident?" (Qtd. in Mitchel 122). This is a relation that we cannot ignore or minimize its significance or its effect because in doing so the analysis of Arab Renaissance would lose its formative dimension, meaning its historicity.

This missing relation in Said's presentation of the Western representations of the Orient needs to be addressed. In what follows, I will sum up the attitudes of Arab and Muslim intellectuals since the early nineteenth century in relation to the same dichotomy of progress and backwardness in order to determine if it is Arab intellectuals who agree with the Orientalist discourse or if it is, rather, the Orientalists who agree with the Arabs'. The fact is that backwardness has been (and remains) a

predominant feature in the Arab-Islamic discourse. Thus, if the West views the Arab and Muslim worlds in terms of backwardness, a word repeated several times in Said's book, then how did Arab intellectuals perceive themselves in light of the West and modernity that underpins it? And how has their perception later shaped and influenced the nature of their modern discourse over the next two centuries?

The Consciousness of Backwardness:

Two periods mark the Arab's awakening to the Western challenge. According to many Arab scholars, these periods are named the first and second Renaissance, or what are also called the era of *Thawra* (revolutions) (Jabri; Tarabishi; Adonis; Abu Rabi; Azm; Kassab; Arkoun). According to Mohammed Arkoun, the first stage lasted from the early nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, while the second era goes from the mid-twentieth century to the present (Shayegan 51). According to a large community of Arab thinkers, there is a sharp distinction between these two phases of Arab Renaissance at the level of discourse.

We find this distinction emphasized by a Syrian philosopher George Tarabishi. In his book, *Al-Muthaqqafun al-Arab wa al-Turath: Al-Tahlil al-Nafsi li Isab Jama'i* (Arab Intellectuals and Tradition: A Psychological Analysis of a Collective Neurosis), Tarabishi maintains that between the first and second *Nahda* (Renaissance), there are significant differences. Following in the footsteps of the psychoanalytical approach, he argues, "Never before had Arabs turned so emphatically to the past cultural legacy as they did [in the second *Nahda*] following the 1967 debacle by Israel" (Qtd. in Kassab 167). According to Tarabishi, this dramatic turn in Arab thought in its second *Nahda* is "an intellectual regression." It marked what he calls an intellectual "collective neurosis," that hit Arab intellectuals

in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 catastrophe, and pushed them to turn backwards in the direction of tradition”² (al-Jabri, *Al-Turath wel Hadatha* 15).

Undoubtedly, Tarabish is not alone in the assumption that the first *Nahda* is distinguishable from the second one. However, such critical studies are challenged as well as ridiculed for their excessive emphasis on the 1967 war defeat as a turning point in Arab thought that expressed itself in the production of new discursive form. It is true there have been some changes in the scope of second *Nahda* discourse in the aftermath of the six day war defeat. However, these changes should not be understood as a turning point in Arab discourse. We will, now, direct our attention to the emotional content, or “psychological charge” as Jabri prefers to label it, which is common to the Arab Renaissance in its two periods, namely the collective sense of backwardness (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 21). One might well ask, why this “psychological charge”?

² The concept of tradition might be preliminarily defined as *all the possibilities that had been achieved already*. This definition applies to the actual world, the thing that already possessed. But, if we intend to discuss the concept of tradition in Arab discourse, this definition should be seen as only one dimension of tradition. I draw, here, on the definition of tradition established by al-Jabri. According to al-Jabri, the other dimension of tradition is *all the non-actual that have not been possessed yet*. Worded differently, tradition does not only mean *what was possessed in the past*, but also, and perhaps more significantly, *what it should be possessed in the future*. Hence, tradition is not necessarily something already actualized, but, also one to be actualized. By this, tradition carries, therefore, emotional, psychological and ideological charges as it conveys and reflects not Arab’s reality but rather, Arab’s aspirations for their hoped-for glorious future. In this sense, tradition is an essential part of Renaissance as a whole as the latter is a dreamed-of project also. No doubt, this definition of tradition begs further delimitations. But, albeit its defects, taking merely into consideration methodology, this definition moves the research step forward, a step that makes us understand how Arab intellectuals, Muslims, Liberals and Nationalists, think through the medium of tradition, no matter be Islamic tradition, European tradition or Russian tradition, etc. Tradition, therefore, is nothing more than a non-yet applied and dreamed- of past-model needed to be repeated (*Al-Turath wel Hadatha* 24).

The answer given by several Arab and Muslim scholars is that this psychological charge characterizing Arab discourse since its inception in the 19th century is solely attributed to the civilizational shock. One thing that shocked the Arab-Muslim world in its first *nahda* was the reality of its backwardness, a theme which recurs again and again in the second *nahda* and still remains persistent today. The feelings of the first Muslim Renaissance thinkers towards a stagnant world of Islam in opposition to a progressive West dominated the whole discourse during the first Nahda. Since their exposure to the Western power in the early nineteenth century, modern Arab-Muslim thinkers were so shocked that they began a rethinking process of why Muslims fell behind while others have progressed that culminated in the publication of several journals and periodicals. These publications concentrated on the reality of Arab-Muslim backwardness and European challenge.

Al-Urwa al-Wuthqa (The Insoluble Link) was one of these Arabic journal which was founded in Paris in 1884 by the father of Islamic modernism, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897), a spiritual rector of modern Islamic reform, and his pupil, the Egyptian Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), the Muslim towering figure of first *Nahda*. The central aim behind the journal was to urge “Muslims to struggle against obscurantism, fanaticism and social inertia, and to resist Western hegemony in the territories of Islam” (Shayegan 130).

For instance, al-Afghani was the leader of the first renewal movement. In a famous lecture on 8 November 1872 in Paris, he discovered the main problem of the theme of backwardness in the Muslim world. He writes:

The Europeans have now put their hands on every part of the world. The English have reached Afghanistan; the French have seized Tunisia. In reality, these acts of usurpation, aggression, and conquest have not come from the

French or the English. Rather it is science that everywhere manifests greatness and power. Ignorance had no alternative to prostrating itself humbly before science and acknowledging its submission. (Qtd. in Choueiri 26, also in Kurzman 104).

In this quote, Afghani explains the factor that led to the superiority of the West and drove it towards its conquest of the Islamic world. The West, according to Afghani, had not invaded Islamic territories solely by force of arms, but through a whole package of scientific innovations: “Telegraph lines, photography, electricity, steam power, railways, the camera, the telescope, the phonograph and the microscope” (Choueiri 27). Afghani is of the belief that science is the impetus that stimulated the West and drove it towards being the most powerful of Islamic nations. His high regard of science can be explained through his attitude towards the Islamic thinkers who lack curiosity. Afghani is astounded that Islamic philosophers “from early evening until morning...study...with a lamp placed before them, and they do not once consider why if we remove its glass cover, much smoke comes out of it, and when we leave the glass, there is no smoke.” He, then, agonizingly concludes, “Shame on such a philosopher and shame on such philosophy!” (Kurzman 106).

Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), the Egyptian *alim*, “the disciple and collaborator” of Afghani, pursued the same path in attributing the advance of the West to science (Hourani, *Arabic Thought* 130). He says that

the torrent of science has rushed forth and engulfed the entire globe, drowning the unsuspecting [‘ulema] in the process. It is an age which has formed a bond between ourselves and the civilized nations, making us aware of their excellent conditions... and our mediocre situation: thus revealing their wealth

and our poverty, their pride and our degradation, their strength and our weakness, their triumph and our defeats etc. (Qtd. in Choueiri 25)

In this quote, it can hardly be difficult to guess the central question which took a central presence in Arab-Islamic conscience: The question of backwardness. Choueiri points out that the West, after it “loomed in the horizon of Islamic reformists as a gigantic power..., embarked on a new adventure of science, industry and prosperity... offered [them] a glaring contrast between stagnation and dynamism, backwardness and progress” (25).

This sentiment continued to be echoed by the Syrian reformist Abdul-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1854-1902), who founded a number of newspapers and published many works. Among his famous works were two booklets that became landmarks of the *Nahda*: *Umm al-Qura* (The Mother of Villages) and *Tabai al-Istibdad wa Masari al-Isti'bad* (The characteristics of Despotism and the Deaths of Enslavement) (Kassab 35).

These very themes were also articulated by Rashid Rida (1856-1935), Egypt's leading theologian of the time and one of Abduh's associates in his review *Al-Manar* (1898). It was in this journal that Islamic modernist Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) published a most outspoken essay, “*Limadha Takhakhara al-Muslimun wa Limadha Taqaddama Gharuhum?*” (Why Did Muslims Fall Behind and Why Did Others Progress?). This treatise is a more precise account of the theme of backwardness which is still referred to today in the Arab intellectual circles. Arslan attributed the decline of the Islamic world to their failure to understand their own Islamic culture and to the throwing away their religion (Tibi, *Fundamentalisms and Society* 82).

Thus, the main subject with whom the Arab-Muslim discourse dealt in the first *Nahda* and continues to deal is the subject through which the discourse developed and

was, in fact, formed and that is the subject of backwardness. As Shayegan states, the first Renaissance thinkers “explored the themes of backwardness (*ta'akhur*), and inertia (*jumud*), opposing them with the ideas of evolution (*tadawwur*) and progress (*taraqqi*) acquired from the West.” These thinkers also reevaluated “the concept of innovation (*bid'a*), condemned by Islam as ‘the worst of things’.” They also talked about the necessity of “reopening the long-closed door of *ijtihad* (individual power of decision)” (52). Some thinkers went as far as to justify the new ideas by asserting that they are just “modern products of the earlier efforts of Muslims during the heyday of Islamic civilization, and ... those products must be reacquired” (Boullata 4, also in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab* 40).

That increasing attention of the first *nahda* Islamic thinkers to the new ideas and systems of Europe is indeed true, and Shayegan offers insights on this. He points out that modern Islamic Reformers “had the merit of paying particular attention to the political and juridical systems of Europe. They were strongly attracted by the notion of individual rights and liberties” (4). *Nahda* thinkers had the merit of being “eager to grasp the secrets of progress, to understand what lay behind Europe’s advancement and superiority in the hope of adopting it to their own societies” (Kassab 21).

“Nevertheless, one essential escaped the earliest thinkers, as it does most of their present-day successors: these basic ideas, whose qualities were so admired, were not the results of some recent miracle, but the end-product of an exceptional historical process” (Shayegan 4). This is what Michel Foucault calls, in his *Order of Things*, the “modern episteme.”

From this standpoint, Shayegan maintains that the *nahda* thinkers, while their endeavors remained appreciated, failed to comprehend that the “modern episteme” “could not be transplanted into [their] world without displacing and marginalizing the

traditional values to which [these thinkers] were so attached, and to which occupied every corner of [their] public space.” The *nahda* thinkers did not realize that these new ideas are the “product of a paradigm shift” (4). For an instance, Shayegan goes on to state, “al-Afghani may have agreed with Renan on a large number of essential points, but he was still a militant promoter of pan-Islamism.” In a similar vein, Mohammed Abduh searched for “exemplary models in the golden age of primitive Islam” in his attempts for renewal (Shayegan 53). According to him, what took place in the Islamic past could be achieved in the future (al-Jabri, *Arabic Discourse*). A large number of these thinkers, according to Shayegan, held the belief that “Islam is innocent, that it is the Muslims who are corrupt.” The *nahda* thinkers did not dare to question the tradition and they just believed that “turn the fur coat of Islam right side out and all will be well.” Thus, Muslim thinkers placed the blame for the backwardness of their societies solely on the religious and not the religion itself (53).

What does this tell us? During its first direct contact with the powerful West, the Islamic world realized, for the first time, their imperfectness and inferiority to the West civilization. They saw and confessed the decline; “but while they wanted progress, most were unwilling to give up the [old episteme] holding progress back” (Shayegan 53). This is, also, what led the Palestinian Professor at Georgetown University, Hisham Sharabi and other contemporary Arab thinkers to announce the failure of the first *nahda* project from its birth (Note 28). Muslim thinkers, in their “quest to find scapegoats” for their backward societies, “displaced the problem onto the institutions embodying the religion, rather than criticizing the underlying paradigm.” They declared that “Islam was sick” (Shayegan 53).

This was with regard to the first *nahda* thinkers. As for the transition to the period of *Thawra* (Revolution), it brought no discontinuity in the nature of the

discourse. No doubt there was a change between the critical language that nineteenth-century *nahda* thinkers employed in describing their inertia and that which twentieth century intellectuals used in the populist nationalism of 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Yet, this change is superficial, as al-Jabri argues (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 21).

Mohammed Arkoun believed that the only change brought about by the period of *Thawra* (Revolutions) was “the modification of language” He argues that the revolutionary period of the 1950s up to the 1967 war aimed at grasping “objective reality-as scientific thought strives to do-less than transforming conditions of existence which are unbearable into conditions which are idealized in order to make them seem more desirable” (Qtd. in Shayegan 53). In other words, the critical thought and dominant feeling of curiosity and backwardness during the first *nahda* was overlaid with the ideology of combat. Thus, the only change between the two periods is “the tendency [in the *Thawra* phase] toward ideological inflation and revolutionary thinking due to the need for rapid change,” as George Tarbishi states (Qtd. in Kassab 167).

However, while we record this surplus ideological inflation imprinting onto the second *nahda* discourse and which is a historical fact known to many intellectuals, we must note on the other hand that Arab thinkers in this stage remained selfsame to the first *nahda*. One dominant category of the *Thawra* discourse that is similar to the 19th century *nahda*, and can hardly be denied, is the notion of backwardness. According to Tarabishi, “the contemporary Arab discourse is quasi-unanimous in characterizing the time when the Arab-Islamic world made direct contact with the West as a moment of shock. The ways in which this shock has been characterized are varied. At times, it is called the colonial or imperial shock, while at other times, a European or Western shock” (*Al-Muthaqqafun al-Arab wal-Turath* 17). It is also

called a “civilizational” or “modernism shock” (Adonis). Importantly, as Tarabishi highlights, “whatever the description, the phenomenon described remains the same and it reveals one undeniable fact: the shock has been, and remains, one of the pivotal concepts underlying the Arab Modern consciousness” (*Al-Muthaqqafun al-Arab wa al-Turath* 17).

Whether we like it or not, this very notion of shock is still the problem underlying present day Arab intellectuals’ views and dominates the very heart of their discourse. It rarely matters whether these intellectuals are Muslims, liberals, or nationalists. There are numerous examples of each. Three contemporary Arab intellectuals’ writings will suffice to show the centrality and stubbornness of this notion of shock. We will mention three of the most prominent schools of thought in contemporary Arab thought: the liberal, the nationalist, and the Muslim.

Muhammad ‘Imara, a prominent advocate of what is labeled as the enlightened Salafism, says:

It was totally understandable and logical, given that the Arabs in the East woke up to this situation, as a result of which their minds and eyes were opened, the situation in which the West came back in the form of Bonaparte and other subsequent conquerors, achieving military victory, after having achieved civilizational victory in their own countries... that when the Arab hearts and minds were mesmerized by this situation, it had the effect of electricity on them. It did not give them a lethal shock, but instead stopped short of that and awakened them, bringing them back to consciousness. (qtd. in Tarabishi 17).

An argument in a similar spirit is advanced by Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, the most prominent proponent of contemporary liberalism in Arab thought. In his

renowned book, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi al-Mu'asir* (The Contemporary Arab Discourse), he writes, “the Arab renaissance has essentially been, since its inception, the product of the shock with an external threat, which is the Western power and its capitalist expansion” (Qtd. in Tarabish, *Al-Muthaqqafun al-Arab* 17).

Finally, Abdullah Abd al-Dayim, a well-known proponent of Pan-Arab nationalism, describes the crux of this Arab self-representation of modernity eloquently, though bluntly, by saying that the Arab-Islamic world “did not wake up from its long slumber until the sounds of Western cannons started to roar throughout its dilapidated caverns” (Qtd. in Tarabishi 18).

What these three statements have in common is they all share a conviction that the colonial age and, specifically, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt is the trigger point of the Arab modernity. They also seem to be an explicit example of how the present day Arab intellectuals' discourse still works according to the same old mode of representation developed during the first contacts with the material power of the West.

But what else can these two phases of the Arab cultural Renaissance tell us? There is no doubt about commending the encouragement marked by Arab and Muslim thinkers in both periods. They courageously faced the present, compared their society with the West, admitted their backwardness. Moreover, they recognized their real problems. Having recorded all these attributes, we should record one thing that despite the deep realization of their stagnant situation and their awareness of the impact of the West, these thinkers have been as caught between two fires, or what Shayegan calls the “state of In-between” (ix). This candid remark of Shayegan on the “In-between” position characterizing the Islamic World is of notice. According to Shayegan, one could say that these thinkers in both periods have had a modern

outlook in some way, but this modern outlook is a “mutilated outlook” (54). But how are these thinkers modern on one hand and traditional on the other?

The answer given by Shayegan is that this shared un-modern modernity, so to speak, lies in the two dimensions of modernity, the first is institutional and the second is cultural. Shayegan’s notion of “Islamic societies confronting the West” makes it clear that Muslims have been forced to welcome and adopt instrumentally science and technology for they recognize that they cannot survive without mastering these items of modernity. But, at the same time, they discarded the cultural side of modernity. Thus, they failed to perceive it as a “rational whole embodying the liberal values (principles of Enlightenment, classical democracy, fundamental liberties and so on)” (173). Muslims’ “splitting of modernity into techno-scientific instruments and culture is coupled with an inclination to adopt the one and simultaneously to dismiss the other” (Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament* 33).

The essential interrelationship between modernity as instrument and as culture is indisputable fact to Shayegan. But, the situation in the Arab world is quite different because the Arab world’s modernity, or “semi-modernity,” to use Tibi’s term (*Islam’s Predicament* 310). Why? Because, as Shayegan outstandingly points out, Islam’s modernity remained “split from the archaeology of the knowledge that preceded it. It has not emerged (as Foucault would say) in the aftermath of epistemological breaks, but has simply appeared like the last offspring of an amputated line, not even aware of its genealogy.” In Shayegan estimation, the Arab-Muslim’s outlook consequently is “blind” and so it comes with “distortions of every sort, epistemological, psychological and aesthetic” (54).

As for these distortions, we move our attention to the psychological one. Our aim in this final phase of the chapter is to look at this form of distortion as being an

integral part of Arab-Muslim discourse and not to study it for its own sake.

Undoubtedly, the aim is still the analysis of Modern Arab discourse structured, as presented below, through the Arab-Muslim outlook and by means of the medium itself. In a word, the outlook is part of the discourse, and the discourse is part of this outlook. Hence, the need is to look at the nature of this Arab-Muslim outlook.

Certainly, there is another reason that can justify giving priority to the analysis of this outlook in the study of modern Arab discourse. In fact, as will be apparent below, the outlook and its mechanism in modern Arab discourse has long determined the Arab-Muslim perception of modernity. It was also responsible for the formation of modern Arab discourse in its diverse orientations and schools, and remains an ongoing driving force today, though it has different manifestations. Here, we will direct our attention to this component of modern Arab discourse as a vital determinant of modern Arab discourse.

The Split:

The Arab world's encounter with the West in modern times goes back to 1789, the year Napoleon's army landed in Egypt. This year, as presented above, has been accepted by Arab intellectuals as the first time Arabs made direct contacts with modernity and colonialism simultaneously. The fact that modernity introduced itself through the colonizing "other" is perhaps the reason why Arabs and Muslims "accepted Western modernity and its educational and cultural underpinnings only slowly and reluctantly," as Mohammed Arkkoun maintains (Qtd. in Abu-Rabi 8).

Similarly, al-Jabri points out that the interaction is twofold in nature: that of colonization and modernity, that of defeat and of desire (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 32).

Abdullah Laroui points out that the Arab-Islamic world "only crossed the threshold of modern times in the pain of defeat and occupation" (Qtd. in Mitchel 31). This made

Arabs regard modernity as an importation or a borrowing that threatens their originality, their traditions, and their identity. But why does it threaten the traditional Muslim world?

Since its exposure to Western modernity, the Arab-Muslim world has found itself facing two models. The first is the European model, which simultaneously involved Enlightenment and repression (liberal thought and colonial conquest), and the second is the Arab-Muslim model (laurels of the former Islamic glory). However, the Arab-Islamic model had long suffered from a lengthy period of recession and decadence. Thus, how does one react to a world in which two different models are facing each other without falling into a sort of tension? According to al-Jabri, the Arabs' choice, since their direct encounter with the West, had to be accompanied by a kind of psychological tension. This tension is similar to what psychologists call ambivalence, a condition in which a person loves and hates the very same thing. This simply has caused the discourse to bear the stamp of ambivalent behavior, a characteristic of any discourse governed by sympathy and antipathy (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 23). But what is the source of this ambivalent behavior?

When Arab discourse dealt with the European model, it needed to shut its eyes to the colonial side of that model. This was not possible for Arab intellectuals since European colonialism in particular hindered their renaissance, and even threatened their own existence. Therefore, such colonialism was exposed and even resisted. On the other hand, when Arab discourse dealt with the Arab-Islamic model, it required the Arabs to shut their eyes to centuries-long decadence. This was not possible either since such decadence constituted an integral part of the Islamic model (al-Jabri *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 23).

Hence, the sense of ambivalence has always characterized Arab-Muslim intellectuals since their first exposure to the modern West in the early nineteenth century, which continues to appear in the contemporary era. The phenomenon in question results from the non-comprehension or non-assimilation of a historical phenomenon, which is modernity. Modern Arab intellectual thought has never understood modernity as a “philosophical discourse,” to use Habermas’s term. Modernity has been always confronted in terms of its impact on Islamic tradition, ways of living, and thinking. As Shayegan points out, “ever since the earliest contacts, attitudes [of Muslims] to modernity have been complicated by a moral component” (3). According to Shayegan, Muslim societies have always analyzed (and still view) the West through the lens of moral issues. Consequently, the West has always been considered “conspiracy of occult forces using their material power to take possession of us, shake us to our very foundations, debauch our morals, corrupt our virtues and reduce us by degrees to a state of political and cultural slavery” (4).

This moral component has also been emphasized by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said explicitly argues that Napoleon’s real intentions during his invasion of Egypt were, in fact, identical to the Spanish invaders’ document in 1513, which was read aloud to the Indians: "We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses [the King and Queen of Spain] may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey"(82).

Explicit in Said’s quotation is the view that Napoleon’s first address to the Egyptians, speaking in the name of the principles of the French Revolution and of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, was just a cover to find an easy channel to enter the

heart of the Arab world, Egypt. Indeed, Said claims Napoleon was compelled to give such an address as a means to get a foothold in the Valley of the Nile because of his full awareness of his limited soldiers. Napoleon's address to Egyptians, though, appeared in reverse to the Spanish address to the Indians, but should be seen identical to it in the end (82).

Undoubtedly, by approaching the issue this way we do not intend to put Arab-Islamic perception in question, nor do we intend to overlook Western hegemony in the region. Our intention is to show that these perceptions are an integral, as well as a constitutive part, of modern Arab discourse. Nevertheless, the question must be asked, how can Arab-Muslim's suspicion of the West and all its modern baggage be explained?

The history of relations between Islam and the West is twofold: one of repulsion and another of attraction. It is interesting to recall that the Islamic world, while it was greatly influenced by Greek thought, ended by withdrawing into increasingly ambivalent attitudes. According to Tibi, the reason for this attitude is plain: the reservations about the West were of theological origin. The West has always been associated in the Muslim mind with the Christian religion. The Muslim has the conviction that his religion is “*ya'lu wa la yu'la alayhu*/ superior and nothing can be superior to it and to its claims,” and his community is “*khair umma*/ the best community,” as Qur'an teaches. Islam, for Muslims, is the last revelation and his Prophet Mohammed is the Seal of Prophecy. Consequently, Muslims believe that Islam is superior to Christianity in every way. This Muslim self image means that Muslims see Christians as backward believers. This is why Western invasions of Islamic territories “were not only a very real threat, but also very humiliating to” Muslim self image (*Islam's Predicament* 266, 254).

The self image of the Muslim is also made by Gima Munoz. Muslims, according to Munoz, have always referred to Europe as “‘Bilad al-IFranj’ (Country of the Franks, the medieval Arabic term to denote the Crusaders).” He points out that “this anachronism perpetuated the notion of the foreigner as enemy and the Islamic identity as the best protection for the ‘I’ against ‘the other’” (Munoz 6, also in Ayalon 16). Echoing Munoz, Tibi points out that “[n]o other civilization in the world feels so bitterly that the European expansion has taken place at [Islamic] expense” (*The Challenge of Fundamentalism* 80). In this sense, Muslims’ call for Renaissance was “not based on an assumption of egalitarian and pluralist definitions of cultures and civilizations.” They “want, rather, to reverse the hegemonic power situation in favor of Islam” (92). Perhaps, this hegemonic claim tells us why the notion of Pan-Islamism (Islamic unity), as proposed by Afghani, Abduh and Ridha (the first three pillars of Arab Renaissance), was to a great degree the nineteenth century Muslim response to the threat of the modern West (Abu-Rabi 11, also in Tibi *Islam’s Predicament* 156).

Thus, while ambivalence resulted from a distorted image of an atheistic, materialistic, and, above all, imperialist West, as most Arab scholars argue, it has also resulted in an uncomfortable feeling. The West, according to Shayegan, made Arab-Muslims for the first time realize their imperfection and inferiority to Western civilization. During the first direct contacts with the West, the “Islamic world discovered to its great astonishment how backward it was, and what an enormous gulf separated it from Europe” (3). The material west “shattered the Muslims’ confidence in the strength and validity of their culture and value system as well as in the social and political structures that these values had produced” (Hassan 10), “wounded the Arab narcissistic pride” (Tarabish, *The Rhetoric of Secularism* 3), forced Arabs to make revitalization of Islam, by emulating painfully the West despite these

humiliations. According to Tibi, the Western model exported to the Arabs both scientific discoveries (new ideas) and oppression through “the ugly face of institutional modernity in military superiority and political domination” (*The Challenge of Fundamentalism* 80). The impact of the Western influence was found to be ambivalent in the Arab world “which, sometimes mild and sometimes violent, kept steadily growing but rarely produced a full stop to the process” (Boullata 1). These ambivalent feelings of hatred and, at the same time, fascination toward the West affected (and still affects) Arab-Muslim thought and action.

The ambivalence, or split, has been found, and remains, in the ideas of the most traditional class (the *ulama*), the intellectuals, the psychological bearing of the lay people, and the ideologues. Indeed, it is in this context that we can talk about Arab modern discourse since its inception. Ambivalence has characterized modern Arab discourse and remains, to a greater degree, to the present day. A quick look at Arab-Muslim writers from the nineteenth century onwards will provide an understanding of this ambivalent feeling of modern and contemporary intellectuals at the level of discourse, which is itself the consequence of this feeling.

There has been a long chain of men-of-letters and thinkers who wrote on the modern west and, in particular, on the French Revolution. Among these names are Amir Haydar al-Shihabi (1761-1835), Ahmed Faris al-Shedyaq (1801-1887), Rifa’ah Rafi al-Tahtawi(1801-1873), Abdullah al-Nadim (1845-1896), Abdul Rehman al-Kawakibi (1849-1902), Shibli al-Shumayil (1853-1917), Yusuf al-Dibs (1833-1907), Farah Antun (1874-1922), Mustafa Kamil Pash (1874-1908), Amin al-Bustani (1854-1937) Shakh Rashid Rida (1855-1935), and Taha Husayn (1889-1973). These few authors wrote rich works on French Revolutionary ideas during the days when the wind of the French Revolution spread over the Arab world. All of these men had

displayed conflicted feelings of both fascination and condemnation that dominated and characterized their attitudes toward the French Revolution (Khuri 93-160). Let us now take a close look at these ambivalent feelings in the discourse of some prominent modern Arab-Muslim thinkers.

This ambivalence in attitude was given its first expression by Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (1753-1825), who was a nineteenth-century Muslim scholar and chronicler. He was horrified at the French's violation of the al-Azhar mosque in Egypt, describing the French army as the soldiers of Satan. According to Juan Cole, al-Jabarti described the French in hostile ways, criticizing most of their values and way of living, especially their women (43). However, al-Jabarti elsewhere expressed his admiration of their science, organization, and judicial system. According to Matti Moosa, al-Jabarti was impressed by the manner in which the French conducted the trial of Sulayman al-Halabi, the Syrian who assassinated General Kleber, "when compared with the Turkish rulers." Like other al-Azhar ulama, al-Jabarti, also, admired the "slogans of French Revolution, 'liberty, equality and fraternity'" (3).

The paradoxical feeling is best described by the nineteenth-century Moroccan Muslim scholar, ambassador and traveler, Muhammad al-Saffar (d. 1881). His visit to France left him "baffled by the cleanliness," industry and military strength of the French. He writes:

So it went until all had passed, leaving our hearts consumed with fire from what we had seen of their overwhelming power and mastery, their preparations and good training, their putting everything in its proper place. In comparison with the weakness of Islam, the dissipation of its strength, and the disrupted condition of its people, how confident they are, how impressive their state of readiness, how competent they are in matters of state, how firm their

laws, how capable in wars and successful in vanquishing their enemies...

(Qtd. in Abu-Rabi 7)

As is clear from this quote, al-Saffar was touched by the power of the French in comparison to the weakness of Islam. He was preoccupied with how to acquire this means of power in order to restore Islam's glory. However, it is quite obvious that al-Saffar's sentiment, like al-Jabarti's and other Renaissance thinkers in the 19th century, was a sign of intellectual bewilderment. According to Albert Hourani, "At another level, we can notice in this period a deep disturbance in the lives of educated men, not only those trained in the new schools but those formed in the traditional ways of thought; not only do their careers take different paths, but the ways in which they see their own lives begin to change" (Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* 109). Hourani makes it clear that the encounter between the Arab world and the West created new conditions to which even the community of the *ulema*, to which al-Saffar belonged, responded by producing new ways of thinking. But, as al-Jabri maintains, these new thoughts were ambivalent in their attitudes towards material and cultural sides of modernity (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 23).

This dilemma of ambivalence, or "disturbance" as Hourani states, was expressed in the writings of the nineteenth century thinkers as well as in the writings of the twentieth century intellectuals. The Egyptian Nobel-Prize writer Naguib Mahfouz in an interview in 1998 tells the interviewer, "We were in conflict with the West; we used to demonstrate against them... But at the same time, we valued highly English literature and English thought... We made the distinction between ugly material face and its radiant civilized one" (Qtd. in El-Enany 3). In this way, Mahfouz, according to El-Enany, replicated the nineteenth century thinkers' views by seeing the West both as a "malady and remedy" (3).

In similar vein, Nawal al-Sa'dawi (1931-), reveals her ambivalent feelings in her autobiography, *Awraqi...Hayati* (My Papers...My Life). She writes:

In my dreams I used to see myself as a woman of letters like Taha Hussayn; because I loved the Arabic language, its letters, its words, its musical ring in the ear. I used to believe that God alone created the Arabic language, that He chose it over other languages and revealed the Qur'an in it. I imagined that the English language was made by humans but that Arabic was a Divine language made by God Almighty and that Arabs were the best nation created by God. I would walk haughtily in the street, looking down on the English, who spoke a mortal language and belonged to an inferior nation not mentioned in the Qur'an. (Qtd. in El-Enany 4)

But at night, Al-Sadawi states that it is whispered into her ears that this certainty is questionable because "if God loved us more than the English, why did He let them conquer and occupy us? Why did He let them discover the power of steam and electricity, the radio, the wireless, the aeroplane and the submarine?" No doubt, al-Sadwi was not interested in questioning the love of God. Rather, she was questioning the "sublimity of the self and the mundanity of the other" (Qtd. in El-Enany 4).

This is the ambivalent attitude, which swept modern Arab discourse and continues to characterize the contemporary Arab writings. The two afore-mentioned contradictive tendencies have, in part, characterized the encounter between the Arab-Muslim world and the West from its earliest days and manifested themselves in the writings of contemporary Arab discourse. I say 'in part' because I add a third element, namely 'backwardness.' With this element, one can see three elements behind the formation of modern Arab discourse, a triad of different aspects. But, in spite of their underlying disparities, they constitute one soup, so to speak. Modern and

contemporary discourse is a discourse that remains caught in a contradictory fascination: with the enchanted Islamic tradition on one hand and the equally undeniable enchantment of modernity. The split is the “Arab own specific and inalienable destiny” (Shayegan 5). But before this split between tradition and modernity came into existence, there first came the shock that struck the Arab intellectuals, namely ‘backwardness.’

Given this, what can we make in the way of conclusion in regard to our subject from this journey concerning the Arab discourse? This backwardness, as noted above, was not perceived and admitted by the Arab-Muslim until the nineteenth century, specifically not until the encounter with the industrial power of the West during colonial expansion. As presented in earlier sections of this chapter, the first thing that shocked the Arabs was the reality of their backwardness. The acknowledgement of and search for the philosophical meaning of backwardness became from that time onwards the central subject and driving force of the Arab-Muslim thinkers. As a result, the Arab-Muslim world entered the age of two opposing paradigms: tradition and modernity. Modernity is the new outlook, while tradition is the emotional contents of beliefs. The three elements of backwardness, tradition, and modernity reflect (and remain in the age of the American world) the state of Arab-Muslim intellectuals and the nature of their discourse. But how can this unitary nature of Modern Arab discourse explain its polarization into different schools of discourse?

The theme of backwardness obsessed Islamic and Arab thinkers more than any other theme. Ever since this reality struck Arab intellectuals, Arab and Muslim thinkers have investigated the causes of and reasons for their backwardness. All thinkers agreed on their state of backwardness, aware of the gap between their society

and the West, and were eager to close that gap. However, despite their agreement and similar concerns, the solutions they proposed vary from one thinker to another.

In light of this observation, three major trends flourished, though in relatively different times, as a result of the increasing realization of the need for change in the Arab region. These schools of thought appeared to have different solutions and different ideologies since the formative era. Undoubtedly, various and vital issues have been the concerns of these schools since the 19th century, ranging from religion, science, nationalism, women's liberation, and politics. But all of these issues have been governed by and revolved around one central axis: tradition and modernity. The central problem addressed by these three schools is how to assume a relationship to tradition that allows the Arab world to live in modernity? It is this question that we seek to answer in the following chapter.

III. DEMOCRACY IN THE MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, some issues of Arab discourse were highlighted in the aim of establishing a clear picture of modern and contemporary Arab discourse. This picture, as noted above, has been grounded on two stages. First, there is the attempt to locate the beginning of the modern Arab period, known as the Renaissance.

Throughout this stage, we have noted that Arab-Muslim intellectuals are quasi-unanimous in seeing the colonial period and, more specifically, Napoleon's colonialism in 1789 as the trigger points of modern Arab Renaissance.

However, this is only one stage of the first chapter's plan. As for the second stage, we focused on the formation of modern Arab discourse and identified its triple components. Most importantly in this stage was that this formation was determined within an Arab-Islamic parameter, which is through the eyes of the Arab-Muslim intellectuals. With this in mind, we noted, throughout this section, that the modern Arab discourse from its very inception has been determined, essentially, by three basic elements: the reality of backwardness, a glorious Islamic past, and the superior European model. Taken together, the three elements have been, and remain, the primary field in which modern and contemporary Arab discourse produces and reproduces itself. In fact, as we have seen above, they consistently made the discourse bear a stamp of ambivalent behavior. This behavior is a characteristic of any discourse simultaneously governed by sympathy and antipathy. It is from within these three elements that modern Arab discourse has been constructed and, as a result, produced images of and articulated the need for change, revival, and modernization.

The three elements from which the ambivalent nature of modern Arab discourse have been constituted and shaped are also responsible for its diversity at the level of ideology. In other words, these elements are responsible for the variety of

arguments and controversies in the Arab discourse. Thus, from these observations we concluded the chapter by affirming that three major trends or schools of thought flourished, though in relatively different times, as a result of the increasing realization of the need for change in the Arab region. Thus, what have been gathered from the previous chapter is: the location of the beginning of the modern Arab discourse, the definition of its ambivalent nature, and finally its branching out into three schools of thought. We will now move the research, in the second chapter, into analyzing the Arab discourse in its three trends. But the initial question is, how shall we proceed with the task of analyzing the Arab discourse without diverging too far from the area of interest?

This would occur if we do not restrict the analysis of the discourse to one specific issue. Undoubtedly, several vital themes concern the modern Arab discourse, from its inception in the 19th century through today. According to Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, there have been many things that attracted attention in Arab-Islamic thought since its Renaissance. These issues include the rise and fall of civilizations, political justice, science, religion, and gender (Kassab 20-22). Of course, discussions would be prolonged if we were to cover all these themes. Therefore, it is sufficient to limit ourselves to one selective issue. As Boullata states, "[a] useful approach seems to be one in which [the research is launched] from one selected angle" (6). We choose to angle our discussion onto democracy. Our focus on democracy is doubtlessly a procedural choice as it prevents us from diverging from the standard demands that ground any intended focused thesis.

Consequently, the central question is: how did the Arab discourse, since the crystallization of the modern Arab Renaissance in the nineteenth century, come to deal with democracy? This will be a mere textual analysis of the three Middle Eastern

schools of Arab discourse in order to discover how they read modern issues such as democracy. The democracy example will shed light on how the forces of the past govern modern and contemporary Arab thought on the issue of democracy and, in turn, how Arab thought, in its proneness to the past, imprisons democracy. We have previously classified the modern and contemporary Arab discourse into three main headings: Muslim, Liberal, and Socialist. So, let us now direct the question to each trend individually in order to discover what results may occur.

The Muslim Model:

The concept of democracy in the Arab world has a history. The concept of democracy as well as the debates surrounding it, like other modern Western concepts, found their way into Arab-Islamic societies in the 19th century. This was the start of what Arab intelligentsias called the age of the modern Arab Renaissance. What was the attitude of the Islamic world's intellectuals to this new concept of democracy, among many other ideas "absent from Middle Eastern political experience" as Ami Ayalon maintains (Qtd. in Browers 34)?

As a matter of fact, the issue of democracy haunted Arab-Muslim thinkers. By examining Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and his writings, we find telling evidence that Muslim reformist thinkers appealed to the principle of democracy, among other new enchanting ideas. This support came in spite of the cautious reservations held by statespersons and the religious clerical establishment of the Ottoman Empire and its Arab provinces over the adoption of the European Renaissance ideas in general and democracy in particular. Consequently, al-Jabri maintains Islamic thinkers did not hesitate to integrate it within their religious corpus (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 84).

The positive attitude held by Muslim thinkers toward democracy was, no doubt, revolutionary in many ways, as many scholars maintain. It is true, as discussed

in chapter one, that interest in the issue of democracy was an essential theme of a vast reform program advanced by Muslim reformers to face both the changes and challenges of European colonialism. Most Muslim thinkers believed that democracy and other related issues, such as constitutionalism, political justice, and public participation, are the “basis of European advancement and the primary condition for the Arab Renaissance” (Kassab 21). Hence, Muslim thinkers developed a high regard for democracy and its sister themes and fused them in Arab discourse.

Several leading Muslim thinkers in the 19th and early 20th century provide us with a view that makes democracy a requisite, or even a prerequisite, to Arab Renaissance as a whole. Among them, to mention a few names, were Rifa’ al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), Khayriddin al-Tunisi (1822-1890), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Mohammed Abdu (1849-1905), and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1848-1902) (Masud 246). According to al-Afghani, the participation of people in the government was the key to making any progress and development, as well as to form a strong state that could stand against European imperialism. Undoubtedly, al-Afghani’s considerations of the necessity of people’s participation in decision-making as a means of power would later inspire new generations of Muslim thinkers. This modern Muslim intelligentsia would seek to revive Islam in the hope of “acquiring the means of power from Europe in order to use it against its colonial expansion” (Kassab 21).

If the emergence of the discourse on democracy, just like any other new ideas, drove the need to change and face the colonial challenges, this raises the question, how did Muslim thinkers read democracy after they sensed its necessity? Or, to put it differently, what was the mechanism of acquiring and applying democracy as postulated by these Islamic thinkers?

Islamic thinkers appropriated democracy by positing that the concept of democracy is not something foreign to the Islamic religion, but is rather indigenous to it. Thus, on this subject Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), who continues to be seen as the towering figure of Islamic modernism, has asserted that democracy is essentially an Islamic commodity that belongs to the first generation Muslims during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed; it is a must-recover commodity (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi*, also in Boullata 4).

Abduh was not alone in advocating this view. Almost all the pioneers of Muslim modernism have expressed similar ideas about the indigenesness of democracy. According to Albert Hourani, a number of thinkers such as Tahtawi, Khayr al-Din, and al-Afghani held a shared mode of thinking. He writes, “In this line of thought, *maslaha* gradually turns into utility, *shura* into parliamentary democracy, *ijma’* into public opinion; Islam itself becomes identical with civilization and activity, the norms of nineteenth century social thought.” (*Arabic Thought* 144).

A consideration of Hourani’s quotation can help us to understand how Islamic thinkers define democracy and its related ideas. The Muslim reading of democracy was (and remains) reflected through the demand for equating democracy with *shura* (consultation). According to al-Jabri, modern and contemporary Islamic thinkers contend that the notion of democracy, as contained in the Qur’anic principle of *shura*, proved to be an essential value of Islamic civilization and an important pillar in its first rise in the early centuries. The same would be true in its second hoped-for glory (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 84).

It is worth mentioning that Muslim thinkers, in their insistence on associating democracy with *shura*, refer to a vast body of material found in the Qur’an, *hadith* literature (teachings of Prophet Mohammed), and the historical accounts of the first

four Caliphs. Undoubtedly, all these references provide, in their mind, strong support for the merits of the principle of *shura* and its practice. There are some passages in the Qur'an that are cited by these thinkers to advance their claim. These passages include: "...and seek their counsel in all affairs. And when you have come to a decision, place your trust in God alone" (3:159); and "Who obey the commands of their Lord and fulfill their devotional obligations, whose affairs are settled by mutual consultation" (42:38). These two Qur'anic verses are always highlighted by Muslim modernists to justify the claim that democracy is an "authentic Islamic political concept" and means "nothing more than the Qur'anic notion of *shura*" (Browsers 41).

Also, in further attempts to advance the claim that democracy and *shura* are identical, Muslim thinkers searched for examples in Islamic history. In so doing, they asserted that the principle of *shura* was once a practical system in historical Islam carried out by the companions of Prophet Mohammed. After his death, the companions used the principle of *shura* to select a Caliph (successor) to Mohammed, who would take the supreme lead of *ummah* (Muslim community) (Browsers 28).

Hence, it seems clear then that Muslim modernists held the belief that there is an identical nature "between the European concept of 'democracy' (*dimuqratiyya*) and Qur'anic notion of '*shura*,' which they considered to be the defining principle of the form of government advocated by the Prophet Mohammed and specified in the Qur'an" (Browsers 41). But, whether this integration of democracy into *shura* was a correct reading is not our concern here. What concerns us, rather, is that this fusion remains the principle field through which Muslim discourse on democracy moves.

But the issue does not end here. The Islamic thinkers of the reformist movement, in their endeavor to achieve a concordance of democracy with the Islamic principle of *shura*, overlooked an essential component. Demonstrated by al-Jabri,

Muslim thinkers did not give a positive content to the term democracy, mainly because the same negativism was ascribed to the meaning of *shura*. Both democracy and *shura* were defined by Muslim scholars with a negative connotation where they both mean “the absence of absolute despotism” (*Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 84).

In order to appreciate the importance of the term “absolute despotism” in relation to our subject of democracy and *shura*, there needs to be a clarification. This clarification is the prominent distinction of the senior Renaissance figure from the Muslim modernist discourse when defining “absolute despotism” and “restricted despotism.” Abduh defines absolute despotism:

Absolute despotism is a state of governing in which a single [ruler] exercises his will of power over his ra’iyah (literally translated as ‘herd’) in an absolute and unconditional way. In this type of governance, it is the ruler’s absolute will of whether to adhere to Shari’a and rule of law or go against them. (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 84)

In opposition to this “absolute despotism,” Abduh defended what he calls “restricted despotism” as:

The sovereignty of the ruler in the implementation of rule of law, after his checking on its concordance to Shari’a as much as possible. And this is, in fact, not to be called despotism. But, in the eye of statesmen, it is called unification of the executive power. The absolute despotism is a forbidden act in Shari’a because Islam commends *Shura* while the restricted despotism is not prohibited, neither in Shari’a nor by ra’ay (reason), but, rather, it is a religious binding duty on both ruler and ruled. (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 84)

According to this distinction, posited by Abduh, between “absolute despotism” and “restricted despotism,” we can now define the concept of *shura* as perceived by Muslim discourse. *Shura* is nothing other than this ‘restricted absolutism,’ which Abduh defended. Certainly, the question of whether Islamic reading of democracy is defective, as Jabri asserts, is a question which we prefer not to deal with, as it is not within the realm of this study. However, Abduh does attribute the causes of decline and backwardness in Ummah to absolute despotism, believing that restricted despotism, namely *shura*, will lead Muslims back into their early glory (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 85). This moves us a step forward: a step that begs an explanation of how *shura* then is to be practiced.

According to al-Jabri, Muslim intellectual discourse confirms that the conduct of *shura* is not limited to a certain path, and, therefore, there is no objection to conduct *shura* by means of democracy. And this, according to Abduh, comes through the establishment of a *shura* Council, whose main task is providing advice (*Nasiha*) to a ruler. On the importance of a ruler’s consultation with experts and its crucial role in advancement of *Ummah*, Abdul-Rahman al-Qawaqibi, a senior figure of the Muslim modernist discourse, states the following:

If we contemplate the life cycles of Islamic governments from the time of Message [i.e., the mission of the Prophet Mohammed] onward, we find the fact that their rise and fall attributed to the strength and weakness of ahl al-hal wal-aqd (literally translated as, the people of loose and bind) and their consultative role in governments. Not only this. If we further contemplate each apparatus in the Islamic governments, whether today or in the past, each king or a prince, and even each family and each single human, we find that good

and evil are due to whether there is consultation or arbitrary opinion. (Qtd. in Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 85)

Certainly, we could cite other texts of modern Muslim discourse to further determine the essence of *shura*/democracy. However, our goal is not a collection of documents, but rather to frame the mode of thinking which produced (and still produces) this discourse. Thus, what is truly noteworthy is that Muslim modernist discourse, while analogizing democracy to *shura*, took issue against modern political institutions such as parliaments. Al-Afghani explicitly stated that a parliamentary system does not fit the Middle-Eastern Muslim societies But Afghani's negative attitude towards a parliamentary system was not without alternative. According to al-Jabri, Afghani believed that Middle Eastern Muslims would not experience progress without a strong and just ruler. A ruler with these two characteristics is a precondition for Muslim revival and progress.

Just as Afghani chose the strong, just ruler as a prelude to advancement of Middle Eastern people, his disciple, Mohammed Abduh, also agrees with the need of a ruler, though in more explosive terms, demonstrated in his prominent article, "That Who Promote the East Must Be a Just Despot." In this article, Abduh concludes with a question: "Is not there, in the entire East, a local just despot who can do in just fifteen years what reason cannot do in fifteen centuries?" (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 88). Undoubtedly, the value of Abduh's question does not reside in an answer, since Abduh does not propose one. Instead, the value of Abduh's question is a wishful tone, as he favors "the idea of a just despot" (Kassab 28). To quote Choueiri's description of Abduh's whole approach, Abduh "differentiated between tyranny, on the one hand, and autocracy, on the other. To him, the first was forbidden

by the Shari'a, while the second was not, since the execution of the law by one person was permitted by both religion and human reason" (30).

So, what can we conclude in regard to our subject from this brief exposition concerning the school of Muslim discourse and its reading of democracy?

Conceivably, the Islamic past constitutes, in its discourse, the primary component of their perception of democracy. What might strike our attention from this school of thought is its reading (and desperate defense) of democracy as equivalent with *shura*. Thus, the Muslim model, as we elucidated above, circles around one element regarding the conduct of democracy, which is the *shura* as commanded by the Qur'an and Prophet Mohammed's teachings.

From this perception, Muslim modernists conclude that democracy can be practiced in the Arab world by the establishment of the *shura* council with a just despot. This is the discourse of Islamic intellectuals concerning democracy. We will turn, now, to another school of Arab thought, which is Liberal trend, and see how it views democracy.

The Liberal Approach:

One way to look at liberal tendencies in the Arab-Islamic world is that it is a tradition that gradually developed in sharp, clear opposition to the Muslim school of thought. The liberal movement has been, to various degrees, swayed by the European tradition of progress and secular constitutional government. As far as democracy discourse is concerned, what is clear in this approach and in its perception of democracy is that its upholders reject the Muslim reading of democracy and, therefore, outline sharp criticisms of the Muslim habitus. The liberals affirm that any new or, at least, renewed endeavor of establishing a democracy in the Arab world

demands liberation from the prevailing Islamic approach. The liberation cannot be done without a critique of Muslim tradition.

A recurring charge raised by liberal intellectuals against the Muslim reading of democracy is that it confuses *shura* and democracy by preaching that both are two connotations of the same concept. Liberal discourse warns against this confusion from the beginning and holds that the Islamic concept of *shura* is not applicable to the modern idea of democracy. Qasim Amin (1865-1908), a prominent liberal voice, says:

It may be said that the caliph used to rule after the members of the Community had formally invested him, and that this shows that his authority was derived from the sovereign people. I do not deny it; but the authority which the people only enjoyed for a few minutes was a nominal authority, and in reality it was the caliph who was sovereign. It was he who declared war, made peace, imposed taxes, made decisions and looked after the interests of umma, relying on his own judgment and without any obligation to make anyone else in partnership in the matter. (Qtd. in Hourani, *Arabic Thought* 168)

In this passage, Amin does not appeal to the Muslim modernists' argument, which shows the conformity of *shura* with democracy. Instead, he criticizes the argument for the so-called democratic spirit of Islam, demonstrating that legislations are the business of the caliph alone and not the community as a whole. Therefore, the concept of *shura* is not democratic, as Muslim modernists claim.

The same vision has also been pursued by a prominent liberal thinker, Shibli Shumayyil (1850-1917), who confirms this verdict rather bluntly. He asserts:

A system of laws should not be taken from gods' hands but from humans'. Neither should it be taken from mouths of Caliphs or kings but from the tongues of the homeless and the poor. For only by this, laws would be closer

to humanity, to the sound social justice than to satisfy selfish desires of ruler's own happiness. (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 86)

We will stop at this point in regard to liberals' counterargument over Muslim's perception of democracy. Here, we need not overburden the reader with citing other writings of liberal discourse which has been abundantly circulated. However, if raising democracy to the level of the *shura* is the Muslim approach against which, as observed above, the liberal approach severely stands, then how does the liberal discourse define democracy?

The liberal thinkers' reading of democracy proceeds not from Islamic history, as with the Muslim discourse, but rather from Western European history. And so, the liberal reading is European style, meaning it adopts a European frame of reference. Salam Mussa (1887-1958), the Egyptian well-known prolific writer and thinker summarizes quite clearly most of the liberal issues in his book *Mahiya al-Nahda* (What is Renaissance). If we were to enquire, as Mussa points out, into the European introduction of democracy into human thought, we should consider that democracy is the legitimate daughter of the rising middle class. Thus, the evolution of democracy in Europe was associated with middle class, and this association, for Mussa, is of a causal nature, that is of a cause and effect relationship. He writes that the introduction and growth of middle class, "constitutive of industrial, commercial and agricultural, resulted in the collapse of the old feudal order, elimination of slavery-based production relations and demolition of thrones of those claimed divine sovereignty" (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 90). It was only by that time, as Mussa affirms that an alternative middle-class ruling elite emerged which, in effect, embraced the establishment of the democratic system.

Mussa acknowledges that the democratic system was only in its very initial beginning by which “political participation has been limited and restricted to these classes alone,” while almost denying working class the right to express their opinions and participate in politics. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century, Mussa points out, that “workers in Europe began to feel the need to political inclusion or participation in the formation and conduct of governments and so raised demands for engaging in parliamentary representations. The circles of political participation, from that time on, are getting expanded slowly.”

Importantly, Mussa does not stop at this. By drawing on European history, Mussa makes an assertion that democracy has a foundation attached to the rising middle class. He affirms that democracy is a bourgeois invention. In so doing, he manages to extract lessons from this history. Mussa, therefore, criticizes his fellow contemporary views of democracy that are short-sighted since they do not take into account that democracy is a worldview in society before being an exercise within power system. Democracy first emerged in the fabric of a cultural structure which was itself born in the context of middle class. Mussa’s relevant text deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

The feudal system cannot pave the way to democratic governance; neither can the farming system which is persistent in many Arab countries. None of these systems can prepare the way for democratic rule. How, then, can we ask farmers—in remote villages, in extreme poverty, in their blind reliance on the wealthy land owners, and finally, in their ignorance of the public affairs, and in their complete illiteracy of policy and economy—for having a say in the political system, political programs, taxes policies, rights of the press and

freedom of expression? This is impossible. (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 90)

As is clear from this passage, Mussa makes an affirmative case for the prospect of democratization in the Arab world, admitting that democracy remains a distant wish in the Middle East without the aspiration of the middle class movement.

Taking this view into consideration, the liberal reading of democracy maintains that because democracy has emerged in Europe at the hands of the middle class, the road to democracy in the Arab world will be through the same class revolution. Therefore, as Mussa concludes, "We must help this Arab man, a man of the middle class to plant in our soil this tree, the tree of democracy" (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 90).

Nevertheless, does the liberal's perception of democracy, with its borrowing from Western European history, end with an insistence on the existence of middle class? In other words, is the middle class, according to the liberal's view, the only prerequisite to democratization in the Arab world?

Contemporary Arab liberals have taken further steps in their way of reading democracy. Kassab states, "For a number of Arab thinkers, the secularist demands are in reality demands for democracy" (270). In fact, if we consider Arab liberal writings on democracy in the Arab world, we will find them replete with references to secularization. The vast majority of liberal thinkers in the Arab world manage to associate democracy to secularism, including Farah Antoun, Farag Fouda, Fouad Zaqariyya, Aziz al-Azmeh, Sadiq Jala-al-Azm, Taher Bin Jaloun, Abdelkebir al-Khatibi, Mostafa Lacheraf, Abdelkader Zghal, Hiachmi Karoui, Hisham Sharabi, and George Tarabishi (Kassab 220-247).

Farah Antun (1874-1922), a forward pioneer of the first *nahda*, is an example of the secular line of thought. He says:

Those men of sense in every community and every religion of the east who have seen the danger of mingling the world with religion in an age like ours, and have come to demand that religion should be placed on one side in a sacred and honoured place, so that they will be able really to unite, and to flow with the tide of the new European civilization, in order to be able to compete with those who belong to it, for otherwise it will sweep them all way and make them the subjects of others. (Qtd. in Hourani 255 *Arabic Thought*, also in Tamimi 23)

Views similar to those of the early liberal tendencies have remained constant and form a common ground for the proponents of the liberal trend in contemporary Arab political discourse (Nasr 92). The Egyptian philosopher Fouad Zakariyya, a contemporary liberal thinker, confirms the virtuous principle of secularism:

The religious state, by virtue of its metaphysical foundation...cannot guarantee the protection of civil rights, while the secular state can, since it posits the human being at the center of the organization of human society. The primacy of human sovereignty permits the establishment of a system of checks and limitations on abuses of power. (Brynen101)

Undoubtedly, the liberal literature is replete with references to secularism. However, our goal, here, has been to uncover some illustrations of liberal discourse that allow conclusions regarding the outcomes related to our subject. What remains important is that such liberal thinkers not only associate democracy with secularism, but also hold that the principle of secularism is a prerequisite to democracy in the Arab world. “No secularism; no democracy’ is for them a sacred equation” (Tamimi 29).

What can we derive from this brief preview concerning the Liberal approach of democracy? Two essential characteristics of the liberal discourse can be drawn from this presentation. On the one hand, the liberal discourse embarked on a total rejection of Muslim reasoning upon which democracy is reduced to the mere establishment of *shura*. As elucidated above, the liberal reading is, in some aspects, a reaction against the Muslim reading of democracy. On the other hand, the concept of democracy is extrinsic to the Arab world, establishing itself in European ideals, and its existence in the Arab world requires both a middle class and secularism.

The Nationalist Orientation:

For the sake of clarity, the analysis of the nationalist discourse will rely on writings derived from Arab nationalists from the middle of the twentieth century forward. It is evident that, despite the existence of a nationalist sense among the first generation of *Nahda* in the 19th century, there is a difference in Arab nationalism between the 19th and 20th centuries. Many Arab thinkers realized the radical transformation of Arab nationalism in the aftermath of World War I. According to Kassab, the first Arab nationalists were influenced by French Europeans. She writes that the first Arab nationalism

was inspired by the French conception of nationalism, based on adherence to a set of laws and values. It wasn't until after World War I and the establishment of the French and British mandates on the Arab lands that Arab nationalists turned to the German conception of nationalism based on language, culture, blood, and soil. (232-233)

Thus, the first Arab writings on nationalism were part of the 19th century cultural renaissance and, consequently, defined a sentimental movement that integrated the language of cultural renaissance in the early nineteenth century. However, in the mid-

twentieth century, Arab nationalism attached itself to concrete political programs and was defined by three components: “anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism, and Arab socialism” (Podeh 1). Undoubtedly, “these issues owed not to abstract debates but to the practical, daily, and ongoing challenges posed by colonialism and Zionism” (Barnet 57).

Thus, it is in this phase of ideological Arab nationalism, which centered on the desire for a unitary Arab state, that democracy discourse is constituted. As posited to the other two schools of thought, the central question is how do nationalists read democracy in the Arab world?

Perhaps the first result imposed by Arab nationalism in the mid-twentieth century is the necessity for a total reform in the scope of Arab democracy discourse. Two major shifts can be discerned in this stage of Arab political discourse. First, as Shayegan maintains, there is the shift in Arab attitudes towards the West, which now is considered to be a “conspiracy of occult forces” and the cause of artificial creations of Arab states. Hence, “the newly critical attitude [of the first *nahda* intellectuals] was overlaid with the ideology of combat” (12, 69).

In regards to the second change, with which this section is more concerned, it is on the first attitudinal shift that the second one is based. According to al-Jabri, what distinguishes the Arab political discourse in this revolutionary stage of the second half of the twentieth century is the transition from the emphasis on *political* democracy to the supremacy of *social* democracy. This is the state of democracy that Arab discourse transitioned from *nahda* into *thawra* (Revolution), as observed in the first chapter. Also, it is in this phase of Arab thought that elitists hurled accusations and insults against political democracy (90).

Gamal Abd al-Nassir in his *Al-Mithaq al-Watani* (The National Charter)

advanced his accusations against political democracy:

Political freedom, namely democracy, is not to mean a borrowing of nominal constitutive facades. This democracy is a hollow democracy. It is forged democracy comprising Arab reactionary forces that are not ready to break with the colonial or stop cooperating with him ... This fact tears the mask of the forged facade behind which reactionary democracy lay, exposes its big trick, and confirm for sure that political democracy or freedom in its political shape will have no meaning without economic democracy or freedom in its socialist sense. (Qtd. in al-Jabri, *al-Khitab al-Arabi* 91)

In line with this view, many nationalist intellectuals point out that freedom, in light of the bourgeois' democracy, "is the biggest hoax" because it is only "freedom of the capital." In the case of the Arab states, nationalist intellectuals affirm freedom must fit in with the supreme objectives of "Pan-Arabism." They maintain that democracy, pluralism, and freedom should not be tolerated except "within the general framework of the ultimate objectives of Arab national identity." Thus, the nationalist model cautions that democracy must be achieved in a way that the ultimate goals of Arab national unity are preserved. These goals are prerequisites to any formation process of parties and parliamentary life in the Arab world (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 93).

Moreover, this approach to democracy that concentrates on the supremacy of a socialist democracy was highly appreciated by the Soviets. According to Elie Podeh, the *National Charter* document of Nassir "was indeed regarded by the Soviets as another positive step on Egypt's fitful road to socialism." The Soviet experts believed the concept of socialism advocated by Nassir in the charter proved "the influence of

the world system of socialism [and] the influence of socialist ideology is being felt” (242).

Undoubtedly, this ideological utilization of Soviet writings does not concern us much here. What concerns us most in this section is the form and presence of this new approach, namely socialism, in the democratic discourse of Arab politics. The first thing imposed by this new approach on the political discourse is the necessity of reconsidering the concept of democracy. Formerly, Arab intellectuals considered democracy to be associated with either *shura* or middle class or secularization. Now, in the mid-twentieth century, the stage of Arab revolutions has led to the formation of a new concept of democracy based on its association with state socialism.

Thanks to this association, nationalist intellectuals found a feeling of confidence and support in transcending the shortcomings of the two foregoing readings of democracy. We have referred to the methods followed by the previous two readings of democracy. First, the Muslim model based its definition of democracy definition on the association of democracy with *shura*. Secondly, the liberal model’s method based its reading of democracy on a European Renaissance history necessitating a secular society which was itself born of a middle class. The nationalist model makes a “magic combination” of political democracy, on one hand, and social democracy, on the other hand. Thus, this new ‘logo,’ according to its adherents, does no longer raise the inconvenience raised by the Muslim model of “the just despot,” nor betray the national objectives threatened by the liberal-Western model (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 91). So, what justifies this new association of democracy to socialism in the nationalist model?

Abdullah Abdel Daim, one of the pioneers of nationalist thought, endeavored to regulate and determine the relationship between political democracy and socialism.

He argues that a striving for democracy, within the existing political system or through parliamentary systems, is incapable of bringing change to the Arab world. History as support proved impractical for both the reformist bourgeois and for reformist communism. Instead, it is necessary for the Arab states to search for another way to promote democracy. This way, Abdel Daim goes on to state, should come through a revolution as has been launched by communist movements in most countries outside Europe. He concludes that political democracy can only be achieved after the elimination of political exploitation. This elimination can only find its way through the means of a socialist revolution.

Thus, according to Abdel Daim, solutions must be sought from within Arab socialism. And if this is the case, then there is nothing that prevents nationalist intellectuals from making the past the power of law, which is the justification of their socialist model. In this, Abdel Daim identifies two ways for the construction of a democratic society where "all inequalities go away." It is either by promoting a political democracy or by a revolution led by the working class. The first, as has been experienced by the Western bloc, aims at increasing pressure on Arab rulers at the hands of political parties, social movements, civil society and trade unions, in the hope for the expansion of democratic institutions. In the second case, democracy comes through the revolution and use of excessive force under the dictatorship of the working class. Abdel Daim concludes that both routes are unacceptable. The first situation, based on the implementation of social democracy from within the existing system without radically changing society, is deceptive and illusive. The second situation, based on the Marxist conception of revolution, implies a great adventure at the expense of and in the name of human beings. Thus, according to Abdel Daim, the

nationalist model rejects both the gradual path of the West and the USSR preliterate dictatorship. What can be done then to achieve democracy?

This is no easy feat, according to nationalist intellectuals. Abdel Daim states there could be a third way. He affirms that this unknown third way could be difficult and hard, but is worthwhile to find. Abdel Daim believes all Arab efforts should be made to find the third way, as it is the only hope for Arab salvation. He maintains that the "Yugoslav experiment" can offer a pilot and an empirically rich portrait to be followed by the Arabs because it succeeded in making reconciliation between political and social democracy (al-Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 92).

This is the primary reading of democracy presented by the nationalist model in Arab thought and the forms it presents. Undoubtedly, discussions would be prolonged if we were to further follow the writings of the nationalist intellectuals. But, it is sufficient to conclude this section with an excerpt from a communiqué released by the elite of Arab nationalists and progressive intellectuals from all over the Arab world. The communiqué was released at the conclusion of a symposium entitled *Ishkaliyyet al-Dimuqratiyyah fi al-Alem al-Arabi* (The Problematic of Democracy in Arab World), held in November 17, 1980. It concluded that:

Participants concurred on the necessity of the question of democracy in the Arab world, on its crucial role in achieving the ultimate objectives of the Pan-Arab nation to liberation and social progress, and on its vital role in building the grass-roots. Participants, also, considered the crucial requirement of democracy to achieve territorial integrity and unity of the Arab nation...The conference raised questions about and desires to search for a new formula to Arab democracy to reconcile the reality of multiplicity in Arab governmental

forms on one hand, and commitment to the ultimate goals of Pan-Arab liberation, unification and socialism. (Qtd. in Jabri, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi* 97)

Indeed, the conference indicates the extent of the nationalist model's perfusion, as well as the extent of the authority in its reading of democracy in Arab world. This reading combines political democracy with socialism.

Consequently, we can derive several conclusions from this presentation of democracy and the means of thinking about it within the three main modern Arab discourses. Here, at the end of this chapter, we will summarize the three models of thinking on the question of democracy. If the above brief overview of the Arab discourse highlights, in different ways, the necessity of democracy in the Arab-Islamic world as a requisite to, or even a prerequisite to, the Renaissance, then the more significant matter for our subject is the way or the method in which democracy is perceived. Here, it might seem that we are in a position to engage in a comparison between these three approaches. This is only an illusion. What is, then, our goal of presenting these three schools of thought on democracy?

Undoubtedly, our goal in the above brief presentation of the democratic discourse as perceived by Arab-Muslim thinkers is not the content of the construction itself provided by these thinkers, but rather the *process* through which the discourse itself is constructed. Worded more precisely, the issue which interests us in this constructive process of the democratic discourse is not the materials of construction -- namely *shura*, middle class, or socialism-- or whether these are right or wrong. Rather, it is the technique and action of the construction process itself, meaning the way the discourse works and produces its criteria of acceptance and rejection. Our goal in presenting these three models was to uncover the thinking of these three schools regarding democracy and proceed with our task of Arab discourse. But, what

is the logic that determines the constructive process of these three schools of thought on democracy? This is a question that constitutes the topic of the next chapter.

IV. DEMOCRACY IN MODERN ARAB DISCOURSE: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

It is clear that the picture presented in the previous chapter on democratic discourse in modern Arab thought established three different readings. So, to the question, what is democracy to the Arab world? Modern and contemporary Arab discourse can be classified under three broad headings: the Islamists, the Liberals and the Nationalists. The Islamist model, having defined democracy by restoring the just-despot, answers that achieving democracy is done through and by *shura* (consultation). The Liberal model, standing against the Muslim reading, shows that democracy is achieved by locating the Arab middle class. The champion of Nationalism, having rejected both Muslim and Liberal *habitués*,³ preaches that democracy should be practiced by socialism. If one considers the democratic discourse of the three foregoing trends from the point of view of the orientation guiding each of them, one will definitely conclude that the discourses are completely different. This is true. Each trend differs in terms of inclination, as well as content.

But this is only on the one side, that is to say, from the ideological standpoint. The other side appears if we turn our concern from the ‘*what*’ of these three discourses toward the *how* it is stated. In other words, we need to examine democratic discourse at the level of epistemology. More precisely, what matters are not the materials from which the three schools of thought construct democracy in their discourse, whether this is related to *shura*, the middle class, or socialism. Rather, the

³A term first coined by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu by which he means “the ways in which we are produced as subjects through sets of dispositions—or habits—which predispose us to think and behave in ways that are adapted to the structures in which we are constituted. Since these are *predispositions*, they are embodied, durable and largely unconscious.” (Danaher, *Understanding Foucault* xii).

issue that concerns us is the process of construction itself, namely, the technique and the act of construction.

Having clarified the goal for this chapter, we now move forward to the next step, which is stating the subject of this critique: The Arab rationality. Thus, the previous question about democracy has to be transferred from the level of orientation (namely answering what is democracy) to the form of Arab rationality that is the mode of thinking that establishes these three schools. Consequently, the question to be posited now is, "How does the Arab world propose democracy can be achieved?" The previous readings enabled us to assert that modern and contemporary Arab discourse on democracy is governed by a shared *how*. Let us take, first, a brief analytic tour of the previous three schools in an attempt to lay bare the shared *how* democracy is read before we take the second step towards a critique of Arab discourse.

For Muslim discourse, answering how to achieve democracy appears to be closely associated with an interest in the past, namely the Islamic past, as a means to regain self-identity and pride. This affirmation of authentic Islamic identity takes the pattern of a "defensive culture" (Tibi, *Islam's Predicament* 11). Hence, the revivalists retreat to *shura*, referring not to a principle to be applied, but rather as one that is already applied (al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*).

In order to fully comprehend the practical circumstances that determined and imposed this retreat to the past, one should remember that this was the first spontaneous reaction to the challenge of the West. The essential doctrine of this movement was to fulfill the duties of breathing new life into *shura*, taking cover in it, and projecting a "radiant future-fabricated by ideology-upon the past" (al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*). As Albert Hourani puts it, Muslims hold the belief that "what happened in the past can happen again: Islamic civilization was created out of nothing

by the Qur'an and the normal precepts enshrined in it, and can be re-created if Muslims return to the Qur'an" (*Arabic Thought* 228; also in al- Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 9). Confronted with this, Daruish Sheygan wonders, "A longing for cultural identity? Perhaps. Fear of being short-circuited by dangerous modes of thought? Undoubtedly" (22). Hence, one notices the Islamic modernists' desperate defense of imitating *shura* as commanded by the Qur'an and Prophet Mohammed's teachings in order to establish a modern discourse.

It might be argued, then, that the Islamic revivalist movement should be understood as a strategy pushing against imitation (*taqlid*) and in favor of renewal (*tajdid*). Thus, the movement is not necessarily defensive, but rather corrective. This argument undoubtedly comports with Albert Hourani's writings. Hourani states that the work of those Islamic modernists in the nineteenth century was a turning away from the "traditional reading of tradition," to use al-Jabri's term, and was "opening the door to the flooding of Islamic doctrine and law by all the innovations of the modern world." Therefore, Hourani maintains

maslaha gradually turns into utility, *shura* into parliamentary democracy, *ijma'* into public opinion; Islam itself becomes identical with civilization and activity, the norms of nineteenth century social thought... It was, of course, easy in this way to distort if not destroy the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts, to lose that which distinguished Islam from other religions and even from non-religious humanism. (*Arabic Thought* 144)

Hourani goes on to state that "[i]t was, of course, easy in this way to distort if not destroy the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts" (*Arabic Thought* 144). In fact, we see no justification for Hourani's reading. It is quite the reverse; it was democracy which was heavily contaminated by the content of *shura*. Worded differently, it is the

discourse on *shura* which has deformed and distorted democracy from the very beginning. Daruish Shayegan, an Iranian Muslim scholar, considers the Islamic thinkers in their recourse to analogize modern concepts to classical ideas “[a]s if [they] could get hold of modernity by one end, fold it up, flatten it out on the bed of Procrustes, trim it ruthlessly down to the limited scale of [their] own ideas and make a place for it among the phantasms of [their] so-called ‘cultural identity’” (83). Drawing on Shayegan, if there is a distorted concept resulting from “this line of thought,” it is democracy itself.

Furthest to this, despite the highly respected incentives and purposes behind Hourani’s observations about the virtues of first generation’s modernists, this reading is troubled because it is only one side of the picture, which on the face of it appears clear and comfortable. The other side of the picture appears if one raises the issue at the level of the epistemological break. At this level, one must reconsider Hourani’s comfortable interpretation. While the leaders of the Islamic modernist movement have certainly called for renewal in the hope to adapt to modernity, this renewal was, and continues to be, based on the revival of the past. Al-Jabri points out to the heart of the renewal project, as advocated by Muslim modernists, by suggesting that if we are to say that Islamic modernists preach against “imitative conformism,” this preaching must be understood in a specific fashion. It aims first and foremost

to eliminate" a whole apparatus of knowledge, of methods and of concepts inherited from the "era of decline" while being careful not to "be caught in the toils" of Western thought. As for "renewal," it was meant to create a "new" interpretation of the dogma and of the religious laws that rest directly upon the foundations of Islam. It was a question of actualizing *religion*, to make it

contemporary and to make of it the substance of our renaissance. (*Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 10)

As is clear from this quotation, the initiative of the Islamic modernist movement intends not to break with the past, which is the true Islam because it is of the first generations and the pious forerunners (Caliphs). On the contrary, they want to bring the nation back to the religious belief of Islam as practiced by Mohammed and his companions. What they condemn and claim disjunction from is the era of decline, an era that set out in the tenth century and was intensified with the destruction of the Islamic Empire and continues until the existence of the Ottoman Empire. It is in this era of decline that the nineteenth century towering Islamic revivalist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani diagnoses Islam as being “sick” (Shayegan 53). As such, this renewal (*tajdid*) called for by Muslims should not be seen as without limits, but rather it is practiced from within and inside the scope of the Qur’anic scripture and *sunna*. Hence, democracy becomes possessed by the traditional concept of *shura*. It is a reading in which the past is projected onto the present: a past which is repeating itself.

Also of note is that “all the innovations of the modern world” were accepted by Islamic modernists and, as a result, seeped into the locus of “Islamic doctrine and law.” These new ideas were accepted as belonging to the Islamic tradition. In this mode of thinking, democracy, as Mohammed Abduh claims, is merely a modern coined-term that originally belongs to the first generation Muslims’ stuff during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed, and it must be re-acquired (al-Jabri *Al-Khitab, also in Boullata* 4). Undoubtedly, seeing these innovations as belonging to the Islamic past makes the past an essential element in the outlook of the Islamic modernists and, consequently, a fortifying component in their perception of these innovations. Perhaps this is what causes those modernists, in their desperate defense of *shura*/democracy,

to define themselves against parliamentary system and “against the introduction of a representative form of government” (Choueiri 46). For instance, al-Afghani “was not a constitutionalist” and all what he desired was a strong, “just king”; an inspiration that later inspired his disciple Abduh for a “despot just king” (Hourani *Arabic Thought* 116, al-Jabri *Al-Khitab* 88).

What, then, should we conclude about these observations? These observations are contributing to one result: this reading emerged as an attempt to overcome the negativity of the present by calling for a revival of the past in the hope for catching up with the West. In other words, the Islamists revived the traditional concept of *shura* in the hope for democracy. But contrary to what was quite planned for, “the means soon became the end: hastily reconstructed to serve as a jumping board to “glory,” the past [*shura* in this context] became the *raison d’être* for the renaissance project,” to use al-Jabri’s terminology (Arab-Islamic philosophy, 10). Thus, it was not destroying or distorting the traditional meaning of *shura*, as Hourani claims, nor improving or enriching democracy. Rather, *shura* swallowed and restrained democracy. Hence, democracy was “grafted” onto and “flattened out on the bed of [*shura*],” to use Shayegan’s language (83). Hence, the Islamic perception of democracy was locked inside the *shura*; it was the *shura* repeating itself.

However, was this mode of thinking the concern of the Islamic school alone? Let us direct our attention on another school of thought, the liberal, and see what conclusions we can derive from it.

What is clear in the liberal approach and its perception of democracy is that its upholders reject the Muslim reading of democracy and, therefore, outline sharp criticisms of the Muslim model. The liberals affirm that any new or renewed endeavor of establishing a democracy in the Arab world demands, first and foremost, liberation

from the prevailing Islamic approach. The liberals saw the Islamic approach as preoccupied with an inflated sense of selfhood on the national level, which is marked by the influence of an invading western culture.

In their critique of the Islamic perception of democracy as being an expression of resistance to the West, many liberal scholars vehemently oppose the Muslim passionate vision – like Sadiq Jalal al-Azm – or take a cautious distance from them, like Burhan Ghalyun. They claim that their main concern is preoccupied with the rational method of dealing with democracy. Their main justification most often provided by this reading, as al-Jabri maintains, is backward-looking. Thus, just as “the future in the Arab past having consisted in the assimilation of a foreign past (mostly Greek Culture) into the Arab past, hence by analogy, the future in the Arab “becoming” should consist in its assimilation into the European present-past.” This is indeed the case with the liberal pattern of any successful democratization project in the Arab world: It ends up being projected on a European near past-model (*al-Jabri, Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 12-13).

Whether or not this analogy justifies the Liberal interpretation of democracy, it hardly differs, at least in its logic, from the Islamic reading. For Liberals, democracy is once again cast in a past language, but rather than referring to an Islamic past, it refers to the European’s. Henceforth, Liberal thinkers connect democracy with foreign conditions, such as the need for a middle class, which is an essential ingredient that underlies any futuristic establishment of democracy in the Middle East.

What can we derive from the Liberal model? Liberal discourse on democracy is preoccupied with a dual function. It attempts to distance itself from the Islamic past by casting Islamic culture as one intrinsically resistant to democratic spirit. The Liberal model also strives to create new imaginaries of democracy by reconstructing it

with a European origin and copying a foreign past. However, if these observations highlight that the Liberal vision or the material of production of a Liberal discourse on democracy are in opposition to the Muslim's, then the more important matter for this subject is the method of theoretical production, which could be stated as the rule of their thinking. The question here becomes, do opposing visions necessarily designate competing methodologies?

The answer is no. Indeed, just as Muslims base their discourse on the Islamic past, the Liberals base their discourse on an analogical deduction from European experience. This similarity is a sign of importance. Each way of thinking resorts to the past, not as a way or a principle to be "applied, but as one that is already applied, to use al-Jabri's wording (*Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 13). Thus, the rule of methodology determining the Muslim's discourse is the same as that on which the Liberals base their discourse. In both discourses, the past, as one that is already possessed (be it Islamic or European), would attain the power of the law or referential authority. The justification of a future democracy would derive from the past. Therefore, the starting point with the Liberal school is the same as with the Islamic school: a past repeating itself. But, was this case restricted to just the Muslim and Liberal intellectuals?

In the age of Nationalism, there has been a radical change in Arab attitudes toward the West in general and perceptions of democracy in particular. It is during this period, in the post-independence nationalist period, that the 19th century *nahda* appreciating apprenticeship towards Western ideas soon shifted into hysterical language of rejection. The Nationalist period of Arab history characterized the Arab as a "person of resentment who was seeking dignity and striving to restore a sense of self," as the Egyptian philosopher Anour Abdul-Malik maintains (Kassab 91).

This negative attitude of the Nationalist Arabs' perception towards the West bleeds over to their views on democracy as well. The Western liberal character of democracy, one that is based on a gradualist reform program, is deserted and soon replaced by a so-called socialist democracy. This Nationalist democracy is inspired by the ideology of state socialism. As elucidated in the preceding chapter, it is in this phase of Arab thought that many of the intellectual elites propose a unique way out. For the Nationalist, the only way out of social miseries is to move "not from its own past to the present of the Other, but from its present colonial reality to socialism," as Mahdi Amil confirms (Boullata 25).

The movement to socialist democracy singled out the Arab's perception of democracy in this period. Thus, it is easy to tell, without having to take the argument that far, that this school of thought borrows the Marxist theory as the "best school of historical thought, ... which can help make long-term plans of action toward liberation," as Laroui claims (Boullata 26). The Nationalist school adherents picture other schools of Arab thought as ill-conceived. Abdullah Laroui, for instance, provides a critical reading of both Islamic and Liberal approaches where he condemns them as ahistorical. He argues that "traditionalists [Muslims] reliving medieval Islamic thought and perpetuating it, and the 'eclectics' [Liberals] borrowing what is not theirs and impossibly trying to graft it to their Arab heritage- remove themselves from reality, both remaining subordinate to others." For Laroui, the Islamist and Liberal approaches prove not to be productive in Arab society as they copy either a distant local past or near foreign past. What is needed is the "acquisition of historical thinking" that situates the past in its historical context and this only can be done in Marxism (Boullata 26).

It might be argued that this reading of democracy, in its appeal to a dialectical order, escapes the criticisms that charge its upholders as thinkers stuck in the past. The charge refers to a mode of thinking that seeks to repeat the past as it was. However, despite its claim that Nationalist democracy is a dialectical method, some critics state Nationalist thought never follows the dialectic in its full meaning and, therefore, still thinks about democracy outside the confines of dialectics. Al- Jabri develops a critique of the nationalist approach, focused on its adherence to a Marxist framework. He shows how poor a perception the Nationalists, modeling themselves to various degrees, can offer. Although al-Jabri speaks of Arab Marxism, his analysis can be extended to the Nationalist reading of democracy because he suggests that Arab Nationalism and Marxism are interconnected. For al-Jabri, the Arab Marxist thinking, even though it claims to be a dialectical method, has always been problematic. It has always been revolving around dreamed-of socialism and hoped-for democracy, but it neither accomplishes its fantastical socialism nor the hopeful democracy. What causes this, according to al-Jabri, is that this mode of thinking seems to employ the dialectical methodology not as a descriptive term, that is to say “as a method to be applied, but as one that is already applied.” Part of the problem is when nationalists fail to achieve their futuristic task as they should, they painfully and difficulty cast the blame on the uniqueness of socio-economic conditions of Arab history. And when they find no trace of a “class struggle” in Arab history because of what Marx calls the “Asiatic mode of production,” they fall victim to a “historical conspiracy” (*Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 13-14).

Once these observations made by al-Jabri are bracketed, one can conclude that the structure of Nationalist thought is formed in conjunction with the past. This past is not that of the Islamic model or that of European inspiration as formulated by the

Liberal school, but rather a past based on the leftist ideology, as lived by the Eastern European experiences.

* * *

Now, what can one derive from this brief analysis presented concerning the three schools of thought on how to achieve democracy within the modern Arab world? There is one important criticism to emphasize in regard to these three schools. Let us emphasize that this presentation justifies the assertion that modern and contemporary Arab discourse in its various and apparently competing trends can be faulted for its ahistorical outlook. On the basis of the previous discussion, it can be argued that the desires for democracy and a brighter future in general are anchored in the static outlook for dealing with a troubled past. The entirety of Arab discourse is transcendentalist in nature: it is a discourse that seeks democracy with its eyes focused on the past, one that is already possessed or/ and realized, and, therefore transforms it into an ahistorical or even an absolute. The past, thus, becomes an ideal existing outside of time and imposed as authoritative from the outside. Thus, the Arab discourse is trapped in ongoing “leap[s] from one absolute to another,” to use Von Grunebaum’s expression (Qtd. in Masud, *Islam and Modernity* 41). The entire body of Arab discourses present the past as an absolute transcendence of history in which each “rushes to take refuge, seeking support from a founding ancestor, through whom and thanks to whom it can recover some self-esteem” and relieve the anxious sense of inferiority (Al-Jabri, *Arab- Islamic Philosophy* 17).

But some Arab thinkers see that this lack of historicity characterizing the Arab discourse should be seen as a part of a whole, namely the Arab thought system. Such an argument is directed by some contemporary Arab thinkers. The Moroccan philosopher, Abdullah Laroui, recognizes that the Arab sense of accelerating change

in the hope of “catching up with the West has pushed Arabs to borrow ready-made models of explanation and action before looking at them in a critical and thorough fashion” (Kassab 84). Subsequently, in Laroui’s estimation, “What is to be described is this long movement of Arab consciousness toward a stage where history becomes the essential element of the debate and at the same time loses its fluidity to become a protecting myth” (Qtd. in Kassab 85). Therefore, the dominance of tradition as a transhistorical essence, being entirely outside the domain of history and immune from the critical norms of historicity, is what identifies the Arab discourse and, consequently, its failure.

The criticisms get even bitterer. In his anguished article, “Al-Ab’ad al-Tarikhyyah li-Azmat al-Tadawwur al Hadhari al-Arabi” (Historical dimensions of the crisis of Arab civilizational development), Shakir Mustafa asks why Arab cultural experience failed to be modern. He raises this question from within the framework of its comparison to other modern nations. Mustafa gives explanation for the failure of Arab *Nahda*:

We [Arabs] do not look at [history] as points of departure but as end boundaries; we do not look at it as mere sap but as ready branches to hang on and swing. We do not see it as a history that bore a thousand of possibilities but rather as a one-dimensional history that has the one form it actually took (Qtd. in Boullata 18).

This tendency of backward- looking, which seems to govern Arab discourse, is mainly the outcome of the uncritical mode of thinking as the late Moroccan philosopher Muhammad al-Jabri emphasizes. In his book, *Al-Khitab al-Arabi al-Mu’asir: Dirasat Tahliliyya Naqdiyya* (The Contemporary Arab Discourse: A Critical

and Analytical Study), al- Jabri points out that what distinguishes Arab discourse is that it is,

A discourse of memory, not a discourse of reason; it is a discourse which does not speak in the name of a conscious self that possesses independence and enjoys complete personality, but rather one which speaks in the name of a referential authority that employs memory and not reason. This is very serious, because intellectual concepts in this condition are not related to the reality of which the discourse speaks but rather to another reality which establishes the past-model in the consciousness as the directing, referential authority. (Qtd. in Boullata 47)

According to al-Jabri, it is a fact that the belief in a past-orientation constitutes the primary component of the Arab inclination throughout all times. This pivotal component is reinforced by Adonis, the pen name for the contemporary Syrian poet and literary critic Ali Ahmad Said Asbar. In his four-volume work, *Al-Thabit wal-Mutahawwil: Bah'th fi al-Ibda' wal-Itba' Inda al- Arab* (The Constant and the Changing: A Study in Creativity and Imitation Among Arabs), Adonis maintains that any question concerning the reason behind Arab retardation will remain incomplete if it were not to finger directly at the Arab mentality (*Dhihniyya*). For Adonis, Arab mentality is characterized by a number of traits that lie behind Arab intellectual failure. Adonis accuses Arab's mentality as being preterit. He explains the "Arab mind's preteritism" as "its clinging to what is already known and its rejection, even fear, of what is unknown." For Adonis, this state of living in the past within the Arab's mind is a submission to the known, which abandons the unknown and disparages "doubt, experimentation...freedom of search and the adventure of exploring the unknown and of accepting it." This "preteritism" contradicts the basic

thrusts of modernity, which are creativity and innovation. Thus, the known for the Arab operates as a paradigmatic frame of reference “that regulates his relations with the world” and to which everything unknown is explained (Qtd. in Boullata 28).

Perhaps, this state of the “Arab mind’s preteritism” bears witness to the fact that democratic movement in the Arab culture is closer to being an operation of dependence on the past rather than one of transition from one episteme to another. The transition among episteme systems would have allowed the later to negate the former, if placed in dialectical terminology. Instead, one observes that the initiative of modern cultural *nahda* (in general) and democracy (in particular) was (and still is) based on the revival of the past and not breaking away from it. Hence, says al-Jabri, the “phenomenon of cultural rumination” has long prevailed in the Arab mode of thinking throughout its long-stretched history. This phenomenon, for al-Jabri, is also visible in the evolution of Islam itself, as the later system of belief was a religion based on the revival of the old belief of Abraham. In this state of the “Arab mind’s preteritism,” where the old and known is defensible and favored on the ground of its supremacy over the new and unknown, there is little surprise about the ancient Arab saying that, “the modern is sniffed and flung onto the rubbish bin while the old is like musk and amber, the more you shake it, the more it increases in pungency” (Qtd. in al-Jabri *Takwin* 92).

These observations may be criticized as an approach which falls into the essentialist category. But if one holds that an argument, such as the one presented above, has been (and still remains) a characteristic of Arab’s thought, perhaps the reason for this is better described by an “episteme,” to use Foucault’s term. By ‘episteme,’ Foucault means, “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly

formalized systems” (Qtd. in Miller, *The Seventies Now* 28). It is worth mentioning that Foucault affirms that an episteme is unconsciously practiced and is largely unaware to the subject. The episteme is, as Michel de Certeau suggests, the ‘order of things’ which organizes everything, “but only in the form of what one does not know” (Qtd. in Danaher, *Understanding Foucault* 17). But why does this order go unnoticed?

The most striking example Certeau gives to explain why the “grounds” of this episteme are difficult to know is that of “cartoons where a character (say Felix the Cat or Wiley Coyote) is walking on thin air: as long as they don’t notice that there is nothing beneath them, they are fine- they keep going- however, as soon as they become aware that they aren’t on firm ground(s), they fall into the void” (Danaher 17). However, although mostly unaware of the episteme is, as Foucault suggests, we need to keep in mind that it may sometimes allow us to escape from our unknowingness of the episteme. Not only this. We should make an attempt at being critically aware of it “since it is the episteme that sets the terms for all knowledge and it is the episteme of a culture or epoch that must be grasped to correctly understand the beliefs and practices of that culture or epoch” (Potts).

Following this, one can state the definition of episteme as follows: it is nothing other than the unconscious social construct formed within and governing by a certain culture that imposed on its followers in a certain period of time. If one adopts this definition, one can say, first, that the Arab episteme is all the rules and activities governing by the Arab culture and unconsciously accepted by its members in which social practice, belief, truth and knowledge are produced. Secondly, this definition avoids the risk of falling back onto an essentialist and metaphysical notion of Arab thought since the adoption of an episteme is a social construct, the forces governing

its rise and fall is social too. According to Danaher, the episteme “doesn’t correspond to any notion of natural continuity, development or progress, but is random and contingent” (xi). Thirdly, this definition offers a possibility of rearranging matters from within Arab episteme. As for this, one will see that the Arab discourse on democracy, which seeks ready-made solutions and a recourse to repeat the past, is part of a whole Arab episteme.

In the light of this elucidation, the question arises, what reason does Arab thought have for thinking that the future will resemble the past? Or, to put it differently, what system of knowledge do Arab thinkers have for using the past as a basis for generalizing about things to come? In order to answer this question, an Algerian professor of Islamic studies at the University of Sorbonne, Muhammad Arkoun, suggests that to understand the Arab’s episteme, one should begin by examining the Arabic language. Arkoun says:

When the field of the unthinkable is expanded and maintained for centuries in a particular tradition of thought, the intellectual horizons of reason are diminished and its critical functions narrowed and weakened because the sphere of the unthought becomes more determinate and there is little space left for the thinkable. The unthought is made up of the accumulated issues declared unthinkable in a given logosphere. A logosphere is the linguistic mental space shared by all those who use the same language with which to articulate their thoughts, their representations, their collective memory, and their knowledge. (Qtd. in Kassab 179)

According to Arkoun, language plays a crucial role in determining thought and, as the quotation clearly states, he tries to “to introduce the important dimension of the linguistic constraints of each language on the activities of thought” (Qtd. in Kassab

179). But, suggesting that thoughts manifest themselves in and through the medium of language “where the whole curiosity of our thought now resides,” as Foucault proposes, only deepens the elucidation (Qtd. in Gutting 17).

Thanks to modern scholars of linguistics and ethnology, one becomes aware that “language determines thought” (Yule 218). According to Edward Sapir, an American linguist, “every language contains its particular perception of the world.” This means that every language offers particular mechanisms for representing and understanding the world experience, and thereby shapes its worldview and thought (Qtd, in al-Jabri, *Takwin* 77).

Of course, discussions would be prolonged if one were to cover the arguments that prove the validity of this point, namely arguments that would examine the interrelation between language and thought and how the later is constituted through the medium of the former. It is, therefore, sufficient to give one last observation. Adam Schiff offers a deep study reviewing all the linguistic works from the eighteenth century onward. He writes:

Beginning at least with Herder and Wilhelm Von Humboldt, linguistic studies have often held the thesis that a language system (which not only means vocabulary, but which also includes syntax and structure) influences how its people see and articulate the world, and consequently how they think. We think as we speak...which means that the language that determines our ability to speak is the selfsame one that determines our ability to think. (Qtd, in al-Jabri, *Takwin* 77)

We can add to this interrelationship between language and thought another consideration, which is one that examines the specificity of this relationship in Arab culture. According to Albert Hourani, “More conscious of their language than any

people in the world, seeing it not only as their greatest of their arts but also as their common, most Arabs, if asked to define what they meant by ‘the Arab nation’, would begin by saying that it included all those who spoke the Arab language” (*Arabic Thought* 1).

This observation of the specific attachment of the Arabs to language is also emphasized by a number of other researchers. This specificity inspires al-Jabri to say, “The Arab holds dear to his language inasmuch that he sanctifies it, and he appreciates its power over him emanating not only from the Arabic language itself, but also comes down from his own.” The fact that the Arabic language is the language of culture and, at the same time, of religious revelation gives an added weight to the Arabic language’s specificity in Arab life and eventually in the formation of Arab thought (*Takwin* 75).

To establish both the essential relationship between language and thought and the specificity of this interrelationship in the Arab context is, undoubtedly, just one step among many others. Another question to ask is, if language determines thought, what nature does the Arab language possess in order to be used to justify the past-model thought systems? Let us seek the answer to this question with the assistance of the Moroccan philosopher Muhammad Abed al-Jabri. In his four volumes of archeological study, *The Formation of Arab Mind*, al-Jabri addresses the determination of the Arab mind to emphasize the crucial role of the Arabic language in its structure. Among his main findings, al-Jabri states the characteristics of the Arab language can be narrowed down to the following: its ahistoricity and its tangibility.

As for its ahistoricity, al-Jabri generalizes the process as collecting and unifying the Arab language, which began in the eighth century “out of the concern

and fear for its dissolution due to the spreading of solecisms in a society where Arabs had become a minority.” It was a process that, according to al-Jabri, “one cannot but admire because it transformed the Arabic language from a form of language unfit for scientific study into a scientific one that could be categorized and codified.” This is, according to al-Jabri, a “miracle in which Arabic language was transformed from a language based on innate disposition into one capable of being studied and learned in the same way that knowledge is acquired through rules” (*Takwin* 90- 94)

But the methodology adopted by Arab linguists in the process of collecting and classifying the language caused the later Arabs to be resistant to change and development. To give an example, al-Jabri proposes that the compilers and chroniclers started with the conceptually possible, treating Arabic letters with a purely mathematical approach that limited the kinds of phonations they could form. This approach treated language as a mental production instead of treating it as a realistic given. In this case, the process reverted from being one of collecting the language to one which pleaded the tenability of a theoretical hypothesis. Hence, it was essential in this case that analogical reasoning should prevail over what was acceptable to the ear. Thus, words were correct because they were possible, not because they were real. The words are possible as long as there is a root origin to which they can revert or an analogue to which they can compare. These words are not realistic because the branch is often a theoretical proposition and not a given possibility from among the principles of inductive reasoning and social experience. Therefore, the Arabic language remained, and still is, static since its codification in the mid-eighth century; its syntax, morphology, phonations and words remain the same. This is an indication that this language is ahistorical. “It is a transhistorical language and does not meet the requirements of progress” (*Takwin* 86).

As for the second feature of Arab language, namely its sensuality, it is true that the primary reference of unification and grouping of language was from Arab Bedouins, the indigenous people of Arabian Peninsula. Hence, there was “increasing popularity and competition over the [Bedouin], as well as the struggle to gain his satisfaction” for the sake of the exactness of language and consequently setting its foundations. If one recalls what was previously stated concerning the role of language in forming the human perception of the world and the structure of thought, one should have realized how much influence that the Bedouins must have left on the Arab mind, especially given the tangible nature of their thinking and perceptions. Thus, the exclusive recourse to Bedouin language in the process of collecting Arabic vocabulary confined the Arabic language to the boundaries of their sensate world. As a contemporary author, Zaki al-Arsuzi, points out, the tangibility of Bedouins made Arabic words rooted in nature, so consequently a word that cannot be originated in and derived from nature, such as their nomadic nature, is extrinsic to Arabic and, eventually, should be cast aside and disregarded (al-Jabri, *Takwin* 86).

The sensate character of the language, in terms of linking a word to and rooting it in nature, and its ahistorical character, that is, its single mental mechanism emphasizing the branch to the root in producing Arabic words, “ended up snowballing and becoming deeply rooted in the structure of the Arab reason, both as a mode of thinking and as a principle of activity” (al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 20). This mode of thinking continues to feature what al-Jabri calls the Arab epistemological system: it is a measurement (*qiyas*) as termed by linguists, or the deduction of the imperceptible, unknown after the perceptible, known as expressed by theologians, and analogy as coined by rhetoricians. Whatever the name is, for al-Jabri this epistemological order still underlies the theoretical production in Arab –Islamic

knowledge and science. This production began to occur in what he calls the age of recording (*asr al-Tadwin*), a formative period in the eighth century when much of what came to form Arab heritage was recorded, including the *hadith* (saying and acts of the Prophet), Qur'anic exegeses, theology, language, jurisprudence, etc.

While al-Jabri attributes the emergence of the epistemological system in this period to the power struggle among political and religious sects, an examination of this connection between this episteme as a system of knowledge and power falls beyond the scope of this chapter. What concerns us here is the nature of this mode of thinking, or what al-Jabri preferred to call the epistemological order of explication (*al-nidham al-bayani*), as a system based on a past model, which produces knowledge concerning the ignorant unknown on the known.

It is true that this mode of thinking emerged as part of the process of codifying language, but it snowballed into all fields of knowledge. Thus, as is previously elucidated, Arab grammarians, in the process of codifying Arab language, built an Arabic language from patterns reflecting the sensate and tangible, which belonged to and reflected Bedouins' criteria. Thus, the production of a new word is only acceptable as long as there is a root origin or a sensate analogous to it.

It was not only linguists and grammarians who resorted to this methodology. Al-Jabri provides an incredible amount of examples demonstrating that this system, that is the deduction through sensate analogue or evidence, has long been filtered through to the Arab unconscious and continues to be featured in all fields of Arab knowledge. The methodology has such great power that it is unbearable for Arabs to compare or analogize anything with insensate or unfamiliar things. One example from Qur'anic exegeses suffices here. In an attempt to interpret the Qura'anic verse, "The tree of *Zaqqum*, emanating from hell, its branches like the heads of demons," exegetes

have been bewildered with the meaning of “heads of demons,” since it is unknown and imperceptible. This is further complicated by having to compare it or analogize it to the “tree of *Zaqqum*,” which is unknown as well. They have, therefore, been forced to claim that the “heads of demons” is a name of a plant that grows in Yemen. In other words, Arabs turned the unknown phrases into sensible and perceptible items in order for its analogy with the “tree of *Zaqqum*” to be rectified. The example clearly shows that what is unseen/unknown (tree of *Zaqqum*) can be analogized after the seen/known (heads of demons) is determined.

Hitherto, what can one deduce from this summary presented about the reason and the means of thinking as proposed by al-Jabri’s *Takwin al-‘Aql al-Arabi* (The Formation of Arab Mind? In its seeking the nature of the Arab mental act, an epistemological production asserts that the Arab’s mind is characterized by a familiar, historical mental act. It is an analogical mode of thinking that explains the unknown/imperceptible on the basis of the known/perceptible. This is the epistemological field determining Arab production of knowledge, and it has occurred since the age of recording in the eighth century. It was first used by linguists and jurists as a device for classifying and codifying the Arab language and was later adopted by theological exegetes as a method in reading and interpreting the Qur’anic text, *hadith*. Eventually the method snowballed into all fields of disciplines such as philosophy, Islamic law, and physics. The method infiltrated Arabic life so much that it ended up being anchored firmly in the very depth of Arab’s theoretical production, all occurring on an unconscious level, according to Foucault.

All of this could only add up to one conclusion. The impact of this snowballing mode of thinking is important because it enables not only an analysis examining how modern and contemporary discourse perceives democracy, but it also

gives an explanation to why Arabs perceive it this way. Thus, to the question, how to achieve democracy? We have elucidated in the opening of the chapter that modern and contemporary Arab discourse on democracy is governed by a shared *how*. For Muslim discourse, which is closely associated with an interest in regaining self-pride, democracy means a return back to *shura*, not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. For Liberal discourse, which is firmly oriented in the European recent past where the latter becomes the servant of the former, democracy is solely a prerequisite to achieving a middle class. As for the Nationalist reading, a reading that inspired the leftist “ideology of combat,” democracy turns out to be a precondition and servant of a socialist state system (Shayegan 54). Consequently, to the question, how did (and still do) modern and contemporary Arab discourse perceive democracy? The entirety of discourse on democracy is drunk with repeating a past-model, presenting it as an absolute transcendence of history.

But, to the question, why does Arab discourse end up perceiving democracy in this historical light? This is a question that can be answered through observing the epistemological order in the Arab mind. Thanks to the modern theory of knowledge, one can maintain that there is good reason to place the three readings of democracy entirely inside a single epistemological field. The modern and contemporary discourse in its three trends on democracy belongs to a single cognitive unconsciousness. This accordingly produces one reading, epistemologically speaking. In other words, dealings with democracy are undertaken by the three discourses through the same mental act of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), which is based on and derived from the hoped-for unknown "in absentia" on the known “in praesentia” (al-Jabri *Takwin* 121). In any case, the unknown/non-actualized for the three discourses concerning democracy is a dreamed-of project; it is in all circumstances derived from and in the

service of the known/actualized, whether that is the *shura*, *middle class*, or *socialism*. Thus, does one need any further reasons to justify the previous allegation that modern and contemporary discourse in its three trends are cut from the same epistemological cloth? In the opinion of this author, the reason presented is more than enough.

V. CONCLUSION

Samir Kassir (1960-2005), the Lebanese writer, once observed, “Arabs are the unhappiest beings in the world, even when they don’t realize it” (Kassab 358). This might be the concluding picture emerging from our previous journey with Arab discourse on democracy. Nearly two centuries have now passed since the nineteenth century intellectual Arab *nahda* and yet the desired result has been disappointing. Worse than that, if one looked at it from the perspective of progress made in the past two hundred years, one would conceive a regression from what *nahda* forerunners achieved.

It is, then, not by chance that there is so much anguish nowadays among Arab thinkers about their present conditions. For example, Hussein Amin, the Egyptian intellectual, describes contemporary Arab conditions as a retreat from the early periods. He says: “Eighty-five years after Qasim Amin tried in 1899 to settle the question of the veil for women, people are still arguing about it. And there are fewer voices calling for the abolition of the veil today than there were eighty-five years ago” (Qtd. in Shayegan 24).

A similar feeling of malaise and disappointment are voiced by Gamal al-Ghitani too who records a retreat in present day Arab world with regard to freedom of expression. “In 1926 [al-Ghitani writes] when Taha Hussein’s book on anti-Islamic poetry was banned, there was a revolution. Just recently a ban was imposed on the *Thousand and One Nights*, and nobody uttered a word in protest (Qtd. in Shayegan 24).

In similar vein, frustration with the political system is also expressed by a number of Arab intellectuals. Undoubtedly, I can find no better here than to quote

Nizar Qabbani “sarcastic” description of Arab reality. In a lengthy article published in Paris entitled “We Who Undersigned with Our Hoofs,” he says:

We have discovered... that the Arab sheep, metaphorically called the Arab masses, are deprived of all rights granted by the United Nations, the International Red Cross, and the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals...that they may not butt, whose brains have been washed so that they may not think... We, the Arab sheep, who have been condemned to remain sheep until the day of Judgment and who are required not to complain, argue, or object. (Qtd. in Boullata 145-146)

We have quoted these randomly selected passages because they tell us strikingly how much Arab thinkers are unhappy with the present conditions of their societies.

Current Arab world democratic freedom, in the eyes of its contemporary thinkers, appears not only rating low but above all retreating from earlier *nahda* efforts. To put it in Hegelian language: the ‘World Spirit’ has not yet found its way to Arab world. In a word, Arab reality has not been yet touched by the Enlightenment project in spite of the two-century long racking endeavors.

To be fair, a span of two centuries has not been meaningless; it is, indeed, of great impact on the history of modern and contemporary Arab World. We can discern a number of structural changes in the Arab world: Formation of modern Arab states, “massive urbanisation, mass education, dramatically increased communication, the emergence of new types of institutions and associations, erratic yet at times powerful waves of political mobilisation and major transformations of the economy” (Masud vii).

But, this perspective is not completely satisfying to our aims since it concentrates on one side of modernity. As we have elucidated in chapter one, we have

disregarded the materialist or structural narrative of modernity, restricting our attention to its cultural aspect. By this restriction, modernity has been stressed in this thesis as a cultural experience manifested itself in the “major European historical events of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution” that seek to “liberate societies from their oppressive “material” conditions” (Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament* 36 , Ali Mirsepassi 2). On this ground, everything indicates that the fundamental problem remains immutable: The central 19th century problematic of progress is still present.

This invites us to share Shayegan’s astonishment that our “problems have not changed since [we] became aware of [our] displacement. [We] ceaselessly repeat the same nostalgic themes, ceaselessly pursue the same scapegoats, retire ceaselessly behind the same barricades” (10). In similar vein, one cannot help but share the Moroccan philosopher Abdullah Laroui’s wonders: “What are the definitive achievements of the *Nahda*, the shortcomings of the traditional political parties, the causes of the relative failures of Nassirism and of Baathism, the reasons for the failures of Arab Marxism... Why, in spite of all our efforts, are we facing the same difficulties as our parents and grandparents faced?” (Qtd. in Kassab 82-83).

One is also tempted to agree with the British historian of Middle Eastern studies Bernard Lewis that to all the standards by which modern societies are judged, Arab Middle Eastern societies lag behind. There is a passage in his book *What Went Wrong* that it is useful for our purpose to quote at some length:

The quest for victory by updated armies brought a series of humiliating defeats. The quest for prosperity through development brought, in some countries, impoverished and corrupt economies in recurring need of external aid, in others an unhealthy dependence on a single resource—fossil fuels. And

even these were discovered, extracted, and put to use by Western ingenuity and industry, and doomed, sooner or later, to be exhausted or superseded—probably superseded, as the international community grows weary of a fuel that pollutes the land, the sea, and the air wherever it is used or transported, and puts the world economy at the mercy of a clique of capricious autocrats. Worst of all is the political result: The long quest for freedom has left a string of shabby tyrannies, ranging from traditional autocracies to new-style dictatorships, modern only in their apparatus of repression and indoctrination.

(151)

Thus, the current Arab reality, if one looks at it from the perspective of what Arabs should have done in the hope of catching up with the West, raises the pressing question: After almost two centuries had elapsed since the issue of progress had initially emerged: Why are, then, Arabs backward?

This question was already posed by the 19th century first Nahda forefathers. For an instance, Islamic modernist Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) published a most outspoken essay, “*Limadha Takhakhara al-Muslimun wa Limadha Taqaddama Ghairuhum?*” (Why Did Muslims Fall Behind and Why Did Others Progress?). The question was, also, dealt with and addressed by the second *Nahda* thinkers since the 1950s but was peppered that time with a different form: Why have Arabs failed to achieve their first *Nahda*?” As for today, the Arab intellectuals address it in the form of the question, why are the experiments of the *nahdah* in its both stages dead end? This is a question that is expressively posed in Hisham Salih’s 2007 book *Al-Insidad al-Tarikhi: Limadha Fashila Mashru’ al-Tanwir fi al-Alem al-Arabi?* (The Historical Deadlock: Why Did the Enlightenment Project Fail in the Arab World?).

By this anguished awareness of backwardness we have concluded chapter one. The consciousness has been painted, as we have inaugurated, in a causal manner as the effect of modern Western ideas bombing Middle Eastern societies in the aftermath of Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798. This date blew up all the safety valves in the inflationary Arab self-pride and shook his narcissism to the teeth. In a word, Napoleon's conquest gave the deathblow to Muslim narcissism (of course there are still some exceptions). The Islamic world realized, for the first time, their imperfectness and inferiority to the West civilization. But, as we have remarked, while this realization of backwardness was very disastrous and is still the insoluble problem that ravages Arab's consciousness, it was not without fruition: Arab intelligentsias had to bow to hard questions, "What Went Wrong?" and, what is to be done? (Bernard Lewis).

The consequences of these two unprecedented questions were the splits of Arab elites. Three major trends flourished, though in relatively different times: Muslim, liberal and nationalist. Each school of thought appeared to have its own diagnosis and corresponding prescription to the question of what to be done in the hope for re-acquiring some self- esteem. Based on our conviction that a question turns intractable to be tackled unless assessed from within "one selected angle," as Boullata observes, it has been sufficient to limit ourselves to one procedural selective issue, namely democracy (6).

Thus, the problematic of democracy has been the constituting topic of chapter two. Consequently, the question remains: If Arab intellectuals did (and still do) in fact preach the virtues of a democratic state since the crystallization of the modern Arab Renaissance in the nineteenth century, then, how do they come to perceive it? To this question, the Islamist model, having attributed their backwardness to the

abandonment of the true heritage of Islam, answered by return to *shura*. The Liberal thought, condemning the Arab past, advocated secular and middle-class- based democracy as inspired by European Renaissance experience. The Nationalist democratization project, having seen both Muslim and Liberal habituses as an inadmissible betrayal of and conspiracy against the supreme objectives of Arab unity, was essentially a state socialism.

Our analysis of these three readings of democracy has not been without a purpose: It has been to uncover the mode of thinking of these three schools regarding democracy and proceed with our task of critiquing Arab discourse. This is what has constituted the topic of chapter three. The paradox we have formulated was as such: While the issue of and debate on democracy was one which came, almost, at the first of the list of *nahda* objectives since its inception in the 19th century, Why is it still the non-resolved question. Why is the Arab world still the example of the lack of democracy and human rights? Why are Arab societies the furthest from democratic freedom?

To these questions, it is useful, before giving a few concluding thoughts, to acknowledge the most current arguments constituted by some Arab scholars as the carriage upon which they tend to hang the non-democratic status of Arab Middle East and so feel at ease within the frontiers of these assumptions.

At first, it is often claimed that outside factors are blameworthy; at the forefront of these are colonial powers. This assumption often goes by the name of “conspiracy hypothesis,” and it has long ravaged the Arab literature. But we see this claim as unconvincing. Shayegan strikingly describes this hypothesis from psychological level. According to him, this hypothesis is very popular and its popularity reveals a lack of potency. Since their encounter with the superior

Westerners, Muslims “ended by granting the shrewd foreigners the same magical qualities that [they] used to attribute to the Divinity.” This sense of impotence would make Muslims saying,

The English did it!...The Russians did it!...It’s all a plot by the British, the Americans, any secret services you want. When the Shah went, it was because ‘they’ decided it was time. When the Imam took his place, it was because ‘they’ wanted it so. If I myself went out in the street howling like a man possessed, it was because I was hypnotized by the BBC and manipulated by the CIA. The entire universe was in league to exploit us. (15)

This is in regard to the psychological base of the ‘conspiracy hypothesis.’ In another regard, that is of its degree of validity, the claim that the West is behind the plight of Arab world or that the ills of its lack of democratic freedom are colonial legacy’s faults lacks credibility. I think it is our entire fault. For this reason, I share an Iraqi writer who says, “The disease that is in us is from us” (Quoted in Rushdie “Yes, This Is About Islam” n.pag). According to Bassam Tibi, it is a “home-made problem, not a colonial legacy.” For Tibi, one cannot really take Arab World inhospitality to liberal democracy as mainly reflections of remnants of imperial impositions. If this is so, why has Indian democracy, having been itself under colonialism, worked well enough in that it “guarantee[d] human rights to its citizens, including minorities, in their capacity as individuals? On the other hand, how does it help explain the reason that Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, a medievalist, absolute monarchy, has never been subjected to colonial rule and yet lacks all such rights?” (*Islam's Predicament* 131).

Second, it is frequently claimed that the poor democratic performance of the Arab world lies not in Islam but in Muslims. This belief goes by what I may call the “true Islam hypothesis.” This is the most recurring mantra in dealing with the issue of

Islam and modernity from the nineteenth century till the present. We have discussed this view in some detail in the second chapter that “Islam is innocent,” and that the Muslims who “have corrupted the true religion, so that Islam has become, as Afghani put it, ‘like a fur coat worn inside out’” (Shayegan 53, 52). This belief is still caught up in the present-day Muslim thinking.

The trouble with this repeated claim is that it is not accurate. One needs only to look at a sociological approach to see that religion cannot be understood except from within cultural and historical settings. In this context, religion is just a cultural product, an event inside history and not above it. In Kantian phenomenological language, religion is not a thing-in-itself or mind-independent. Rather, it is manifested itself only in its interrelationship to its followers and to their social layers. Consequently, Islam is not an imperative thing that “can be used in a similar way as one use a gun or a pen,” as the contemporary Tunisian scholar, Hammadi al-Ridiesy, maintains (Al-Arfawi, *Interview*).

Along the same lines, religion should be viewed as a symbolic capital, that is to say, one that is best distributed thing in the matrix of social system in which every group wants to speak in its name and in the service of its own. This is on the one hand. As for the other hand, religion’s symbolic capital is the amount of power or the “capacity of those who use [it] to create or solidify physical and social realities.” Nevertheless, the production of certain meaning and interpretation of symbolic capital “doesn’t reside in the symbol itself; it must be pragmatically negotiated in face-to-face situations,” as Bourdieu points out. In a word, religion is what we make of it “because of symbolic interactionism’s insights” (Allan 414). Given that there is no distinction between religion and religious, at least from the perspective of sociology

of religion, it makes no sense that Muslims, and not Islam itself, always get the blame for the lack of individual human rights.

But, even if some Muslim intellectuals grudgingly come to bow to this argumentation, they find some way around its conclusion to recover some self-esteem. The simplest one, this time, comes from the West as is always the case. Thanks to postmodernist approach launched at the mid of the century, the upholders of Islam can now pepper their writings with confident references to the innocence of Islam. The notion of postmodernism as based on the *fashion* of cultural relativism is now being widely employed by many Middle Eastern scholars; it does not matter if they are on the right or on the left. They find pleasure in the notion of postmodernism, build out of it their comfortable home and, so, feel no longer outsiders of the waves of modernity because, after all, there is no all-inclusive model of modernity. Every culture is distinct, according to postmodernist adherents.

The idea of specificity unfolding through postmodern theory has gained so much appeal in the Arab world that it is now being *prostituted* by the misuse of some Arab and Muslim scholars. That Islam is characterized by its own trajectory of differentiation and so it cannot be reducible to other civilizations' dynamics of modernity may be misleading. As clearly stated by Tibi, the trouble of this approach is hypocritical for "Islam is a religion with an absolute and equally universal claim." For Tibi, some Muslim scholars ascribe to cultural relativism, "despite their contempt for it...to advance their own anti-modern and irrational views in a disguised manner" (Tibi, *Islam's Predicament* 219, 83). They apply this approach to their own destiny in order to cover their own shortcomings and, thus, it is "mere palliatives for [their] comfort, sedatives that plunge [them] deeper into [their] dogmatic slumber," in Shayegan's language (10).

Furthest to this, we share Shayegan's wonder, "What, after all, is this irreducible specificity claimed by the exclusive upholders of Islam? [Islam] could hardly be any more specific than Hinduism for the Hindus, Buddhism for the Buddhists or Shintoism for the Japanese." To be blunt, the question raises itself, why is this desperate assertion that Islam is innocent and that its innocence is always infallible? Why do not Muslims aim at seeing Islam, like every other religion in the world, as a cultural category? Is not time for Muslims to "acquire a measure of humility and free [themselves] from the crazed egocentrism that let [them] believe the world begins and ends with Islam." After all, Muslims "have accomplished no more than Indians, say, or the Chinese. Indeed their civilizations were in many respects more complex, far more elaborated and refined, than Islam's" (26-29).

Having elucidated counter-explanations in the foregoing paragraphs to the most recent claims about the reason of the lack of democracy in the Arab world, then where to find a best possible answer to the question: After the near two-century long efforts to bring democracy, why is the Middle East still the example of the lack of democracy? In the third chapter, we have attempted to search for an answer in epistemological approach, of course with the provision that this answer will be only one possible among many others. In this context, we deem it necessary to reformulate the above-stated question within an epistemological prism: Why did the Arab form of rationality fail to enable Arabs to achieve democracy?

Thanks to the modern theory of knowledge, we could find good reason to place the entirety of modern and contemporary Arab discourse on democracy inside a single epistemological field. Drawing on al-Jabri's *Takwin al-'Aql al-Arabi* (The Formation of Arab Mind), we have elucidated that the modern and contemporary discourses on democracy, however diverse and competing they may appear, belong to

a single cognitive unconsciousness. As we have seen, the most natural and common way of addressing the problem of democracy is through analogy. Analogous reason tends to hold that the truth or justification of a claim strictly depends on an old precedent. In a more traditional term, analogy is the deduction of the unknown from the known. The unknown/non-actualized for the three discourses is democracy as a dreamed-of project; it is in all circumstances derived from and in the service of the known/actualized, be it the Islamic *shura*, Western Renaissance *middle class*, or leftist *socialism*. This practice of analogy is an essential component of Arab thought within which and through which it practices thinking. But what is the source of this analogy?

The analogous pattern of thinking is a linguistic phenomenon that dated from the eighth century since, what al-Jabri terms the age of recording. It was first used by linguists and jurists as a device for classifying and codifying the Arab language and was later adopted by theological exegetes as a method in reading and interpreting the Qur'anic text, *hadith*. Eventually the method snowballed into all fields of disciplines such as philosophy, Islamic law, and physics. It infiltrated and occupied every corner of Arabic life so much that it ended up being anchored firmly in the very depth of Arab's theoretical production, all occurring on an unconscious level, to use Foucauldian terminology. This is what we found problematic in the Arab discourse on democracy.

A number of scholars who draw on a comparison with the European Renaissance may belabor the value of our critique by affirming that every change within a given culture builds on an old precedent (past) in the selfsame culture. This happened with the European Renaissance where Europe claimed to go back to Greco-Roman sources. And so did Arab *nahda* in its impetus of returning to the past. Now even if we admit that the path to modernity does not radically refute classical past,

modernity requires another level of consciousness, one that recognize how much of a break or ‘negation,’ in Hegelian language, of the past should be.

It is true that European Renaissance called for a return to the Greco-Roman Antiquity but this return, in its less extreme forms, was, one of delimitation, that it to say, one of a particular way of subscription to this tradition. But, if we take modernity as a stage of the reconstruction of subjectivity, as more incommensurable ethos, and attitude or worldview than just a period, in a Foucauldian sense, then it cannot be considered as continuation of the past and, in other words, the past is not the initiator of modernity. Modernity is formed as an epistemic rupture dating back to Kant (although some date it back to Cartesian subjectivity).

From this diagnosis, Modernity “meant breaking with the fundamental principle of the past that governed all pre-modern societies” (Amin, *Europe and the Arab World 2*). In a word, European modernity manifests itself in the Enlightenment legacy. “And the Enlightenment is the apotheosis of the age of criticism,” self-understanding and rationalism (Shayegan 28). Thus, modernity “had nothing to do with rebirth; it is the question of birth” (Amin, *Europe and the Arab World 2*).

But, the situation of Arab *nahda* was not on the same wavelength in that “its internal dynamics does not express itself in the production of new discursive forms but rather in the reproduction of the old” (al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy 1*). The path of Arab *nahda* is presented as identical with the past. For the Muslim, he failed to negate, or at least criticize or even scrutinize his past. As for the liberal and nationalist, while it is true they engineered, more or less, a break with the Islamic past, they, nevertheless, took asylum in a past which is not theirs, one that does not have a counterpart in their reality. It was a past adhering to nowhere, so to speak. In a word, Arab *nahda* discourses, however different they may appear, has a shared

characteristic: They, in their best, do not seek rebirth of the past. Rather, they, what al-Jabri puts it, employ “the traditional understanding of tradition.” It is this reading which “stops time, suspends evolution and creates a permanent presence of the past inside the game of thought and inside the affective domain, thus feeding the present with ready-made solutions.” Such a *nahda*, by its slave-like dependence on a past, can produce nothing except past products (al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy* 22). To put it in computing terms, Arab *nahda* underwent a copy-paste based modernization program instead of a re-typing one.

Shayegan explains this grave paradox with reference to what he coins as “grafting.” By this he refers to a kind of false consciousness or a mistaken view of the world through which one weds two “epistemologically two different paradigms, old and new” to form one whole (76). But how could it happen? Does not Foucault clearly say, “In a given culture and at a given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge?” (*The Order of Things* 183). Perhaps, this peculiar hybridization of two competing epistemes can be explained only as a kind of Islamic exceptionalism. According to Shayegan, Muslim “painful experience demonstrates ...that it is thus possible to live through a period of *epistemic* delay during which adherents of an archaic *episteme* confront the forerunners of the world’s next conceptual matrix” (71-72).

But we should also be aware of how does the grafting of these two epistemes operate? For Shayegan, “Grafting can work in either of two opposed ways, the results being more or less identical. Either a new (modern) discourse can be grafted onto an old content, or an old (traditional) discourse can be grafted onto a new base.” But in both cases, the outcome is one: we have “inter-epistemic situation” in which “two different paradigms meet and, like two reflecting screens face to face, disfigure each

other by scrambling their mutual images.” And for that reason there is what he calls “the phenomenon of distortion” (77). But how does these two ways of grafting find its manifestations in Arab discourses?

Clearly, the first type of grafting is related to both liberal and nationalist discourses where in both we can find entirely modern-correspondent concepts such as liberal democracy, secularism, and socialism that are all post-Kantian episteme grafted onto pre-Galilean Islamic worldview. In the second sort of grafting with which the Muslim discourse is identified, we find a classical episteme -based idea of *shura* grafted onto modern episteme-delimited concept of democracy.

Herein lies the paradox of Arab democracy and modernity in general. In such a deformed sort of modernity, expressing itself in a mode of thinking which appears against all reason, “even being unaware of the underlying contradiction, [the Arab] wants to be both modern and archaic, democratic and authoritarian, profane and religious, ahead of time and behind it” (22). The consequence of this unconscious methodology, of course among many others, is that Arab *nahda* was born dead or, in its less pessimistic picture, remained “truncated,” to use Shayegan’s expression, or “semi-modern,” in Tibi’s wording (173; *Islam’s Predicament* 310).

But the pressing question here is: Can this pessimistic picture be the whole story? Has the light of hope vanished in the Arab world? We do not hope so. We might remember, here, the smartest saying of John Dewey: “A problem well-stated is a problem half-solved.” Perhaps, this advice is fit in our ambitious conclusion. We have already looked at what troubles Arab *modernity*, namely its problematic aspect of seeing a past, and now it is worthwhile to draw what might be done in the hope of creating a healthful understanding of the past. How?

To this question, the answer might be contained in our thesis, with reference to our definition of modernity. We have taken modernity as a philosophical discourse that emerged in the Age of Enlightenment of which autonomy of reason, in Kantian sense, is its skeletal structure. In this context, reason, being the cradle of modernity, has its own laws, without reference to history or tradition.

Given this cultural definition of modernity and the primacy of reason on which it is based, the issue of Arab *nahda* cannot be settled unless it attains this missing part, that is to say, through *nahdacization* of Arab reason. As intelligibly maintained by al-Jabri, there could be no Arab Renaissance before a renaissance *mind* ('aql), one that cuts itself from the determinations of the past, or at least from being a servant to past. This is the missing part of Arab *nahda* and it is time for Arab discourses to put the horse (reason) before the cart (past), to use Shayegan's wording. Only when they are committed to this goal, does their *nahda* become possible.

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