Contesting the Empty Time of Modernity:

Sufi Temporalities in Postcolonial Arab Thought and Literature

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages a cultural discussion on time concepts that took place between Arab thinkers and creative writers in the aftermath of the June War of 1967 against Israel and the onset of a period of Arab cultural self-critique. It focuses on a set of intellectual projects and examines their propositions on Islamic notions of time and their place in the modernity of Arab thought. Intellectuals such as the Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930), the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2000), and the Lebanese psychologist Mustapha Hijazi (b. 1937) critiqued the alleged Arab "event-based" and "discontinuous" perception of time which lacks the notion of the temporal as a homogenous impersonal medium. Focusing on the example of Sufism, they argued that time in the Islamic worldview is a heterogenous mix of sacred and profane events in an ontology deprived of change. My dissertation debates these findings in two ways. I first draw on the French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of "duration" to problematize these thinkers' discursive ideal of homogenous time which imposes on the heterogeneity of lived temporality the attributes of space and, as such, produces a mechanistic vision of the world. I then focus on the discourse of Ibn ʿArabi (d. 637/1240) and Mulla Sudra (d. 1049/1640) to demonstrate that Sufism advances a view of time as a flux of change internal to the life of the soul and leading to moral self-perfection. Finally, my dissertation focuses on alternative Arabic engagements with Sufi writings on time through the works of the Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b.1944),

the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). I argue that these thinkers and writers draw on the heterogeneity of time in Sufism to critique the semantic neutrality and abstraction of modern time which depends on capitalism as a life form.

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Introduction

This dissertation studies the reception of Sufi notions of time in the post 1967-War period, during which Arab intelligentsia took part in a heated debate on the place of Islamic cultural heritage (*al-turāth*) and its "superseded" worldviews in modernity.[1] I explore how Islamic notions of time are approached by a diverse set of Arab thinkers and writers as they reevaluate the ontological concepts of the Neoplatonic tradition of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Chief among these concepts is the articulation of time as a heterogenous mix of sacred and profane temporalities, a fusion of homogenous social time and the temporality of the event. My dissertation debates modernist repudiations of this Islamic discourse on time and focuses on alternative Arab engagements with its critical potential. While addressing the larger landscape of post-1967 Arab thought and literature, this dissertation focuses on the works of the Moroccan thinkers Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2000) and ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b.1944), the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). It puts into conversation these authors' premises on Sufi *turāth,* focusing on the connecting thread of the discursive possibilities and challenges offered by its concepts of time.

In their engagement with Sufi *turāth* and its notions of time, these thinkers advance diverse propositions. The modernist response, exemplified by Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, calls for a permanent break with temporal concepts that stem from the enchanted ontology of the pre-modern. This position considers the endurance of such concepts a product of an Arab atomistic worldview which explains the failure of the Arab self to develop the sensibility of linear progress

[1] In this dissertation, the transliteration of Arabic words follows the convention of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). All technical terms are fully transliterated, while personal names, place name, and titles of books and articles are transliterated without diacritics.

in secular historical time. I argue that this position fails to be critical of normalized conditions of power in modernity which include not only its "homogenous, empty time" but also the exclusivist notion of modern critique as secular critique.[2] As a counter discourse, this dissertation studies philosophical and literary projects which repurpose these Islamic notions of time and adapt their existential, moral, and aesthetic content to their critique of capitalist modernity. These reformulations include Taha Abdulrahman's systematic use of notions of heterogenous time in retheorizing the ethical self in late modernity. They also include Hadi al-ʿAlawi's reinterpretation of Sufi time as a kairotic temporality of social uprise against political power and capital. Finally, these reformulations find their synthesis in the novelistic project of Gamal al-Ghitani who marshals the aesthetic, moral, and political dimension of Sufi concepts of time to negotiate the tragedies of self and of the post-socialist nation in neoliberal times. These alternative readings, I conclude, debunk the notion that Islamic concepts of time represent cultural impediments to the intellectual modernity of Arab thought and demonstrate instead that Arab projects of secular and religious critique can benefit from the Islamic articulation of time as a heterogeneous reality.

The problem-space in which this dissertation locates its contribution is the critique of the post-1967 War (*al-Naksa*) notion of a stagnant cultural progress which is caused by the conjoining of a defective Arab perception of time with the temporality of Islamic enchantment. I use the term "problem-space" in the sense advocated by David Scott as a "discursive context" that contains a host of secondary concepts and motifs, but most importantly as a "context of argument and, therefore, one of intervention… around which a horizon of identifiable stakes

[2] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Henry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 261.

(conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs."[3] The host of key motifs in the discursive context under study include: the ontological concepts of Islamic philosophy and Sufism; their articulations of the heterogenous nature of time; the theory of the atomistic Arab mind; and the notion of Arab cultural progress. The horizon of stakes which animate this debate vary as they comprise, on the one hand, the question of how to overcome Arab cultural failure and connect Arab Islamic thought to a horizon of modern progress and, on the other hand, the question of how to overcome the discourse of failure *itself*, to foster a healthier relationship with Islamic cultural heritage (*turāth*), and repurpose it in modern critique.

I use the terms "Arabic" and "Islamic" in conjoined form (Arabic Islamic). This use requires clarification. Some of the intellectuals that this dissertation surveys often speak in ethnic terms of an Arab perception of time which is influenced by the cultural factor of the Islamic worldview. Others use it in less controversial ways to refer to modern Islamic thought and culture in Arabic speaking countries. I use the designation "Arabic Islamic" not to put an ethnic delimitation on the category of the Islamic, which is irreducibly multiethnic and multilingual, but solely in continuation with the terms used by the modern Arab thinkers and writers as they debate the place of Islamic concepts in modern Arabic cultural production.

To study these Arabic intellectual projects which pertain to diverse trends of Arab psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, and Islamic thought, and to investigate the ways in which they approach pre-modern Islamic writings on time, a set of theoretical questions must first be addressed. These questions include: the relation between postcolonial modernism and the continuity of historical tradition in modernity; the competing conceptualizations of culture and

[3] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

modernity and their relation to the postcolonial discourse of cultural crisis, and, finally, the modern transformations in the semantics of time.

Postcolonial Nationalist Thought and the Question of Modernity

Nationalist thought in the postcolonial world is, Partha Chatterjee argues, committed in terms of the "problematic" of its raison d'être against the hegemony of its old colonial masters.[4] In terms of the "thematics" of its discourse, it largely accepts both the supremacy of Enlightenment reason and the orientalist tropes of the cultural inadequacy of the non-Western subject. During the colonial period and in its aftermath, postcolonial nationalist thought often recognized, or at least implicitly accepted, a visible blueprint for its intellectual modernity. This model is largely the European way of life, socio-political organization, and cultural production. Modernity is the name of a condition that countries of the Global South have yet to achieve through a mimetic process. Postcolonial nationalist thought often internalizes colonial epistemologies and identifies with the "bourgeois-rational conception of universal history."[5] To be in modernity, then, is to catch up with a Western model. To reject modernity is to reject a Western way of life. Both stances share the identification of modernity with the Euro-American experience. It is in this sense that Ashis Nandy speaks of Europe as not only a geopolitical or historical category for the postcolonial subject but, fundamentally, a psychological category, the site of existential fantasies and anxieties.[6]

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[4] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1993).
[5] Chatterjee, 17.
[6] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), 11.

Identifying the path of modernity as the reproduction of a higher model leaves the realm of discourse in the postcolonial world and becomes a material reality. This fetishistic projection which, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argued, has long been proselytized by European historicism and its "stageist" view of universal history, is put into effect in the postcolonial world. [7] It emerges as the dominant answer to the question of how to become modern while postcolonial societies are subjected to rapid and often disruptive modernization processes with the aim of replicating the experiences of Europe.[8]

With this structuralist emulation imposed during colonialism and accelerated in its aftermath, modernity manifests, according to Anthony Giddens, as a stage of history, beginning with the 17th century, which is marked by the globalization of European colonial capital and the hyper networks of connectivity it fostered between different regions of the world.[9] For Giddens, modernity is a gradational global condition in which diverse social realities become increasingly homogenized through their differentiated subordination to the abstract institutions of expert knowledge, finance, and clock time. Modernity is, in the first place, a "juggernaut" of rapid

[7] See Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of evolutionary theories of European historicism from Friedrich Hegel and John Stewart Mill to Karl Marx. These theories situate Asian and African countries in "a waiting room of history" having not yet achieved the necessary transitions to modernity. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9–10.

[8] An illustrative example is Iran of the 1930s. Beginning in 1927, Riza Shah launched a major modernization project that was enforced by the military. The setting up of industrial infrastructure was accomplished through the forced relocation of tribal populations and the abrupt "destruction of pastoral economy." The Uniform Dress Law of 1928 is highly symbolic. Urban populations were mandated under threat of fines and imprisonment to wear European style hats and dress. See Stephanie Cronin, "Reform from Above, Resistance from Below: The New Order and Its Opponents in Iran 1927-29," in *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 71–93.

[9] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1990).

material changes that cause the disembedding of social realities from their localized contexts under global flows of power.[10] These disembedding mechanisms include the concentration of knowledge in expert systems and the governing of social relations through symbolic tokens such as money and data.[11] As Walter Mignolo urges, a decolonial critique of the homogenizing tendencies of capitalist modernity must wrestle with the issue of its disembedding mechanisms and the forms of historical and cultural differences they suppress.[12] However, in certain modernist discourses of postcolonial intelligentsia, it is local culture which is critiqued for its insubordination to the abstract institutions and disembedding mechanisms of global modernity. The ruptures caused by colonial and postcolonial modernization in relation to nature, social systems, and social inequalities are often shaded by the promises of progress. It is rather the cultural worldview of the postcolonial subject which is put on trial to answer for the inevitable crises of capitalist modernity.

Singular Modernity and Defective Cultures

Cultural traditions and worldviews are constantly called upon in the postcolonial world as major sites of contestation between demands of transformation, modernization, and

[10] Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 139.
[11] Giddens, 53.
[12] Critiquing Marx Horkheimer, one of the Frankfurt School's leading critics of capitalist modernity, on this very issue of the suppression of cultural difference, Mignolo writes, "Horkheimer rightly argued that it is not possible to detach the knowing subject from the known object. Thus traditional theory is charged with believing that knowledge can be objective. However, in making this charge Horkheimer still assumed that the knower is a disembodied subject beyond location. His shortcoming was not to question the ego-politics of knowledge that underlines both traditional and critical theory. The problem with Horkheimer's argument is that his subject is a modern subject, deracialized, de-sexualized, gender-neutral, and unaware that such a subject dwells in Europe, better yet, Germany, and not in the City of Singapore, Tehran, or La Paz, where the issues, problems, and knowledge-making have different needs, genealogies of thoughts, affects, and problems." Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xxiv.

transcendence. The question of compatibility with the pre-given modern haunts these discursive sites. If modernity is convergence into a higher model, then the plurality of cultural practices and identities poses a problem.

As a major concept of modern thought, culture has a complex history. Raymond Williams remarks that beginning with the 17th century, the meaning of culture in European usage changed from husbandry as "the tending to something, basically crops or animals" to denoting "a general process of becoming 'civilized.'"[13] In a long historical duration, culture was borrowed from its agricultural context to act as a metaphor for human development becoming with the 18th century an abstract concept and a synonym for civilization. In the 19th century, the meaning of culture shifted to include negative connotations. As Terry Eagleton notes, Enlightenment thought gave culture the implication of "regressive attachments which prevented us from entering upon our citizenship of the world."[14] The rise of imperialist scholarship as well as the later anti-colonial nationalisms gave the notion of culture a global political urgency. Eagleton writes:

> We owe our modern notion of culture in large part to nationalism and colonialism, along with the growth of an anthropology in the service of imperial power. At roughly the same historical point, the emergence of 'mass' culture in the West lent the concept an added urgency… As the pre-modern nation gives way to the modern nation-state, the structure of traditional roles can no longer hold society together, and it is culture, in the sense of a common language, inheritance, educational system, shared values and the like, which steps in as the principle of social unity.[15]

Culture is a key political category for the nascent postcolonial state. Postcolonial intelligentsia often entertain a complex and at times paradoxical relation to their local cultural traditions. As Chatterjee remarks, in the period of anti-colonial mobilization nationalist thought appropriates

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[13] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, New edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50–51.
[14] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 30.
[15] Eagleton, 26.

local culture as its domain of legitimacy, strategy of mobilization, and the source of difference and virtue against the materialism of the West.[16] In later postcolonial phases with their increasing political and economic challenges, postcolonial intelligentsia often revert to the two-fold position of accepting the cultural supremacy of western modernity and decrying the essential anti-modern qualities of local cultural worldviews.

In contemporary usage, the notion of culture includes a range of meanings from differences in religious experiences and social customs to the more problematic ideas of the "programing of the mind" and structures of thought.[17] Against this latter position, Arjun Appudarai encourages scholars to use the adjectival form "cultural" rather than the objectifying noun "culture" in order to mark a relation of difference between peoples.[18] Appudarai's caution is important against essentializing discourses especially of the type that stresses "culture wars" as the global late modern mode of conflict.[19] However, one may object that this caution does not warrant the underplaying of the substantive historical experiences of world cultures which can be

[16] Chatterjee advances a tripartite structure of the historical progress of nationalist thought. In the moment of departure, nationalist thought accepts orientalist tropes of the inferiority of non-western cultures and the imperative of catching up with Enlightenment Europe. The moment of manoeuvre flips the equation. Chatterjee draws on the example of Gandhi who uses Hindu moral and psycho-epistemic concepts to critique the *homo economicus* of Western societies and their materialist worldview. He views this moment of anti-colonial critique which draws on cultural tradition as a mobilization strategy whose historical significance lies in its ability to politicize the colonized peasantry. After the mobilization effect, nationalist thought in the moment of arrival comes back to accept the modularity of Western political and economic institutions. Partha Chatterjee, "The Moment of Maneouvre: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society," in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1993), 85–130.

[17] See Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

[18] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 12.

[19] See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

brought into a critical posture against the hegemonic modern. These substantive moral and epistemological experiences of groups of people united, in their irreducible diversity, by religion and language can be approached in the semiotic sense as "maps of meaning that codify knowledge and present it symbolically."[20] Thus, culture emerges as the fluid network of symbols and narrative patterns, the fusion of multiple traditions of meaning which can be important resources for counteracting the modern conditions of anomie and existential meaninglessness. While cultural traditions admit an amount of consistency regarding their symbolic language and narratives, these elements are not static as they are embedded in social realities affecting and being affected by them.

Yet, in certain trends of postcolonial intelligentsia, there is a strong tendency to treat local culture in the way of fixed entities, stagnant identities, and superseded worldviews that need to be radically modernized—some elements to be transformed and others to be eliminated. While transformation in cultural practices and productions are part of the healthy life of culture, it is the notion of radical rupture between the pre-modern tradition and modern culture which often marks the gulf between postcolonial intelligentsia and their public, disallowing critique a wider social diffusion. Though cultural and religious traditions continue to have prominent social lives and provide anchorage and meaning for multitudes of people, they are often projected by modernizing intelligentsia as cultures in radical crisis. The radical nature of the crisis is not a question of whether certain practices or power dynamics require reformative thinking. Radicality lies in the conviction that the entire worldview of a given cultural system, its ethos, and ontological concepts are inimical to obtaining the proper conditions of modernity. These

[20] Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 186.

concepts are said to have no place in the modern secular and capitalist world which is understood to rest on institutions of politics and economy that must be culture neutral and value free. Cultural norms and ways of orienting life hamper, then, the installment of these institutions. The advocates of this view often quicken to point the blame to the anti-modern nature of cultural worldviews when the mishaps of the running "juggernaut" of capitalist modernity hit home. In the words of Arif Dirlik, this type of discourse emerges as:

> [the] ensemble of intellectual orientations that crystalize methodologically around the reduction of social and historical questions to abstract questions of culture and as responsible, therefore, not only for legitimizing hegemonic relations between societies, but also for mystifying hegemonic relations of exploitations and oppression within societies.[21]

The postcolonial discourses that identify the crisis of modernity as primarily a crisis of local cultural worldviews run the risk of being complicit in mystifying the experience of modernity as formed of colonial and neocolonial material realities. The ruptures caused by these volatile realities become the prism through which a cultural tradition is re-evaluated and is projected against an inevitable crisis.

Cultural notions of time are a key element in this debate about global modernity and the cultural worldview of the local. It is a common theme for both the Western anthropology of high modernism and postcolonial intelligentsia to evoke the difficulties that, say, African, Indian, or Arabic perceptions of time pose to the disenchanted direct access to reality which allegedly secures the proper formation of the modern subject. In the African context for instance, Souleymane Bachir Diagne remarks that in discourses of the so-called Afro-pessimism, "the

[21] Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2018), 26.

ultimate ratio of African Backwardness is to be found in culture, at the heart of this is time."[22] Diagne focuses his critique on the Kenyan philosopher John Mbiti's notion of African time as being event-based, oriented to the past, lacking a sense of futurity, and, as such, disallowing prospective thinking. Instead, Diagne emphasizes the multiple linguistic, social, and eschatological ways of thinking the future in African societies. More fundamental to his critique, Diagne draws on Henri Bergson's notion of "durée" to problematize Mbiti's temporal ideal: the spatialized notion of serial time that is given to the subject from outside in the form of a homogenous space. The ability to see the future, which Mbiti maintains can only be injected into African culture by an external agent (i.e., colonialism), misunderstands the nature of the future as something that is lying in wait, "something to be seen" rather than something emerging *out of and in* the now with radical novelty.[23] Diagne refutes the false problem of African time by redirecting the critical gaze to the modern notion of time as serial linear progress.

I take my cue from Diagne's argumentation in attempting a similar questioning in the parallel context of postcolonial Arab thought. My dissertation explores the limitations of modernist Arabic discourses that problematize Islamic concepts of time as inconducive to the modernity of Arab thought and its cultural production. It debates the value of these articulations of time as a heterogenous reality consisting of multiple cycles and *kinds* of temporality which are linked to the moral experience of the subject and their ability to contribute to intellectual projects that are committed to a critique of capitalist modernity. This dissertation then surveys how what is declared to be a defunct worldview and imaginary of time can, with alternative hermeneutics, produce tools of critique. It asks the following set of questions and attempts to answer them

[22] Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa* (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2016), 37.
[23] Diagne, 45.

through putting into conversation a number of post-1967 War Arab intellectual and literary projects. Do notions of time that are available in a historical cultural repertoire represent impediments to the modernity of thought when they are not limited by the modern standard of "homogenous, empty time"? Do cultural discourses that present rich semantics of time need to be eliminated to produce the sensibility of linear progress? To answer these questions, one has to further clarify a set of key considerations that include the nature of the modern and the shifts in the concept of time in the modern period. Charles Taylor offers a helpful set of conceptual terms to reflect on these questions within the broader issue of competing notions of modernity.

Cultural and Acultural Accounts of Modernity and the Issue of Time Concepts

In addressing the theories of global modernity, Charles Taylor speaks of cultural and acultural accounts.[24] For Taylor, the cultural account defines modernity as the rise of a new culture within context-specific historical circumstances allowing, as such, for variety in geographical contexts and the possibility of "multiple modernities." Most importantly, the cultural account embraces a pluralistic understanding of what constitutes the modern, accepting the coexistence of multiple concepts of the subject, of rationality, and of the good that are informed by the historical trajectories of various cultures. In the logic of the cultural account:

> Transitions to what we might recognize as modernity, taking place in different civilizations, will produce different results that reflect their divergent starting points. Different cultures' understandings of the person, social relations, states of mind, goods and bads, virtues and vices, and the sacred and the profane are likely to be distinct. The future of our world will be one in which all societies will undergo change, in institutions and outlook, and some of these changes may be parallel, but they will not converge, because new differences will emerge from the old.[25]

[24] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 153–74.
[25] Taylor, 162.

The cultural theory of modernity recognizes difference in historical experiences that produce diversified outcomes to the most uniform types of structural transformations.

The acultural account, on the other hand, defines modernity as the undertaking of an allegedly "culture-neutral" set of transformations "belonging to one Enlightenment package."[26] This package includes the separation between fact and value, the ascendance of instrumental rationality, the permeation of techno-scientific culture, the rise of a rational and disciplined public sphere, and the free market. These changes are said to push every culture to shed its traditional garb and converge to a universal culture of the modern. Taylor writes:

> The acultural theory tends to see the process of modernity as involving among other things the shucking off of beliefs and ways which don't have much rational justification, leaving us with an outlook many of whose elements can be seen more as hard, residual facts: that we are individuals—that is, beings whose behavior is ultimately to be explained as individuals—living in a profane time, who have to extract what we need to live from nature and whom it behooves therefore to be maximally instrumentally rational, without allowing ourselves to be diverted from this goal by the metaphysical and religious beliefs that held our ancestors back. Instrumental rationality commands a scientific attitude to nature and human life.[27]

In assessing the path of world cultures to a proper experience of modernity, the acultural theory seems at first to advocate autonomy as it does not speak the language of acculturation by a superior model. It speaks the language of an internal development and progress through a universal set of stages. This is, however, only a surface appearance.

Charles Taylor remarks that the acultural theory of modernity is both violent and deceptive. It is violent in that it rejects plurality as it treats cultural differences in a given sphere of the modern as arrested development. The path to modernity is equated with "the demise of traditional society and the rise of the modern."[28] This modern is defined as direct disenchanted

[26] Taylor, 160.
[27] Taylor, 170.
[28] Taylor, 153.

access to a universal reality organized around objective principles and freed from the specificities of local culture (interpreted as impediments). This path bears, in reality, an original cultural imprint. As Taylor notes regarding the implicit logic of the acultural theory, "The march of modernity will end up making all cultures look the same. This means, of course, that we expect they will end up looking Western."[29] This view, then, approaches modernity as a twofold process: with the loss of cultural difference comes the fusion into a uniform modern culture premised on an objective relationship to the world.

The deception of the acultural account lies, Taylor argues, in its preferred language of objectivity and direct access to a bare reality. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor describes the modus operandi of the acultural theory as "subtraction stories."[30] These he defines as "stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge."[31] As Taylor notes, subtraction stories mystify more than they reveal about the experience of modernity. This is so because they present modernity as the crystallization of "underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside."[32] This assertion, however, obfuscates the reality of modernity as the cumulative effects of *new constructs of the self* and *new material reconstructions of the world.* The acultural theory, then, gives a ready answer on how to become modern: every major element of human existence loses the cultural lore that accumulated in its historical experience and conforms to a bare objective reality. This bare reality which is

[29] Taylor, 161.
[30] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.
[31] Taylor, 22.
[32] Taylor, 22.

allegedly disentangled from culture is however a construct born out of material historical circumstances, cultural shifts, and consensus paradigms.

Furthermore, the acultural theory views the modernity of thought as the process of shedding pre-modern cultural concepts and worldviews that stem from ontologies of enchantment. It is the process of achieving a permanent differentiation between the domains of knowledge separating the social and the economic, the religious and the philosophical, the aesthetic and the moral, the sacred and the profane. Differentiation and the reduction of complexity to a homogenous norm applies prominently to the notion of time in modernist discourse.

Time serves well to reflect on how cultural and acultural theories define the modernity of a certain cultural expression. The acultural account advocates the elimination of notions of time which are projected as relics from pre-modernity, as distorting concepts that block the formation of the modern sensibility of linear progress in secular historical time. It holds local culture responsible for defective notions of time that are unfit for the modern world. Cultural accounts of modernity, on the other hand, acknowledge the experience of temporal being as a fundamentally heterogenous and differentiated reality. They view these notions of heterogenous time as important moral, philosophical, and aesthetic resources for critiquing the conditions of capitalist modernity and its abstraction mechanisms.

Subtraction Stories, Homogenous Time, and Heterogeneity as Critique

Exploring the conceptual differences between pre-modern and modern notions of time reveals a shift from semantic polyvalence to semantic neutrality and abstraction. It also exposes the modern standard of time, the empty homogenous medium, to be a construct of material

changes that depend on the "progress of capitalism as a form of life."[33] With these modern processes in place, time gains in quantitative precision but its semantics are eroded. Its neutrality, Elizabeth Ermath remarks, becomes "the particularly modern (i.e., post-medieval) construction of temporality."[34] Modernity is in the Kantian sense the condition of the production of independent, mature, and self-reflective subjectivities.[35] It is also in the Weberian sense the condition of the production of a highly mechanistic world in which these subjectivities become trapped.[36] In engaging the semantics of temporal heterogeneity, postcolonial thought and literature secures a critical stance against normalized conditions of modern power. Rather than being obstacles to a direct access to reality, discourses of heterogenous time, as this dissertation argues, provide rich hermeneutical horizons for postcolonial thought while maintaining the possibility of imagining social relations beyond the economic logic of capitalist governmentality.

Pre-modern time, as Johannes Fabian remarks, served the double function of chronology and chronicle since it was not "a variable independent of the events it marks."[37] The pre-modern sense of time was fundamentally heterogenous. Time was primarily relational at all levels of its

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[33] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 213.
[34] Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, "Ph(r)ase Time: Chaos Theory and Postmodern Reports on Knowledge," *Time & Society* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 93.
[35] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58–65.
[36] Max Weber links the modern project to Protestant theologies which allowed for the socialization of calculative rationality and its extensions to all spheres of life. For Weber, the Reformation shifted the core of the European religious experience from being organized around the structure of the church to the privacy of the individual, their spiritual asceticism coupled with an emphasis on worldly productivity. The subsequent rationalization of economic activity and social relations constitutes the hallmark of the modern as well as the force that pushes all forms of life in modernity towards a bureaucratic "iron cage." See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2001).
[37] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 13.

articulation as it was tied to multiple temporalities of natural cycles, sociocultural world-making, and the eternity of the divine. Whether in subjective experience or social ritual, these ties influenced the lived sense of time. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor writes:

> In the pre-modern era, the organizing field for ordinary time came from what I want to call higher times. The most obvious term to introduce here would be 'eternity.' And that isn't wrong, because it is the philosophically and theologically consecrated term for higher time. But I need the more general term, because (a) there was more than one kind of eternity, and (b) these didn't exhaust the higher times. What did higher times do? One might say, they gathered, assembled, reordered, punctuated profane, ordinary time.[38]

Pre-modern higher times, for Taylor, included the eternity of God, the utopic "time of origin" of folkloric traditions, and the suspended times of carnivalesque anti-normative events. These higher times punctuated lived temporality thus reinforcing its two major dimensions: the internal life of the individual and the cultural web of meaning that sustains social time.

Capitalist modernity imposes on the philosophical notion and lived quality of time a simultaneous process of abstraction and commodification. Anthony Giddens argues that one of the earliest disembedding mechanisms of modernity in its global expansion is the delinking between time and space or what he called "time-space distanciation."[39] In the form of abstract clock time, the temporal submits to economic structures which regiment social life under the imperative of linear accumulation. It is both abstracted and commodified as it becomes an economic variable, bought and sold through the act of production and its aftermath in consumption. Barbara Adams describes this process:

> Time is decontextualized, asituational abstract exchange value that allows work to be translated into money. Since, however, money is a quantifiable medium, the time that features in this exchange has to be of a quantitative kind as well: not the variable time of seasons, ageing, growth and decay, joy and pain, but the invariable, abstract time of the clock where one hour is the same irrespective of context and emotion. Only the quantitative, divisible time of the clock is translatable into money. Only this

[38] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 54.
[39] Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 21.

> decontextualized time can serve as an abstract exchange value and this be traded as a commodity on the labour market.[40]

The dominant form of time in modernity emerges as an abstract institution propelling production beyond geographical limits or social needs. Expanding gradually with the construction of railway networks in the Euro-American world beginning in the mid-19th century, this temporal order became established as the optimal norm of modern being.[41] Its uniformity which organizes social life reduces the relation between temporality and meaning to the minimum of time as measurement.

While abstract mathematical time has positive social effects in relation to organization and order, its fundamental link to the regimentation of alienated production makes it often an oppressive element of human life. One can make the argument that no one in modernity truly lives the capitalist form of time as an *exclusive* temporal reality. This is true but conceptually and in terms of the language of modernist discourse, *other* forms of articulating temporality are not given legitimate discursive merit in comparison with the empty homogenous medium which is normative in modernist thinking. While people still live different experiences of temporality, the modern articulation of the meaning of time is dominated by the notion of an abstract organizational and economic variable, i.e., the iconic "time is money."

The semantic reduction of time to an empty and homogenous element of being underwent different stages in modernity. As Armin Nassehi notes, time in the discourse of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment still retained a gradually secularized messianic sense of a glorified medium that drives history into further stages of perfection. In late modernity, "time is

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[40] Barbara Adam, *Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 38.
[41] Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 127.

understood as calculable abstract medium. It merely provides the rhythm for multiple subsystem processes and becomes indifferent to what happens during its course. In the end there is nothing one can expect from time any more except that it will pass."[42] Homogeneity and linearity are fundamental terms of this late modern notion. These qualities reduce time to a single serial horizon, flattening the dimensions of past, present, and future into a unidirectional causal sequence. This horizon is intolerant of other articulations of time especially those derived from the realm of enchantment with their typical resistance to linearity, homogeneity, and semantic neutrality. In its dominant acultural variety, modernist discourse considers these articulations to be residues of superseded worldviews which impede modern critical thought. Only with their systematic repudiation can the lived and conceptual notion of time conform to the required norm of linear progress. However, with the radical political events of the 20th century and the systematic devastation of the natural environment, this norm emerges more as a destructive obsession of modernist discourse rather than its heroic outlook on the world.

Walter Benjamin is often credited with the description of the time of modernity as "homogenous, empty time."[43] For Benjamin, this semantically neutral and thus empty medium marks the unfolding of the history of the dominant as it suppresses the temporalities of the defeated. It is the march of the "trinity of capital, nation, and state" which gives it ontological supremacy and discursive legitimacy.[44] In turn, this medium serves to normalize the march's violent effects against the subaltern, the colonized, and the non-human as past and present tragedies are written off by the promises of the open future. Reflecting on temporal heterogeneity

[42] Armin Nassehi, "No Time for Utopia: The Absence of Utopian Contents in Modern Concepts of Time," *Time & Society* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1994): 57.
[43] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.
[44] Kōjin Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 14.

is then key to rekindling the semantics of time. Benjamin viewed the role of the historian as the retriever of the heterogenous temporalities of silenced historical moments which await their recognition in the present of political action.[45] This present is no longer a furtive "transition" to a determined future, it is a reality "in which time stands still and has come to a stop."[46] It is a present of overlapping heterogenous temporalities of contemporaneity, actualized and suppressed future pasts, and willed futures.

For Walter Benjamin, the heterogeneity of the present manifests most visibly in moments of uprising and catastrophe that are shot through with multiple temporalities of tragedy, suppression, hope, and redemption. He writes:

> A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.[47]

Modern critical theory, as in the case of Benjamin and others, intervenes against the linearity of historicism and high modernism. It emphasizes the existential meaning of time which is already a mix of profane and higher temporalities. Rather than reducing the issue of cultural expressions of time to a politics of representation which proceeds to affirm the equality in the understanding

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[45] Benjamin conceived of the historian as a witness to the complex temporalities of lived events as they recapitulate the tragedies of the downtrodden that were ignored by historicist progressive narratives. Reformed historical materialism is attuned to the tragic histories and messianic hopes which are encapsulated in historical "nows." Referring to the now of the French Revolution, he writes, "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself… History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous or empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate." Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.

[46] Benjamin, 262.

[47] Benjamin, 263.

time as an empty homogenous medium, postcolonial thinkers can do well to draw on the semantically rich notions of heterogenous time that exist in their cultural traditions in order to form a critique of the temporality of late modernity.

In the Western context in which critique abides largely by the standards of secular discourse, temporal heterogeneity is sourced in a postmodernist fashion from language games and aesthetic subversion. Postmodernism rejects the modernist imagination of time as a progressive duration and, instead, focuses on the temporally fragmented and diffracted. It celebrates the multiplicity of the now instead of the teleological temporality of high modernism. David Harvey notes that postmodernism is marked by "the collapse of time horizons and the preoccupation with instantaneity."[48] However, as a Marxist critic, Harvey quickens to remark that the occupation with the transient and the momentary in the postmodern aesthetic is a "logical extension" of the market dynamics of consumerist fads and ever-shifting commodity value.[49] Guarding against such cooptation, postcolonial thought can engage the imaginaries of temporal heterogeneity that is available in their religious and cultural traditions. These concepts can inspire the critical posture of postcolonial thought in regards to modern and capitalism-based imaginaries of time in continuation with the historical identities and lived social experiences of postcolonial societies. Furthermore, in these non-Western spheres of culture, the moral and the aesthetic have not achieved a permanent rupture and emerge often as co-dependent in producing articulations of difference and opportunities for critique. Concepts of heterogenous time emerge,

[48] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 59.
[49] Harvey, 62. See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

then, as simultaneously moral and aesthetic signifiers beckoning for discursive recognition and productive engagement.

Chapter Outline

The first two chapters of this dissertation draw the historical and conceptual map of postcolonial Arab thought in its response to political crisis and its assessments of the place of Islamic cultural heritage in modernity. In so doing, the chapters focus on discussions of Arabic Islamic articulations of time.

Chapter One contextualizes the emergence of the post-1967 War (*al-Naksa*) paradigm of Arab thought, its development into a phase of Arab self-critique, and the accomplishments and limitations of these developments. The chapter first surveys leftist critique of Arab politics and society. It then attends to culturalist positions which advocate the view of an Arab cultural failure in modernity. Within this culturalist trend, the chapter studies the notion of the deficient Arab perception of time which is marked by discontinuity and heterogeneity. I analyze how this discourse operates through an evolutionary framework that translates articulations of difference into symptoms of failure. I argue that the claim of an Arab discontinuous sense of time lacks an empirical base of evidence. It primarily derives from the tendency of modernist thought to impose its *discursive ideal* of linear homogenous time on organic expressions of lived temporality which is per force heterogenous. I also introduce the culturalist argument that the time of Islamic enchantment impedes the proper realization of the time of history in modern Arab thought. This position, as Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, concludes in a reductive repudiation of key Islamic philosophical traditions, mainly philosophical Sufism, as expressions of a timeless ontology and as relics of premodern enchanted worldviews. These traditions are

then said to be not only useless for but also inimical to the development of modern thought and of modern critique in the Arabic cultural sphere.

Chapter Two addresses the emergence of post-*Naksa* studies of Islamic cultural heritage (*al-turāth*), an important field in which the question of Islamic time concepts is raised through the legacy of philosophical Sufism. This chapter introduces the key figures of the subsequent case studies and explores their analyses of the relation between cultural heritage and the modernity of cultural production through the politics of time. The chapter sketches a map of twentieth century Arab engagements with the legacy of the Sufi philosophical tradition within projects of producing Arabic translations of and elaborations on modern schools of thought that include psychoanalysis, existentialism, and literary postmodernism. In focusing on post-*Naksa* thinkers, I distinguish between two major trends of critical attitudes towards Sufi thought. I, first, survey the approach of Arab Marxists by studying the *turāth* works of Tayyib Tizzini (1934-2019), Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987), and Mahdi ʿAmel (1936-1987). These thinkers engage the Sufi tradition as the subservice temporality of non-institutional popular religiosity whose concepts are key to establishing parallels between the Marxist ethic and certain strands in Islamic philosophy. I, then, engage the stance of Arab rationalists by focusing on the thought of Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021) and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (1905-1993) who argue that Sufi thought represents the decay of the rational impulses in Islamic civilization. For the intellectuals of this second trend, the cultural temporality of Sufi thought is then one of reactionary anachronism and regressive enchantment. The repudiation of this tradition represents, then, the primary condition of a modern critique in the Arabic Islamic intellectual sphere.

The aim of the first two chapters of this dissertation is to draw the general contours of the "problem-space" of Arabic time and the place of the Islamic concepts of time in modern Arabic

cultural production. The unpacking of the arguments which animate this problem-space is conducted in the following chapters through a close reading of a set of intellectual projects, their premises and reformulations of the Sufi tradition and its temporal concepts. While the later chapters study competing understandings of the place of Sufi time and its existential message in an Arabic intellectual modernity, they are not only expository. They also stage an intervention which opposes the modernist reductive reading of the value of this Islamic tradition of thinking temporality.

The third chapter of this dissertation studies the structuralist thought of the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010). It analyses his arguments regarding the epistemological experience of "Arab reason" and his repudiation of the cultural effects of the heterogenous temporalities of the Neoplatonic tradition of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. In this chapter, I argue that the evolutionary framework in al-Jabri's thought reduces difference into cultural deficiency specifically by translating the pre-modern articulations of heterogenous time (the mix between sacred and profane temporalities, internal and external experiences of time) into expressions of the lack of concern for the value of temporal dynamism in human existence. I draw on the French philosopher Henri Bergson notion of ""*durée*" (duration) to problematize al-Jabri discursive ideal of linear homogenous time which projects onto temporality the attributes of space. Al-Jabri focuses on Sufi discourse which, for him, reflects the worldview of a defective Islamic imagination defined by an atomistic outlook on the world. In prioritizing the circumscribed present temporality of the subject, Sufi discourse, then, is unable to grasp the reality of the temporal as an independent linear and progressive flow. Examining the thought of the Andalusian Ibn ʿArabi (d. 638/1240), al-Jabri charges that the Sufi existential attitude leads to the devaluation of the meaning of temporality and its significance to selfhood. This existential attitude constitutes a nihilist ethic in which the self retreats from constructive

social being into timeless spirituality. The cultural historical function of this discourse has been to remove the element of time from the Islamic ontology. As a continuing tradition of philosophical texts and devotional practices, the Sufi tradition represents an existential and epistemological obstacle that fetters modern Arabic Islamic thought. Its systematic repudiation, then, is the cornerstone of emancipative critique in the Arabic Islamic cultural sphere.

I intervene against al-Jabri's reading of Sufi time in two ways. In the Forth Chapter, I present my counter reading of the moral and social value of these pre-modern discourses on temporality. I study the Sufi view of time as a heterogenous reality which is dependent on human perception and moral experience. My aim is to demonstrate how, within the pre-modern Arabic cultural expression, this discourse contributes tremendously to the valuation of temporality in the life of the human being. In my Fifth and final chapter, I turn to the study of modern Arabic projects which instrumentalize the heterogeneity of Sufi time in a decolonial critique of modernity.

The Fourth Chapter reads the Sufi discourse on time against the grain al-Jabri's premises. It focuses on the poetics of time in the thought of the Andalusian Ibn ʿArabi (d. 638/1240) as well as the tradition of writing the moment (*al-waqt*) in the canonical Sufi works of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 377/988), Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 379/990), and Abu Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 464/1072). For al-Jabri, Ibn ʿArabi's writings on time serves as the limit case of timeless enchantment, i.e., the readiest and most prominent example of the Sufi heterogenous and event-based notion of time. While I explore the embeddedness of this imaginary in other duration-based concepts of time (the notion of *al-dahr*), my primary aim is to demonstrate how a discourse that begins by stating that time has no independent reality contributes rich philosophical insights on the existential and moral significance of time to

selfhood. I argue against the qualification that the Sufi approach to time leads to the negation of the value of the temporal in human existence. Rather, I demonstrate that this discourse shifts the meaning of time in Arabic cultural expression from an external corrosive force (the notion of *al-dahr*) to an internal condition of moral evolution. Drawing on the later works of Michel Foucault, I argue that the Sufi attitude of minding time through the watchfulness over the present moment represents a moral technology of the self in which the elements of temporal flux and change are recognized and in which a moral bond between the self and society is affirmed. This chapter aims, then, to problematize al-Jabri's reading of the Sufi time and reveal alternative regimes of value that his arguments elide.

Chapters Five address alternative Arab engagements with Sufi notions of heterogenous time as resources for intellectual and literary critiques of the conditions of late modernity. I analyze the projects of the Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944), the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). The focus in this final chapter is less on exploring their counter analytical claims on the value of Sufi concepts of heterogenous time. Rather I am interested in the ways in which they incorporate these concepts into their own critiques of modern forms of political domination. ʿAbdurrahman Taha engages Sufi ontological concepts in an effort to theorize anew the Ethical subject in Islam. He appropriates the Sufi notion of the moment as a model ontological frame for the renewed convergence of the transcendental and the historical in the socially-oriented ethical act of the Muslim subject. The Marxist intellectual Hadi al-ʿAlawi excavates the social history of Sufism and its critique of political power and wealth. He redefines the moment of Sufism as the transformative temporality of social uprise against political and economic elites. Finally, the Egyptian writer Gamal al-Ghitani makes recourse to Sufi temporal concepts to negotiate personal loss and the state of the postcolonial nation in neoliberal times. In his writing, the Sufi imaginary

of time is narratively appropriated to mediate a process of personal healing, of producing a national elegy, and of problematizing the temporal logic of the neoliberal state. In this concluding chapter, I study how these Arab thinkers and writers repurpose Sufi writings on the present moment as a discourse of kairotic temporality which, in its exceptionality and transformative prowess, is able to unite time and subjectivity in inspiring ethical, political, and literary acts of resistance.

The conclusion of this dissertation emphasizes how these alternative engagements with Sufi temporalities challenge the reductive view that the Islamic discourse of heterogenous time is antithetical to the modernity of Arab thought and its philosophical and aesthetic projects. As Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks, while homogenous empty time is inescapable as one of "the modern instruments of governmentality," it is the job of critical thought to engage constructively with the traces of temporal heterogeneity that preceded the abstract machine of modern time.[50] My dissertation subscribes to this effort by engaging Arab debates on the value of Sufi time in postcolonial Arabic cultural production.

[50] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Time of History and the Times of Gods," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 31.

Chapter 1: On "Duration Disorder": Post-*Naksa* Critiques of Arab Time

This chapter surveys the wave of Arab self-critique in the post-1967 War period (*al-Naksa*). It studies the emergence of the discourse of Arab cultural failure in modernity, its historical roots, and its cultural, sociological, and psychological arguments. After contextualizing the establishment of this discursive site, the chapter focuses on the "problem-space" within it of Arabic Islamic notions of time and their effects on Arab historical consciousness and cultural progress. This chapter serves to draw the general contours of the postcolonial Arabic discussion of Islamic perceptions and conceptions of time. It also advances a preliminary critique of the evolutionary framework which animates this discussion. This critique will be further developed in the third chapter that focuses on the intellectual project of the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010), his analysis of the epistemological history of "Arab reason," and his critique of Islamic concepts of heterogeneous time.

1.1 *Al-Naksa*: Prominent Critiques and Culturalist Answers

The postcolonial period in the Arab world can be broadly divided into an initial phase of decolonial struggles and limited pan-Arab experiments and a second phase which extends into the contemporary of neoliberal readjustments and political fragmentation. The threshold between the two periods is the *Naksa*, the June War of 1967 against Israel. The Palestinian scholar Issa Boullatta described the event as "the acid test of Arab modernization."[51] The *Naksa,* which sealed the fate of the pan-Arab socialist project spearheaded by Nasserite Egypt, accelerated the

[51] Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1.

closing of an important decolonial phase and the realignment of the region with Western capitalism.[52] Fadi Bardawil argues that the *Naksa* paradigm of Arab thought became fully established in the 1980s after "militant intellectuals lost their political organizational moorings and their hope in the revolutionary masses to become detached, isolated critics."[53] However, the immediate reception of large sections of the Arab intelligentsia was mediated through a paradigm of crisis that was to intensify, as Bardawil noted, in the following decades of Arab self-critique (*al-naqd al-dhātī*).

In his characterization of the *Naksa*, Issa Boullatta's use of "modernization" rather than "modernity" is significant as it approached the crisis in terms of developmentalist nation-states and their geopolitical contexts. It also invoked the role of economic and political elites who, as Edward Said remarked, would consolidate in the following decades of liberalization into an "Arab right wing" marked by a "combination of arrivisme with commercial rapacity and national irresponsibility."[54] However, a good number of Arab intellectuals described the crisis in broad cultural terms. In his famous poem "*Hawamish ʿala Daftar al-Naksa*" (Marginal Notes on the Book of Defeat), published two months after the War in the Lebanese journal *al-Adab*, the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998) wrote:

خُلاصَة القَضِيَة
تُوجَز في عِبارَة
لَقَد لَبَسنا قِشرَة الحَضارَة

[52] On the details of this shift in Arab political history, the complicity of Arab political classes, and the case of subsequent conversions of a number of Arab thinkers from Marxist and nationalist positions to liberal and Islamist discourses, see Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', "The Scope and Limitation of Post-1967 Arab Thought," in *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (Sterling: Pluto Press, 2004), 43–62.
[53] Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 84.
[54] Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 227.

والرُوحُ جاهِلية

The heart of the matter
can be said in one sentence:
we donned the husk of civilization
and our spirit remained *Jahili* [pre-Islamic/barbaric].[55]

While it is of the nature of poetry to be hyperbolic, this quality, however, undermines the plausibility of analytical writing. The post-*Naksa* intellectual scene included valuable critiques of the state of affairs in Arab societies as well as counter-productive hyperboles presented by their authors as diagnostic findings.

After the War, Arab intelligentsia largely shifted in their analysis to a self-reflective mode of discourse. This shift produced important critiques of concrete social and political institutions such as patriarchy and censorship. The Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifa (b. 1941) recollected that her commitment to the literary excavation of the experiences of women in resisting occupation and male dominance is a product of *Naksa* consciousness.[56] Leftist intellectuals such as the Lebanese Mahdi ʿAmel (1936-1987) and the Egyptian Samir Amin (1931-2018) analyzed the aggravation of wealth inequalities in Arab societies nationally and regionally with the rise to political dominance of the rentier state of oil monarchies and the consolidation of the military state. In a 1974 publication, ʿAmel critiqued the Arab bourgeoisie's lack of concern for non-comprador developmentalism.[57] Commenting on the Kuwait conference which was held earlier that year under the title of "The Crisis of Arab Civilizational Development," ʿAmel warned against Arab elites' attempts to disavow their historical mistakes

[55] Nizar Qabbani, "Hawamish ʿala Daftar al-Naksa," *al-Adab* 15, no. 7–8 (August 1967): 2.
[56] Sahar Khalifa, "Tajribati maʿa Naksat 67 Ayqazat Waʿyi al-Niswi," *al-Shariqa al-Thaqafiyya* 1, no. 1 (November 2016): 98–99.
[57] See Mahdi ʿAmel, *Azmat al-Hadara al-ʿArabiyya am Azmat al-Burjwaziyyat al-ʿArabiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1987).

through culture talk. Samir Amin maintained the focus of leftist critique on structural issues. He treated "the crisis of Arab society" through the de-essentializing lens of peripheral integration into global capitalism and suggested economic delinking (*fak al-rawābiṭ*) from this peripheral position by recommitting to the developmental possibilities of regional coordination.[58] These positions opposed the facile attempt to explain the events of the period through categories of subjectivity (individual and cultural). They echoed the earlier views of another Lebanese Marxist. In the afore-mentioned 1967 issue of *al-Adab*, Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987) had warned against the nihilism of certain voices who projected the crisis as that of "the Arab person [who] lives in backwardness and enslavement *outside of the bounds of time*… who is backward in his mind, spirit, imagination, soul, and body."[59] In disregard for Muruwwa's plea, many Arab intellectuals spoke of the perennial defects of the Arab Muslim personality.

The period of self-critique included culturalist answers that were centered on psychologized notions of Arab backwardness (*takhalluf*) linked to the transhistorical effects of an anti-modern Arabic Islamic culture. Thinkers such as the Syrian Sadiq Jalal al-ʿAzm (1934-2016), the Saudi Arabian Abdullah al-Qasemi (1907-1996), and literary figures such as the Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930) spoke of the defective condition of Arabic Islamic culture which for reasons of its irrationality (*lāʿaqlāniyya*), atavism (*māḍawiyya*), and rhetoricity (*bayāniyya*) is unable to produce a proper modern subject. Al-ʿAzm spoke of the Arab mythical mentality and the sociological consolidation of Arab personality as being of the *fahlawi* type which invests the least effort to perform a given task and compensates with social cunning.[60] Al-Qasemi

[58] Samir Amin, *Azmat al-Mujtamaʿ al-ʿArabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi, 1985), 29–37.
[59] Husayn Muruwwa, "Tariquna ila Taghyir al-Insan al-ʿArabi," *al-Adab* 15, no. 8 (1967): 34. Emphasis own.
[60] Sadiq Jalal al-ʿ Azm, *al-Naqd al-Dhati baʿd al-Hazima* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 1968), 69–91.

emphasized the subordination of the Arab mind to linguistic performance which overpowers its sense of objective factuality.[61] In the same *al-Adab* 1967 issue, Adonis lamented the Arab "whose inner personality remains just as it was fifteen centuries ago. As if he were a historical artifact from the fifth century clothed in the shape of a human being."[62] The idea of a timeless subjectivity which is unaffected by the progress of history became a central trope in this cultural critique.

1.2 Cultural Critique: Engaging Ideology and Literary Expression

Pursuing cultural criticism by focusing on intellectual trends is different from establishing cognitive and psychological links between subjectivity and culture. Abdallah Laroui's *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine* (Contemporary Arab Ideology) is an illustrative example of the difference.[63] Published in 1967, the study analyzes specific intellectual types who reflect dominant Arab answers to the question of colonial modernity and the meaning of history. Instead of directing the critique to a transhistorical cultural subjectivity, the Moroccan scholar investigates the limitations of circumscribed ideologies and how they influence literary expression.

Laroui speaks of three archetypal figures of Arab modernity. The first is that of the scholar of religion, exemplified by sheikh Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905), who understands the struggle of modernity as the intensification of an age-old assault of Christianity against Islam. He labors to restore an Islam which is purified from popular superstitious practice and is

[61] Abdallah al-Qassimi, *Al-ʿArab Zahira Sawtiyya* (Beirut; Baghdad: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2006).
[62] Ali Ahmad (Adonis) Said, "Bayan Khamsa Huzayran 1967," *al-Adab* 15, no. 8 (1967): 8.
[63] Abdallah Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine: essai critique* (Paris: Maspero, 1967). All Translations from French are my own.

based on a direct access to the Quranic text. For the Sheikh, the onslaught of modernity requires a reform that is also a restoration of an original Islamic message which is compatible with the rationalist spirit of the age. History, for the sheikh, however, must be salvaged from historical accumulation, especially that of the supposed "age of decline" beginning with the 13th century. Historical authenticity, then, does not square well with historical continuum. For the second figure, the liberal political leader, exemplified by Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayyed (1872-1963), the problem of Arabic Islamic modernity is that of the various forms of oriental despotisms. Largely, it is Ottoman rule which is to blame for the decline of Arab societies. The question of modernity is one of modernizing political institutions, of constitutional and legal reforms, and an efficient parliament to guard against despotism. Inversely, Islamic history is reinterpreted through the lens of ethnocentric chauvinism: pure Arab Islam is defined as "tolerant and victorious"; it "changes nature and devolves" under Turkish corruptive influence.[64] History, then, serves to inform a negative theology of modernity. It is instructive on the nature of tyranny and what does not qualify as modern. The third figure is that of the technophile as illustrated by Salama Musa (1887-1958). In Musa's opinion, the power of the West is not due to "religion without superstition or a state without despotism."[65] It is as materialist power defined by technological mastery and science which must be emulated. The technophile rejects as irrelevant the question of reforming the Islamic tradition and often accepts political authoritarianism (i.e., stability) as a condition conducive to technical and economic progress.[66] In this position, the details of history dissolve before the universal call of technology. The ideological neutrality of the technocrat diminishes the element of history in his discourse.

[64] Laroui, 24.
[65] Laroui, 26.
[66] Laroui, 27.

Laroui's analysis of these archetypal figures treats them as the concretization of ideological trends against a well-defined historical problem of colonialism, reform, and the establishment of the nation-state. Instead of cultural essence materializing into a transhistorical personality, Laroui explores how ideologies, materialized in intellectual and social practices, effect change in cultural production. Focusing on the Egyptian example, Laroui surveys how Arabic literary expression of the last century progressed through the temporalities of the sheikh, the liberal thinker, and the technocrat. The early twentieth century trend of neo-classical literature animated by the poetry of Ahmed Shawqi (1870-1932) and the historical fiction of Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) reflects the sheikh's temporality in their quest for historical authenticity through selective revival.[67] The mid-century phase of the sentimental romanticism of the Arab novel of the likes of ʿAbbas al-ʿAqqad (1889-1964) and Taha Hussein (1889-1973) convey the liberal emphasis on deliverance from social conventions and the confines of history. The third phase of social realism, perfected by Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) and Yusuf Idriss (1927-1991), is in tune with the modernizing mission of the postcolonial state and the positivist creed of the technophile. Laroui also spoke of changes in the literary expression of the late 1960s but was yet unable to determine their full nature.

Regarding the literature of the late 1960s, Laroui arguably misidentified a shift that was to crystalize in the decades to come as Arabic literature reflected the wave of self-critique through creative form and nuanced content. He described this literary mood as the return of the "sentimental stage" in Arabic literature.[68] This is largely in reference to how literary expression of the 1960s presented, Sabry Hafez theorized, characters who were alienated outcasts instead of

[67] Laroui, 181.
[68] Laroui, 182.

the socialite and patriotic figures of the 1940s and 1950s, nationalist heroes who critiqued society and were committed to "the task of transforming external reality."[69] The return of sentimentalism was, instead, a shift in post-*Naksa* literary production towards increasing engagement with the *complexity* of subjectivities that were experiencing the disruptions of the period, resisting state repression and social and economic hierarchies. Stylistically, the 1960s has been a period of gradual break with realism and the rise of hybrid forms and registers.[70] Hybridity became a dominant feature of the post-1967 literary writing in which Islamic history and Arab contemporaneity were brought into mutual interrogation through allegorical and surreal images.[71] One such image of the period was deployed by the novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). In his first 1969 collection of short stories "*Awraq Shabʿ Asha mundhu Alfiʿ Am* (The Notes of a Young Man Who Lived One Thousand Years Ago), he conjured the Mamluk historian Ibn Iyas (d. 1529) to chronicle post-war Cairo. Against the essentialist image of Arab timelessness, Ghitani's historian reflected Khaldunian notions of the cyclicality of history and

[69] Sabry Hafez, "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 7, no. 1 (1976): 71.

[70] As an illustrative example, Sabry Hafez remarks that Naguib Mahfouz stopped writing for seven years after he completed his realist trilogy in 1952, "when he resumed writing, with the allegorical novel *Awlad Haratina* (1959), it became clear that he was trying out his ideas and was looking for a new style and a new form. After another two years he published *al-Liss wa-l-Kilab* (1961), a milestone in his literary career, which crystallized the new style and form in which his next five novels were to be written. After the fifth *Miramar* (1967), Mahfuz stopped writing novels again for four years. The six novels which he wrote in the sixties constitute a distinct phase in his work, in which one finds a new blend of realism, mysticism, and existentialism, mixed with social criticism and contemplative and analytical elements." Hafez, 72–73.

[71] Roger Allen remarks on the complex structures of the Arabic novel of the post-1967 period which include fragmented narrative sequences, use of stream of consciousness, break with chronological structures, and hyper-intertextuality. He writes, "In their rejection of the generic expectations for the more traditional novel, these novels may perhaps be said to require, within the context of the Arab world, something akin to Riffaterre's 'superreader.'" Roger Allen, "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt," in *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M. M. Badawi (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 215.

the primacy of power struggles in its alternating episodes.[72] The collection signaled to Arab critics the birth of a promising writer and, more broadly, the consolidation of an experimental and highly politicized phase of the modern Arabic novel with the new voices of the "generation of the sixties."[73] Literary experimentations with Islamic philosophical heritage would multiply in the decades to come despite the voices declaring the problem of Arabs to be specifically their anti-modern civilizational baggage.

1.3 Discourse of Cultural Failure: *Nahḍa* Origins

Yet, the mood that settled onto the Arabic intellectual scene after the *Naksa* was one of deep cultural crisis. As the Lebanese scholar Georges Corm remarked, "a dynamic of failure took hold, which Arabs to this day have not been able to overcome."[74] This mood intensified in a period which witnessed the restructuring of Arab economies along neoliberal lines that aggravated social conditions in the region.[75] It was also the period of the parallel rise of militant Islamist movements supported by Arab oil monarchies and Western administrations to fight the

[72] The elements of change and cyclicality are reflected in Ibn Iyas' lamentations on the passing of historical Cairo and the parallelism al-Ghitani establishes between the ongoing war and the struggle of Mamluk forces against the Mongols. See Gamal al-Ghitani, *Awraq Shabʿ Asha Mundhu Alfʿ Am* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra, 1969), 21–34.
[73] As Paul Starkey remarks, the highly experimental and politically engaged narrative output of "the generation of the sixties" began before the War with the Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim's 1966 novella *Tilka al-rāʾiḥa* (That Smell). The movement became prominently visible after the War with the establishment of the Cairo based literary journal *Gallery 68*, edited by the novelist Edward al-Kharrat. See Paul Starkey, "The Sixties Generation and Beyond," in *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 139–63.
[74] Georges Corm, *Arab Political Thought: Past and Present* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), 137.
[75] See Koenraad Bogaert, "Contextualizing the Arab Revolts: The Politics behind Three Decades of Neoliberalism in the Arab World," *Middle East Critique* 22, no. 3 (2013): 213–34.

proxy battles of the Cold War.[76] With the succession of political upheavals, the discourse of Arab cultural failure in modernity proliferated. The pervasiveness and readiness of this discourse pointed to its deeper roots which lie, Stephen Sheehi argued, in the intellectual negotiations of Arab nationalist thought during the colonial age.[77] The notion of cultural failure is a response to postcolonial political events but also a discursive product of the imaginaries of modernity that were established by Arab intellectuals in the age of High Imperialism and during the colonial period.

In *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, Sheehi remarks that the post-*Naksa* notion of cultural failure is a latent discursive formation inherent to Arab nationalist thought and its modernity paradigm of 19th century cultural renaissance (*Nahḍa*) that unfolded amidst rising imperialist presence in the region. In terms of knowledge construction and its formative effects on selfhood, Sheehi observes that the *Nahḍa* was a period full of contradictions. It was, on the one hand, a period of intellectual effervescence, the proliferation of public intellectuals, and large print readerships.[78] Yet, it was also a period in which the "knowing subject" lost its cultural and epistemological centrality. Most importantly, it lost its identarian stability vis-à-vis its own

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[76] See John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (Sterling, Virginia: Pluto, 2000). See also Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2011).

[77] Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

[78] The *Nahḍa* period was marked by the rise of print culture, the proliferation of journals, and the revitalization of Arabic prose. The Egyptian official press in Bulaq was founded in 1820. In the second half of the nineteenth century, official and private presses proliferated in the Syro-Lebanese region marking the rise of a journalistic culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, the term *Nahḍa,* denoting the act of rising and leaping forward, was "mainstreamed" through the Cairo based literary journal *al-Hilāl* founded by the Lebanese intellectual Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) to refer to consorted efforts of Syro-Lebanese and Egyptian writers to infuse a new life in Arabic belles-lettres. See Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2.

history. It is not merely the issue that the knowing subject became decentralized in relation to its colonial "ideal ego" and its superior modern knowledge. It was, in fact, decentralized in relation to its own historical trajectory which was reinterpreted primarily through the lens of its relevance to the pre-modern European self.

Stephen Sheehi focuses on the Lebanese nationalist reformer Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), author of *Daʾirat al-Maʿarif* (The Scope of Knowledge), one of the earliest modern Arabic encyclopedias. As "a foundational figure of Arab thought and society," the significance of al-Bustani lies in the fact that he "systematically laid down the fundamental tropes and equations that are found in virtually all Arab reform discourses in the later decades."[79] Albert Hourani had equally argued that secularism as a political project was "first expressed in Arabic by Bustani and his school, and passed on by them to Lutfi al-Sayyid and the school of Egyptian nationalists which he created."[80] The writings of al-Bustani and the intellectual community that formed around him laid the discursive building blocks for the Arabic liberal negotiations of the age of the nation-state with its rhetoric of national identity and modern science and economy.

In a number of nationalist essays dealing with Islamic history, al-Bustani inscribes the development of Islamic philosophy after the Abbasid translation movement into a Hegelian universal history of knowledge in which Arabs acted as transmitters of classical Greek thought to Medieval Europe. This narrative aimed to encourage the emulation of new traditions of knowledge and models of subjectivity as modern installments of a universal history of knowledge. The narrative, however, located the Arab knowing subject as a transmitter whose role in world civilizational history is finished. It is the antithesis to the Greek thesis which was

[79] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 15.
[80] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 343.

synthesized in the European Renaissance with its rediscovery of the Classics. This dialectic makes the knowing subject dependent for its self-knowledge and sense of historicity on its subsidiary role in a primarily European narrative. This subject is then inhabited by a doubled other: the othered historical self and the European self which gives it discursive relevance. Sheehi writes:

> The menacing discursive effect is that Arab cultural success is a "middle link" to European progress. Likewise, their presence in universal history is only the "middle link" for the contemporary Western presence that calls attention to Arab lack and otherness. This otherness is not a temporary condition exclusive to the deficient nineteenth-century subject, however. Rather, it is an epistemological condition essential to the Arab subjectivity that al-Bustani enacts.[81]

The "Hegelian Juggernaut" which operates in the nationalist thought of al-Bustani and his generation of Arab liberal thinkers places the Arab present in a "clear and linear map of social evolution," making it the equivalent of the Dark Ages of Europe.[82] Arab contemporaneity is then also othered as it becomes interpreted through the lens of anachronism: of being the past of an achieved future which is spatially inscribed in Europe.

The *Nahḍa* is a period of immense efforts of knowledge production in the diverse fields of language, religion, science, and philosophy. It is also, as Sheehi argues, a period in which "an internal otherness" begins "to haunt Arab selfhood."[83] This internal otherness is projected temporally onto the 18th century which is redefined from the perspective of the 19th century colonized self as the apogee of Arabic Islamic cultural decay (*inḥiṭāṭ*) leading up to Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 conquest of Egypt. However, the historical record, as Ahmad Dallal demonstrates, proves the 18th century to be a period of major reform movements, of "bold and

[81] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 35.
[82] Sheehi, 69.
[83] Sheehi, 27.

self-consciously transformative intellectual projects" which were marginalized by the decline paradigm.[84] This paradigm which serves the *Nahḍa*'s self-understanding as a revolutionary phase in modern Arabic cultural production (which it was) also sowed the seeds for the discourse of cultural failure that was to dominate in the post-*Naksa* period. Islamic history remerges in the *Nahḍa* from the rubble of centuries of the alleged Islamic "age of decay" presaging its impeding crisis in late modernity.

Stephen Sheehi's premises are helpful in providing the link between the postcolonial moment of the "obsession with failure" and its deeper roots in the *Nahḍa* modernist project.[85] He considers this project a *post-facto* intellectual naturalization of violent material changes in which capitalism and colonialism are chief actors. He does not, however, view the *Nahḍa* as a special case of a modernity infused with colonial effects. Sheehi takes global modernity to be an inherently contradictory process in which the expansion of discourses of liberation are coupled with the intensification of material realities of violence and exploitation. In "The 10-point Nahḍa Manifesto," he writes, "Modernity is constituted, in Europe and North America as readily as Southwest Asia, by the imminence of its own failures, lack, and difference as well as its need to carry these failures and its own backward otherness along with it."[86] This dialectic of modernity

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[84] Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 12. Along this same line of argumentation, Khaled El-Rouayheb demonstrated the flourishing of the study of the rational sciences in the 17th century Ottoman empire and the Maghreb under the influence of a number of Persian, Kurdish, and Azeri scholars. He also surveyed the spread in this period of a theology of *taḥqīq* (verification of the rational validity of concepts and rulings) which opposed *taqlīd* (accepting the traditions maintained by early scholars). See Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[85] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 3.
[86] Stephen Sheehi, "The 10-Point Nahḍa Manifesto," in *Manifestos for World Thought*, ed. Lucian Stone and Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh (London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd, 2017), 133.

is key to the conversation at hand. A perpetual "Hegelianism" of self and other and of creativity and destruction marks modernist projects. In the Arab case, this Hegelianism manifests in both cultural self-othering in the face of political crisis and the constant revaluation of one's history in light of its relevance to the dominant European other. This Hegelianism (which will be further explored in Chapter Three) explains the postcolonial dominance of culturalist answers that takes expressions of difference to be signs of inferiority.

1.4 The Charge of the Arab Discontinuous Perception of Time

Post-*Naksa* self-critiques addressed the question of the Arabic Islamic perception of time and historical consciousness. These temporal concepts, these critics observed, lack the sense of time as homogenous, impersonal, and continuous flow. Mythological thinking and religious culture impede the realization of linear progressive time. Consequently, the presence of history in Arab consciousness suffers these defects in paradoxical ways. There is both a saturation of the historical in contemporary Arab culture and a devaluation of the sense of history as a linear continuum. Arabic Islamic time is said to be the discontinuous temporality of the event which is oriented towards the past. The Arab subject, then, lives the present as a heterogenous temporality in which past experiences are folded into the now. History is a constellation of events, and time, to quote Louis Massignon on the Islamic perception of time, is "a 'galaxy' of instants."[87] Marked by its discontinuity and heterogeneity, Arabic Islamic time, these critics charged, is unable to produce the sensibility of linear progress and emerges as the symptom and cause of a deep cultural failure.

[87] Louis Massignon, "Time in Islamic Thought," in *Man and Time*, ed. Henry Corbin (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 108.

Before examining the different iterations of this position in the Arabic context, it is worth advancing one counterargument that refutes the notion of a discontinuous perception of time on a general basis. The charge of discontinuity in the perception of time stems from the measurement of qualitatively differentiated types of time against the "homogenous, empty" standard of modernist thought. What this discursive move does is to translate the alternation between different temporalities into the notion of a discontinuous perception in which event time gives way to *intervals of timelessness and timeless perception*. As expounded in the introduction to this dissertation, I maintain that the "homogenous, empty" standard is a modernist discursive imposition on the heterogenous nature of lived temporality. The charge of discontinuity, then, does not stem from any verifiable facts about perception or experience. It stems from the modernist suspicion of the articulations of heterogenous time. Modernist thought reduces time to a neutral force of linear progress instead of a fully realized lived and existential reality. As Elizabeth Ermart writes, "When a narrative text co-ordinates diverse viewpoints into a single horizon, a single sequence, a single system of explanation, that text literally constructs the natural homogenous temporal medium 'in' which subjects and objects can be identified."[88] This modernist text, then, is unable to process the ways in which time can be lived as a qualitatively differentiated reality combining multiple levels of temporal continuities along social, historical, and religious cycles. When a given cycle does not intersect with the "single horizon" of secular homogenous time, it is relegated to the categories of the timeless and the ahistorical. However, in numerous occasions, and to use the exceptional but meaningful example of millenarian movements in colonial societies, it is the religious temporal cycles which have produced

[88] Ermarth, "Ph(r)ase Time," 91–92.

revolutionary upsurges and changed the course of secular historical time.[89] The charges of the discontinuous perception of time and the timeless affect stem from modernist assumptions and their naturalized constructs. Going back to Arab critics of Arabic Islamic articulations of time, their premises reflect the modernist tendency to dismiss heterogeneity as defect.

In *al-Hazima wa-l-Idyulujya al-Mahzuma* (The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology) published posthumously in 1979, the Syrian Marxist Yassin al-Hafiz (1930-1978) describes growing up amidst the traditional structures of village life, his embrace of Arab nationalism after the Palestinian *Nakba* of 1948, and his fraught relationship with nationalist ideology after his exposure to Marxist internationalism.[90] He analyzes the history of Palestinian dispossession and critiques the modern Arab state as being a neo-Mamluk state (*dawla mamlūkiyya muḥdatha*) in which fused forms of oligarchy and theocracy produce irrational politics.[91] Al-Hafiz attributes the backwardness (*takhalluf*) of Arab societies to the continuous domination of a politically quietest and escapist mystical ideology. This ideology was discursively institutionalized by the likes of al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058), al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111), and Ibn Jamaʿah (d. 733/1333) and socialized by the Turkic Mamluks and Ottomans to ensure their domination over their Arab subjects. It is reflected in contemporary Arab affairs through irrational politics, stagnant intellect, and an inability to understand the progressive flow of history. It manifests forcefully in the Arabic discontinuous sense of time. Commenting on recent Arab historiography, al-Hafiz writes:

> We, the Arabs, have not yet grasped the unity of time, that is the connectedness and continuity of its units or moments. We have also not grasped that this connectedness is causal and accumulative (*sababī tarākumī*). So we deceive ourselves by speaking about "historical moments" and "decisive days"—notice the grandiose language and how it

[89] See Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979).
[90] Yassin al-Hafiz, *al-Hazima wa-l-Idyulujya al-Mahzuma* (Beirut: Maʿhad al-Inmaʾ al-ʿArabi, 1990).
[91] al-Hafiz, 106.

> masks reality—in which we triumphed, believing that only those moments decided the outcome of our struggle. Only when we conceive of time as constituted of interpenetrated units that are continuous in causal and accumulative fashion can we then discover the rationality of history.[92]

For al-Hafiz, discovering the rationality of history means converging to a homogenous serial time. Both Hegel and Benjamin would, for different reasons, disagree with al-Hafiz on what temporality reveals the "rationality" of history. For Hegel, what truly matters in historical progress is the "ripe" moments of world-historical events during which *Geist* (the divine will or the rational idea) inches closer to self-understanding and full concretization in the modern state.[93] For Benjamin, it is the inverse image of the moment of traumatic recognition which diffracts the sense of historical progress and opens old/new possibilities for history in political time.[94] Even if al-Hafez' remarks on Arab time invokes history in a pedestrian sense instead of a grand philosophy of history, his intervention takes conventional and diffuse ways of conceiving of history to be symptoms of a characteristic Arab difficulty in understanding the nature of time.

For al-Hafiz, history can only be grasped in homogenous serial time. The escapist other-worldly ideology, however, imposes on this consciousness of time the punctuating temporality of

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[92] al-Hafiz, 37.

[93] Hegel speaks of how men execute the design of the Spirit unwittingly while pursuing their "passions" and he calls this reality "the cunning of reason." World-historical figures, in particular, influence the progress of history and their individual temporalities represent vehicles for the self-disclosure of the Spirit (hence Hegel's note that these figures tend to die young after having fulfilled their role in the progress of Geist). "Such individuals had no consciousness of the general Idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary, they were practical, political men. But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time — *what was ripe for development*. This was the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J Sibree (Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 45.

[94] See Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 253–64.

the event. The kairotic, opportune and transformative as it is, marks a qualitatively different temporality that halts "the flow of time." As Geoffrey Bennington remarks, "The chance of the right moment's really being the right moment is given only by its discordance with the time in which it arrives."[95] This discordance is the marker of heterogeneity and exceptionality. In al-Hafiz' assessment, Arab thought builds the past as the storehouse of such exceptional moments whose significance is transhistorical instead of being the archive of causally linked and *superseded* events. While al-Hafiz spoke of this temporal quality in relation to Arab historical thought, the Lebanese psychologist Mustapha Hijazi (b. 1937) saw it as the fundamental sensibility of the backward subjectivity which populates Arab societies.

In his 1976 *al-Takhalluf al-Ijtimaʿi: Madkhal ila Sulukiyyat al-Insan al-Maqhur* (Social Backwardness: An Introduction to the Behavioral Psychology of the Oppressed), Hijazi sets out to study backwardness as "a specific existential case with its attendant psychological, mental, and interpersonal dynamics."[96] While his book addresses backwardness as a structural problem of the "Third World," its sociological data are sourced from the Arab world, and more specifically the Lebanese example.[97] The goal of the book, Hijazi states, is to provide relevant analysis for Arab reformers who speak of effecting social change without having fully understood the nature of their societies.[98] According to Hijazi, the backward subjectivity emerges as one whose constitutive exposure to arbitrary cruelty makes it fatalist, desiring of anarchy, given to sabotage, ridden with inferiority complexes, and charged with vengeful aspirations.[99] Its

[95] Geoffrey Bennington, "Is It Time?," in *The Moment: Time and Rupture in Modern Thought*, ed. Heidrun Friese (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 19.
[96] Mustapha Hijazi, *al-Takhalluf al-Ijtimaʿi: Madkhal ila Sulukiyyat al-Insan al-Maqhur*, 9th ed. (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 2005), 9.
[97] Hijazi, 11.
[98] Hijazi, 11.
[99] Hijazi, 37–58.

social life is a difficult balance between repressive conditions and repressed sadistic desires. It is animated by two balancing forces: self-serving social cunning on the one hand and, on the other hand, the fear of social shaming (*ʿuqdat al-ʿār*) which keeps it in check. This subjectivity, which is the building block of backward societies, is susceptible to rebellious eruption rather than being responsive to long-term planned change and steady social development.[100] These social traits are the symptoms of deep-seated psychological defects.

Existentially, this backward subjectivity has the tendency to anthropomorphize natural forces and to disavow its individuality through enthrallment with higher power. Fundamentally, its defective worldview is related to its inorganic sense of time which is focused on the present, directed to the past and lacking a sense of homogenous and progressive continuity which would give it futurity. Hijazi called this fundamental problem "duration disorder" (*iḍṭirāb al-daymūma*).[101] Time is heterogenous as the present and the past are experienced as dyad with a permanent spiral dynamic.[102] It is also momentary (*ʾānī*) as the subject is unable to grasp the continuous duration which would point it toward the future.[103] For Hijazi this defective sense of time is not only socially and culturally produced, it is primarily a question of mentality (*dhihniyya*). He writes:

> The backward mentality perceives reality as being temporally and spatially fragmentary (*tajzīʾī*). In relation to time, it is marked by heightened attention to the present temporality and the excessive focus on the momentary. The horizon of its future is so narrow and remains at arm's length… Spatially, the perception of the backward person remains also fragmentary, unable to see the horizon beyond a limited scope, i.e., the boundary of the immediate environment. He is unable to grasp a holistic vision (*ʿājiz ʿan al-shumūl*), to think of broader horizons, to interpret the traits of the immediate environment through a larger framework.[104]

[100] Hijazi, 56.
[101] Hijazi, 48–51.
[102] Hijazi, 48–49.
[103] Hijazi, 66.
[104] Hijazi, 65–66.

The qualification of this defective worldview as *tajzīʾī* I translate here as fragmentary in opposition to the holistic vision whose absence Hijazi laments. In Chapter Three which studies the intellectual project of the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) as a prominent case of the Arabic critique of Islamic temporalities, I translate *tajzīʾī* as "discontinuous" and relate it to the 19th and early 20th century racial theory of the atomistic mentality of the Semites. At this stage, it suffices to note that Hijazi articulates a growing consensus of the defective Arab experience of time which lacks linearity and homogeneity. This discontinuous sense of time suffers also its subordination to the timelessness and a-historicity of Islamic enchantment.

As Hijazi remarks, popular religious practices which include shrine visitations and *dhikr* ceremonies are expressions of the exiting of time and history altogether. They are rituals of escape into the timelessness of the magical medium as a psychological compensation.[105] In this view, the religious experience distorts the sense of time as homogenous flow and introduces the heterogenous temporalities of sacred beings and events. This clouds the objective sense of living in the historical world of perpetual change and makes the present a stagnant temporality. Hijazi echoes arguments on the effects of the Islamic enchanted worldview on Arab historical and temporal perceptions which have been more deeply explored by the Syrian poet Adonis in his cultural studies.

In his 1974 four-volume cultural study entitled *al-Thabit wa-l-Mutahawwil: Bahth fi al-Ibdaʿ wa-l-Ittibaʿ ʿind al-ʿArab* (The Immutable and the Dynamic: A Study in Creativity and Conformism Among the Arabs), the Syrian poet Adonis examines the institutionalization of key

[105] Hijazi, 142–46.

texts in the history of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and poetry whose canonical status was established through politically enforced practices of preservation and conformism. He also explores the history of rivaling anti-texts produced by innovative and bawdy Arab poets, revolting factions in Islamic polities, and ecstatic Sufis. Regarding the modern stage, Adonis upholds in his work the notion of a radical crisis of Arabic Islamic culture which, in its current status, is incompatible with the conditions of modernity. In Adonis' view, this culture is weighed down by the qualities of theocentrism (*al-lāhutaniyya*), atavism (*al-māḍawīyya*), superficial rhetoricity (*al-faṣl bayn al-maʿnā wa-l-kalām*), and anti-modernity (*al-tanāquḍ maʿa al-ḥadātha*).[106] Fundamentally, Arabic Islamic culture lacks the sense of historical time as a progressive movement of overcoming past experiences. Adonis distinguishes between historical time and the time of revelation (*zaman al-waḥy*). In his view, the time of revelation influences historical time through the disruptive and paralyzing insertion of eternity (*abādiyya*) within it in the form of the recurrent past. This setup in Arabic Islamic thought entails that:

> [historical] time has two connotations: first, perpetual collapse (*al-suqūṭ*) and distance from the original. Time is a force of exile and negation. The human being resists its alienation by preserving the original through repetition, making it eternally present. Second, it signifies that time is not an opening of possibilities, the realm of the revelation of a new type of knowledge, and the source of novelty. It only occasions the remembrance of the knowledge which stemmed from the original.[107]

For Adonis, the punctuation of historical time by the time of revelation in the form of the recurrent past means "that time is not a continuous duration, it is rather a grouping of discrete moments and instants."[108] This view of time as a constellation of moments disallows the proper recognition of historical being and progress. For Adonis, the acknowledgement of the time of

[106] Ali Ahmad (Adonis) Said, *al-Thabit wa-l-Mutahawwal: Bahth fi al-Ibda' wa-l-Ittiba' 'inda al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1974), vols. 1, 57-66.
[107] Said, vols. 1, 70.
[108] Said, vols. 1, 70.

revelation, as it manifests in commemorative cycles and existential and religious discourse, cannot parallel or alternate with the sense of living in historical time. It actively impedes this sense and turns historical experience into a mere "remembrance" of primordial struggles and heavenly events. The awareness of being in history is blocked by the mythological projections of the self into the realms of timelessness. However, the vastness of Islamic historical writing and its extensive documentation of Islamic history stands to problematize Adonis' conclusions regarding the relation between these two temporalities in Islamic thought. As the Iraqi historian Abd al-Aziz al-Duri remarks, it is the Arab sense of their insertion into universal history through Islam and their preoccupation with preserving the texts and the circumstances of revelation which intensified their interest in historical excavations and reflections on the value of history.[109] While Adonis is right in noting the heterogenous quality of the Islamic conception of time, he interprets this quality in dismissive terms and views it as a permanent obstacle to an Arabic intellectual modernity.

In both Hijazi and Adonis' assessments, religious sensibility condenses then the "confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" which disallow a modern sense of

[109] On the question of the development of Islamic historical writing, al-Duri notes the factors of the political and scholarly competition during the period of the Muslim caliphate in asserting historical belonging to pre-Islamic Arab tribes, the issue of the leadership of the Muslim community, i.e., the imamate, and the search for historical legitimacy of the different Islamic fractions. On the role of Islam proper he further asserts, "On the other hand, there took shape among the Arabs an awareness of their importance and a realization that in Islam they were participants in a universal mission. This awareness was related to the establishment of the Arab Islamic empire and had an influence on the Arab attitude towards the *mawālī* [non-Arab clientele populations]. Moreover, the concept of the *umma* [the Muslim community] exerted its own influence in causing the interest in *akhbār* [tribal history] and *qiṣaṣ* [tribal stories] to transcend the limits of the tribe to include society as a whole, and in this way opened the door to historical study." Abd Al-Aziz Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, trans. Lawrence I. Conrad, Modern Classics in Near Eastern Studies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 153–54.

time as linear homogenous flow.[110] This position holds a mechanistic sense of serial time as an ideal temporal sensibility disregarding the fact that lived temporalities rest on an irreducible heterogeneity. What is essential to the human condition becomes, in light of evolutionary thinking and the internalization of racial theories, a sign of inherent cultural defects.

While Adonis' pursuit of his theories through philological and literary examples leaves room for nuance including rejecting the discourse of inherent racial limitations, Hijazi's focus on the question of mentality evokes an established corpus of orientalist literature.[111] His arguments on the fragmented temporalities of backward subjectivity echo an established anthropological discourse on "Arab national character" which has long served an imperialist function. From Sania Hamady's 1960 book *Temperament and Character of the Arabs* to Raphael Patel's 1973 *The Arab Mind*, the Arab is said to live in a timeless world whose enchanted quality makes time an irrelevant aspect of social life. Drawing on her childhood experience in Lebanon, Sania Hamady argued in her dissertation completed at the University of Chicago and subsequent book (which was lauded by Albert Hourani in a review) that the Arab mind is unable to think beyond the immediate data of sensible experience. This makes Arabs "fettered to the moment, they cannot think beyond the immediate present."[112] According to Hamady, this temporal defect makes the Arab susceptible to sharp mood swings, free-floating hostility, and having a Manichean vision of the world. Relying on Hamady's views, Raphael Patai observed that a quality of the "Arab mind" is its characteristic unconcern for the flow of time which disallows prognostic thinking. His analysis also draws on the ethnographic research of Judith R. Williams

[110] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 22.
[111] Said, *al-Thabit wa-l-Mutahawwal*, vol. 1, 62.
[112] Sania Hamady, *Temperament and Character of the Arabs* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 206.

whose study on youth in Lebanese villages emphasized their lack of an ordered sense of time and "the irrelevance of time" in their social lives.[113]

Fouad Moughrabi surveyed this body of literature which grants a user manual on Arab psychology and revealed its unscientific method and political cunning.[114] While some of the so-called basic traits of Arab personality rest on racial caricatures, the interpretation of the general descriptions of social behavior can vary radically depending on the political positionality of the observer. In regards for instance to the impulsiveness of social action and the centrality of the family in Arab life, Moughrabi remarks:

> Many of the characteristics previously described as liabilities among Arabs, may turn out to be assets. Thus, in the face of the superior odds, none of the Arab countries would have 'rationally' engaged in any attempt to win political independence against any of the colonial countries… In times of crisis and of social upheaval, the persistence of the family as a tight-knit organization has served a very significant purpose among various groups. Were it not for the family structure, countless hundreds in various Arab countries would not have received a university education.[115]

As Moughrabi expounds, the consensus around the anthropological descriptions of "the Arab basic personality" which reaches into the critical works of modern Arab intellectuals reveals no uncontestable truths about Arab societies. The only certainty it reveals is the nature of its own discourse which is steeped in imperialist hubris and beholden to an evolutionary framework in the study of non-Western cultures. This framework projects any form of difference in social structures as arrested development and turns, as Johannas Fabian remarked, the other of a different space into another of a different historical stage riddled with pre-modern defects.[116]

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[113] Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Scribner, 1973), 65.
[114] Fouad M. Moughrabi, "The Arab Basic Personality: A Critical Survey of the Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 99–112.
[115] Moughrabi, 111.
[116] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

The Lebanese intellectual Ali Harb (b. 1941) has critiqued the working of this evolutionary framework in modern Arab thought. He noted that evolutionary thinking is at the heart of an elitism (*nukhbawiyya*) which perfects abstract systems but can only translate them into dysfunctional material forms. This elitism, which is marked by the embrace of grand narratives of leftist or Islamist variety, either produces top-down statist revolutionizing projects that often cause considerable social suffering or reduces the intellectual to an isolated outcast ever more separated from the language of his or her people. Drawing on Foucauldian insights, Harb urges Arab thinkers to liberate their critiques of the present conditions of their society from a deterministic anticipation of future forms. He writes:

> The world is not a copy of our concepts and does not change according to our theories and in response to our ideas. Those who think that progress occurs according to predetermined models find only themselves in a state of regress. Likewise, those who think that reason is a pure essence which can be captured in one pure representation end up establishing all sorts of irrational rapports with their fancy. History does not move according to preconceived ideas, given designs, and ready plans. We progress or rather we change according to the models that we make for ourselves in our historical acts. That is to say, we make history as we make ourselves, we partake in world-making activities as far as we engage our thought in radically creative exercise.[117]

As Harb argues, renouncing the evolutionary framework serves to question the dominance of the rational forms of late modernity (both the Enlightenment transcendental reason and those of the instrumental variety) by pointing to their excluded others. It also liberates time and history from the theology of progress (*ʿaqīdat al-taqaddum*) in its reductive and highly deterministic logic which comes at the price of considerable denials and suppressions of the heterogeneous realities of life and humanity.[118]

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[117] Ali Harb, *Awham al-Nukhba aw Naqd al-Muthaqqaf* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 2004), 139.
[118] Harb, 137.

In this sense, Harb denounces what Bonaventure De Susa Santos called "the waste of experience."[119] Santos argued that the evolutionary and "future-oriented" paradigms of the social sciences are adamant about ignoring the complexity of social experiences in the Global South, a denial that serves the meta-narrative of the end of history with liberal democracies in which these disciplines are entrenched. A closer inspection of these paradigms which focus on futurity reveal their bad faith in the future. Santos remarks that these paradigms operate under a proleptic reason which "does not exert itself in thinking the future because it believes it knows all about the future and conceives of it as a linear, automatic, and infinite overcoming of the present."[120] Proleptic reason is characterized, then, by the dearth of imagination in the anticipation of novelty which is at the heart of futurity. In that sense, it is a "lazy" type of reason which refuses to recognize other rationalities and reduces them to "raw material" to be analyzed and translated back into its own worldview.[121] In terms of the politics of time, this reason shrinks the present as it does not consider the diverse elements of social experience within their *full* temporality but treats them as diverse iterations of a recognizable theoretical process whose outcomes are known and already achieved. It both "expands the future" since the present serves merely as a transition and impoverishes the future through its deterministic vision. Santos calls instead for the need "to expand the present and contract the future" through a cosmopolitan rationality that accepts the coexistence of multiple rational totalities that are internally heterogenous and that animate an "ecology of temporalities" in which time is freed from artificial linear and homogenous

[119] Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, "A Critique of Lazy Reason: Against the Waste of Experience and Toward the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences," in *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 164–87.
[120] Santos, 156.
[121] Santos, 165.

designs.[122] Only by recognizing this ecology can these social experiences be adequately understood.

By adopting the evolutionary terminology of lag and backwardness, certain trends of modern Arab thought participate in the unfortunate waste of experience. These diverse social and moral experiences constitutively rest on the heterogeneity of time: on kairotic temporalities of social events and on temporalities of the sacred which punctuate the profane. This heterogeneity reflects the vibrant life of society and its natural response to the rigidity of structure. As the Moroccan sociologist Fatema Mernissi notes:

> Although Arab leaders have abandoned the Muslim Calendar, it is still followed by the most dispossessed as a symbol of self-definition and commemoration… It might be said that one of the manifestations of the class struggle in Morocco is the choice of calendar. The poorest live according the Muslim calendar, while the richest live by the calendar of the West. Sometimes the calendars clash. The wealthy directors of the Rabat and Sale textile factories can never meet the full delivery dates of their German customers because the underpaid and uninsured Moroccan Factory workers take time off to participate in various celebrations and religious festivals to observe the prophet's birthday, a holiday not marked on the German client's Calendar in his office in Berlin.[123]

Temporal heterogeneity is then both a reaction to and a form of resistance against modern oppressive structures, namely the capitalist regimentation of life. Yet, these expressions of dynamic and fully articulated lives, are often interpreted as signs of cultural crisis which is linked to a static society and its regressive embrace of its religious past. These articulations are viewed in the acultural theory of modernity as residue of enchanted worldviews that must be "subtracted" towards a disenchanted world of hard facts.[124] However, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued, the disenchantment project which propagates the myth of the

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[122] Santos, 176–77.
[123] Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (London: Virago, 1993), 143.
[124] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 153–74.

transcendental subject and its instrumental mastery of the world is, itself, an enchanted project.[125] The insistence on evolutionary frameworks and the convergence to a singular worldview whose constructed terms have been naturalized are, then, modern incantations.

1.5 The Islamic Past in the Present of Arab Cultural Production

In reading al-Hafiz' notion of the defeated ideology, Hijazi's diagnosis of the backward personality, and Adonis' distinction between historical time and the time of revelation, religious enchantment emerges as the central agent of timelessness in contemporary Arab culture. There is a distinction still to be made between important critiques of the uses of the Islamic past in modern Arab revivalist projects (such as the thought of Sayyid Qutb in *Milestones*) and the essentialist notion of an Arab subject whose sense of time is misguided by his or her religiosity. The Egyptian intellectual Fouad Zakariyya (1927-2010) remarked that revivalist projects often present ideological and highly selective interpretations of the Islamic past, or what he called in theological terms *talwīn al-māḍī bi-l-hawā* (coloring the past with the predilections of the soul).[126] These revivalist readings, as he notes, lack a holistic approach to the past. They tend to reduce complex, often contradictory, and therefore balancing elements of historical experience into a homogenous repertoire. Shifting the hermeneutical lens would then change the image of this repertoire in radical ways.

While occupying the opposite end of the spectrum to the secular intellectuals explored so far, these revivalist voices deploy an equally modernist preference for homogeneity and teleological

[125] See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972).
[126] Fouad Zakariyya, *Khitab ila al-Fikr al-ʿArabi* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Kitab, 2010), 53–54. This book was first published in 1978.

thinking. The unconscious operation of modern categories in revivalist discourse makes the recognition of the cultural past highly myopic. Wael Hallaq has analyzed how fundamentalist readings of the Islamic past project strictly modern categories, namely law and the state, onto its history and as such fail both to understand the fluidity of past traditions and the primarily ethical demands of the present state of affairs.[127] These positions not only suppress the heterogeneity of history, they also activate a modern teleological notion of the cataclysmic restoration of the original which is nowhere to be found in pre-modern Islamic discourse. As Aziz al-ʿAzmeh writes, nowhere in pre-modern Islamic thought is salvation conceptualized as the restoration of a previous historical stage which is "a phenomenon of the twentieth century, with no antecedents in actual Muslim traditions."[128] Rather, pre-modern Islamic thought "relegated redemption to a moment in the eschatological future defining the end of time."[129] The past which is retrieved for salvation is then a modern projection animated with the political categories and political questions of the present. As Ibrahim Abu Rabiʿ remarks:

> To characterize Islamism as modern is to allude to the fact that the central preoccupation of Muslim thought in the modern Arab world has been the West-Islam dichotomy (or rapprochement), rather than the reconciliation between faith and reason, which had characterized pre-capitalist Muslim and Arab cultures.[130]

This critique of political projects that purport to retrieve the past is valuable in that it highlights that the past retrieved is a modernist projection into history populated with modern concepts (such as the state) that are capable of considerable violence. This type of critique puts into question political narratives rather than the cultural understandings of time or the modern uses of pre-modern concepts.

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[127] See Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
[128] Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 33.
[129] al-Azmeh, 33.
[130] Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London; Virginia: Pluto Press, 2004), 28.

To go back to the words of De Susa Santos, creative engagement with pre-modern articulations of heterogenous time in modern intellectual and literary projects is part and parcel of the refusal to engage in "the waste of experience." The voices of rich cultural experiences continue to shape present social realities despite the vanguardist attempt to either restore a static image of the past or to deny its relevance altogether. The voice of times past but also of *past* ways of speaking about time still echo in social spheres that remain resistant to their complete subordination by the empty abstract time of modern capitalism.

As quoted earlier in the chapter, Louis Massignon wrote in 1958 of the Islamic perception of time as the discontinuous "galaxy of instants." His student Louis Gardet wrote of "*La voie lactée*" (the milky way) of moments in the Islamic imaginary.[131] Gardet, however, added an important reflection to Massignon's textual analysis. He noted that the alternation between homogenous durations and punctuating moments reflects a rich sense of the temporal which is close to the modern scientific understanding of time as a dependent phenomenon.[132] The Egyptian Marxist Mahmoud Amin al-ʿAlem (1922-2009) responded to both authors in his essay entitled "*al-Zaman fi al-Fikr al-Islami*" (Time in Islamic Thought)."[133] Al-ʿAlem focused on the refutation of the thesis of temporal discontinuity by showing how Islamic notions of the event are anchored in concepts of continuous duration that can be found in the Quranic text, certain strands of Islamic theology (*kalām*) and Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*). He counterweighs the event time of al-Tabari's historiography to Ibn Khaldun's theorization of cyclical historical

[131] Louis Gardet, "Vues musulmanes sur le temps et l'histoire: essai de typologie culturelle," in *Les Cultures et le temps: études préparées pour l'Unesco*, ed. Paul Ricœur, Bibliothèque scientifique (Paris: Payot, 1975), 232.
[132] Gardet, 235.
[133] Mahmoud Amin al-ʿAlem, *Mafāhīm wa qaḍāya ʾishkāliyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Misriyya, 1989), 471–512.

time. On early modern Islamic thought, he makes recourse to the example of the *Nahḍa* figure Rifaʿah al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) as an example of a temporal view which while reflecting Ash'arite occasionalist focus on the event is circumscribed in the explicit sense of the continuity of historical time. Al-ʿAlem's problem-space has, at its core, the orientalist charge that Islamic time is discontinuous. As such, al-ʿAlem focused his argumentative energy nearly exclusively on emphasizing the continuity and homogeneity of time in Islam. I take this to be a false problem. As expounded in my introduction, time universally is heterogenous. Discontinuity is a negative modernist descriptor for the *continuous* experience of multiple kinds of time. While appreciating al-ʿAlem's counter-argument that highlights duration-based concepts of time in the multiplicity of Islamic articulations of the temporal, I engage this multiplicity in a different direction. Namely, I aim to show how these very concepts of heterogenous time, in which broad duration is punctuated by kairotic temporalities, can provide critical resources for modern Arabic thought in its philosophical and aesthetic projects.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a sketch of the intellectual map of the post-*Naksa* discourse of Arab cultural crisis and the emergence of the issue of the Arabic Islamic perception of time. It surveyed the interventions of the period which included important critiques of Arab political, economic, and social institutions as well as essentialist arguments that bemoaned the effects of a transhistorical Islamic culture on Arab selfhood. The dominance of culturalist answers in the face of political crisis has its genealogy. As Stephen Sheehi noted, it is discursively linked to the contradictions of ninetieth century Arabic liberal and nationalist projects whose "tireless effort to enact a masterful subject" rested on multiple processes of self-othering, chief among them the rediscovery of one's history as the history of

an other.[134] These latent contradictions represent the deeper roots of the discourse of cultural failure that permeated the Arab intellectual scene of the post-*Naksa* period.

In the decades after the 1967 War, Arab intellectuals discussed the issue of "deficient" Arabic Islamic concepts of time. These thinkers lamented the Arabs' inability to grasp the homogeneity and linearity of time and decried the event-based temporality of Islamic thought. These qualities, critics noted, lead to the radical disregard for the value of time in individual and social life. As this chapter argued, evolutionary thought underlies the logic of these reductive positions and conforms them to what Charles Taylor called the "acultural account of modernity." [135] This account operates by projecting pre-modern cultural discourses and experiences as impediments to the convergence into a universal model of the modern which is said to rest on "acultural" objective institutions. While ignoring the constructedness of its institutions and their dependence on capitalism as a life form, the acultural account, in the case of these Arab critics, translates diverse Islamic articulations of heterogenous time as symptoms of cultural failure. These articulations of non-linear and qualitatively differentiated temporalities are viewed as internal challenges to achieving a disenchanted worldview which instills the sensibility of progress in secular historical time and which is said to secure the conditions of intellectual maturity and critique.

The diverse Arabic propositions on Islamic temporalities, which include repudiations but also constructive engagements, will be further analyzed in the following chapters of this dissertation through a set of intellectual and literary projects and their reception of the Sufi discourse on time in which the notions of concentric temporalities and the focus on the present moment pervade. The following set of questions will guide the examination of these intellectual projects. Do Sufi temporal concepts signal a devaluation of the meaning of time in individual and social life which must then be repudiated? Or, do

[134] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 196.
[135] See Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," 1999.

they provide alternative semantics of time which are essential to the critique of the abstract institutions of capitalist modernity?

Before considering these questions, there is still necessary contextualization ground to cover. In the next chapter, I expand my analysis of a key aspect of the post-*Naksa* paradigm of Arab thought, i.e., the emergence of *turāth* studies in which Islamic cultural heritage is revaluated and the significance of its ontological concepts to modern Arab thought is reassessed. As an extension of post-*Naksa* self-critique, Arab Marxists, Islamic thinkers, and creative writers turn in the 1980s to a systematic study of the history of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and *Adab* (the Arabic literary tradition). These intellectual projects locate the modernity of Arabic cultural production within renewed practices of dialogical interactions with pre-modern Islamic traditions. In addition to the post-*Naksa* works of self-critique, the issue of Arabic Islamic time emerges within these scholarly treatments of the legacy of philosophical Sufism and its ontological concepts. Chapter Two then contextualizes the rise of *turāth* studies in the post-*Naksa* period and investigates the place of philosophical Sufism in its projects in preparation for a close reading of the work of the Moroccan scholar Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, which I conduct in Chapter Three. Al-Jabri raises forcefully the issue of the clash between the modern temporality of linear progress and the timeless event-based ontologies of Islamic thought, focusing on Sufism in particular. In so doing, the next chapter inquiries into the relation between the temporalities of historical tradition and modern culture and how the competing notions of rupture and continuity inform the debate on this relationship.

Chapter 2: The Time of *Turāth*: Rethinking the Place of Philosophical Sufism in Modern Arab Thought and Literature

As examined in the previous chapter, it was the time of crisis which occasioned different interventions on the Arabic Islamic "discontinuous" perception of time. Arab thinkers and writers debated this perception as the product of both racial (Arab) and cultural (Islamic) attributes and viewed it to be is a key factor of an Arabic failure in modernity. The time of crisis occasioned also an introspective turn into the past of Islamic civilizational history and knowledge traditions in search for new resources for Arab thought. Beyond monographs which critiqued the contemporary state of Arabic culture, the problem-space of Islamic concepts of time emerges within post-*Naksa* studies of Islamic cultural heritage (*turāth*) and its place in an Arabic modernity.

Before discussing the modern life of these Islamic discourses on time within specific intellectual projects, the place of *turāth* in post-*Naksa* thought requires further consideration. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the reception within *turāth* studies of the traditions of *falsafa* (Islamic philosophy) and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism). The notions of time, articulated in these traditions, are relevant to the thought of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2000), ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944), Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the literary project of Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). In the coming chapters these will serve as case studies of post-*Naksa* discourse on Islamic time. In so doing, the chapter asks the following questions: What is *turāth*? Is it a category of the pre-modern or the modern? And are these two categories opposed? Is the introspective turn to *turāth* a sign of intellectual regression? Can there be an Arabic cultural modernity without the substantive presence of *turāth*? This chapter treats the question of cultural temporality and its

organizing principles of memory, preservation, and rupture through the relation between modern Arab intellectuals and the pre-modern traditions of Islamic philosophy and Sufism.

2.1 What is *Turāth*?

In modern Arab discourse, *turāth* has existed in a network of terms that express the notion of past knowledge in light of the ideologies of the period. Yasmeen Daifallah notes that late nineteenth century *Nahḍa* thinkers often used the broader notions of "Islam" and "Islamic civilization" to refer to inherited knowledge from the past.[1] From Islamic thinkers such as Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905) to secular nationalists such as Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), the questions of the period were the rivalry between civilizations as well as the continuities and discontinuities in Islamic civilizational history. In the first half of the twentieth century, the term *thaqāfa* (culture) was mostly used in the liberal discourse of Arab thinkers such as Taha Hussein (1889-1973) and ʿAbbas al-ʿAqqad (1889-1964) in their discussions of the classical humanist tradition of Islam. In this period as Daifallah argues, the focus of liberal thought was on the question of education as the instrument of cultural reform.[2] The term *turāth* becomes increasingly adopted in the mid-century literature of Arab nationalism. The Syrian Michel ʿAflaq (1910-1989), for instance, spoke of the national heritage (*al-turāth al-qawmī*) of Islam as one of the ideological pillars of Arabism.[3] *Turāth* appears in this discourse both in the sense of the classical tradition of Islamic learning as well as the world-changing "spirit" and historical

[1] Yasmeen Daifallah, "The Idea of an Arab–Islamic Heritage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Leigh K. Jenco, Murad Idris, and Megan C. Thomas, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 218–41.
[2] Daifallah, "The Idea of an Arab–Islamic Heritage," 223.
[3] Michel Aflaq, *Fi Sabil al-Baʿth: al-Aʿmal al-Siyasiyya al-Kamila*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 1963), 83.

mission of the Arab people.[4] In the post-*Naksa* period, *turāth* eclipses other terms in discursive dominance. According to Wael Abu ʿUksa the surge of *turāth* studies comes at a time when "political Islamism on the one hand and postcolonialism on the other succeeded in imposing their critiques on the subject of the authenticity of Arab thought, especially during the 1980s and the years after."[5] While these factors played direct roles, the turn to *turāth* is also occasioned by the late postcolonial realities of neoliberal cultural imperialism and its pressures for economic and cultural conformity. Taking these factors into consideration, the debate on *turāth,* while producing a plethora of positions, occupies the center of a spectrum of political and cultural dilemmas that include, in the words of Jacques Berque, the "mythological escapism" of purist revivalism and the "depersonalization" of discourses of permanent rupture.[6] In all cases, however, *turāth* opens Arab thought to the consideration of other temporalities beyond its contemporaneity including acknowledged and suppressed past experiences as well as competing futures.

2.2 Post-*Naksa* Approaches to *Turāth* and its Temporality

Arab self-critique of the post-*Naksa* period developed into voluminous works on Islamic cultural history, the development of Islamic sciences, and their diverse epistemologies and ideologies. The participants in this effort defined *turāth* as the pre-modern Islamic library of theological, philosophical, jurisprudential, and literary writing. Certain intellectuals engaged

[4] Aflaq, 83.
[5] Wael Abu ʿUksa, "Liberal Renewal of the Turāth: Constructing the Egyptian Past in Sayyid al-Qimni's Works," in *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967*, ed. Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 102.
[6] Jacques Berque, *Arab Rebirth: Pain and Ecstasy*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Al Saqi Books, 1983), 66.

turāth in search for heuristic methods to negotiate the historical experience of Islamic civilization with postcolonial Arab culture. Others considered *turāth* to be the source of defective pre-modern worldviews which continue to haunt Arab modernity.

The Egyptian thinker Abdel Wahab El-Messiri (1938-2008), for instance, argued for the provincialization of the Western cultural model and its epistemological categories in Arab thought through a reconsideration of Islamic *turāth* and the civilizational experiences of Asian and African nations which are rarely present as interlocutors for Arab thought.[7] In his writing, El-Messiri advocated an Islamic humanism that distinguishes the human with the quality of moral responsibility to the world instead of its rational domination. This humanism rejects any claims to universality and historical teleology and presents itself as a culturally circumscribed expression of a plural human reality.[8] El-Messiri's vision of humanism, he writes, "Stems from our *turāth* in the sense of the civilizational history of the material and intellectual achievements of the human in our area of the world which is available in written and oral form."[9] For El-Messiri, *turāth* is not only a civilizational record of Islamic knowledge traditions. It is also a civilizational record of the moral and existential outlooks of Muslims on the world whose relevance persists in modernity.

In opposition to El-Messiri's approach, other thinkers, such as the Egyptian literary critic Gaber ʿAsfour (b. 1944), considered the rising Arab interest in *turāth* an intellectual regression.

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[7] ʿAbdel Wahhab El-Messiri, ed., *Ishkaliyyat al-Tahayyuz: Ruʾya Maʿrifiyya wa Daʿwa li-l-Ijtihad*, vol. 1 (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1996), 39–92.
[8] El-Messiri writes, "We do not believe in a uniform humanism which can be identified in the way of other [universal] phenomena. We believe in a shared humanity that rests on a latent human force (*ṭāqa insāniyya kāmina*) that generates diverse civilizational forms. These forms bring the human being out of the natural state in the way of diverse groups and individuals. This entails that there is no uniform end to human history nor a uniform law of a uniquely materialist reality which binds all." El-Messiri, 1:96.
[9] El-Messiri, 1:92.

In his article "*Muʿdilat al-turath"* (The Dilemma of Cultural Heritage), ʿAsfour noted that while pan-Arab socialism instrumentalized the enlightened dimensions of *turāth,* its defeat after the *Naksa* meant the succumbing of the Arab intellectual scene to the full return of *turāth* in all its anti-modern qualities. In the post-*Naksa* period, ʿAsfour writes:

> *Turāth* deceives us or rather we use it to deceive ourselves. We rush to it full of all sorts of illusions which make us slaves of *turāth*. We turn it into a gripping, smothering presence, and an obstacle in our path. It reorients us towards its own temporality instead of us bringing it into our own time. [10]

ʿAsfour distinguishes between the time of modernity and the time of *turāth*. This distinction is widespread in modern Arab discourse and it is often expressed in the dualism of *turāth* vs. contemporaneity (*muʿāṣara*). The dualism fixes *turāth* as a category of the past whose presence in modernity is at best anachronistic.

In the works of both the proponents and critics of *turāth* studies, *turāth* emerges as the equivalent of Islamic past knowledge, a category of the past proper which invites either a discourse of permanent rupture or some form of restoration. However, in considering the lengthy and ever-renewed modern Arab debates on *turāth*, this category of the past manifests as not simply an instrument of contemporaneity but rather as its byproduct whose substantive presence is fundamental to the self-understanding of contemporary Arab discourse. In *Desiring Arabs*, Joseph A. Massad writes:

> The term *turāth* refers today to the civilizational documents of knowledge, culture, and intellect that are said to have been passed down from the Arabs of the past to the Arabs of the present. It constitutes the living compendium of the past in the present. It is in a sense a time traveler. Yet despite its strong associations with a certain past, *turāth* is a *modern* Arabic term that did not exist as such in the past. When the term was used until the late nineteenth century, it referred to financial inheritance or legacy. *Turāth* as a concept is

[10] Gaber Asfour, "Muʿdilat al-Turath," *Ibdaʿ* 9, no. 11 (November 1, 1991): 69.

> then first and foremost a product of twentieth-century modernity, where, or more precisely, *when* it is located as an epistemological anchor of the present in the past.[11]

Turāth and modernity are then codependent categories of thought. *Turāth* qualifies a modern hermeneutical relationship to the pre-modern cultural past which unfolds within a perpetual effort of cultural self-understanding. The Moroccan thinker Abdelilah Belqaziz remarked that while questioning the relation between past knowledge and the present of culture is a universal gesture of societies in transition, it becomes dominant in cultural contexts in which, on the one hand, modernity is marked by colonial rupture and, on the other hand, historical consciousness suffuses society or as he phrased it "society breathes history."[12] More critically, Abdallah Laroui had argued that Arab societies are suffused with an image of the West which functions as an existential signifier imposing on Arab culture clashing demands of authenticity and progress.[13] *Turāth* stands for past Islamic experiences but only as these experiences are made intelligible and relevant by a certain postcolonial present. The question of *turāth* can be demarcated through certain historical parameters such as that of the passage from the colonial to postcolonial age but this demarcation obscures the contemporary nature of *turāth* when it is interpreted through the language of progress and anachronism. In a way, *turāth* is fundamentally a question of the significance of continuously lived cultural temporalities in modern globalized time.

More than any other factor, the understanding of the relation between the time of *turāth* and the time of the Arab present informs the polarized discussion on the value of *turāth* in an Arab modernity. This polarization cannot be simply explained through the Islamic versus secularist binary. For instance, while a great number of Arab Marxists have turned to a

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[11] Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17. Emphasis in the original.
[12] Abdelilah Belqaziz, *Naqd al-turāth* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-ʿArabiyya, 2014), 22.
[13] Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine: essai critique*, 15–17.

systematic study of classical Islamic heritage of the Abbasid period, certain revivalist strands of Islamic thought disavow this classical period in their advocation for the exemplarity of the first Muslim community.[14] Rather, it is the understanding of the time and life of culture which determines the various positions on *turāth*. While revivalist logic seeks to restore an original moment purified of historical continuum, modernist thought in its acultural account of modernity has its own assumptions in regards to the relation between lived and historical temporalities. Modernist reason, as Bonaventura de Sousa Santos remarked, shrinks the present and expands the future. By so doing, it identifies the movement of history and the life of culture as an "infinite overcoming of the present" through successive breaks with the ever-expanding archival past.[15] The view that the post-*Naksa* interest in *turāth* represents a form of intellectual regression reveals already an implicit notion of modern being as a process of linear accumulation and transcendence. These diverse projections of the meaning of *turāth* rest on a number of modernist assumptions regarding the temporalities of culture and tradition.

[14] In *Maʿālim fil-ṭarīq* (Milestones), the Islamic thinker and ideologue Sayyid Qutb writes, "The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, intended to create a community of believers whose heart, reason, imagination, and emotion are purified, a community perfectly formed and unaffected by any influence other than the divine path which is laid down in the Holy Quran. Because that community drank exclusively from a unique wellspring [the Quran], it secured for itself a privileged place in history. And then what happened? The wells became mixed. The wellspring which quenched generations of Muslims was mixed with Greek philosophy and logic, Persian mythology, Jewish and Christian theology, and the sediments of other civilizations and cultures. These were all fused with Quranic exegesis, theology, and jurisprudence. From that polluted wellspring drank successive generations of Muslims, one after another, so much so that the first community could never be repeated." Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿalim fi al-Tariq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1979), 13–14.

[15] Santos, "A Critique of Lazy Reason: Against the Waste of Experience and Toward the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences," 165.

In *Questioning Secularism*, Hussein Agrama explores the ecology of temporalities which involve the state, the modernizing intelligentsia, and religious tradition.[16] In its politicization of religious and social life amidst a permanent state of emergency and its deployment of sovereignty in ways that blur the boundary between secular and religious authority, the Egyptian state, for Agrama, does not present (as it is often maintained) an image of the European past in the sense of an incomplete case of secularization. It rather holds the image of a "potential secular future" for the Western democracies of the post "war on terror" and their ever-expanding national security politics.[17] As Agrama argues, a key element of the global modernist image in which the Egyptian state partakes is the naturalized assumptions of the discourse of the state and the intelligentsia vis-à-vis the life of tradition in society.

In its direction to the future, modernist thought, as Agrama remarks, emphasizes the elements of novelty and creativity which require tradition to undergo perpetual revolutionizing changes. While change is essential to the life of any tradition, its exclusive identification as based on radical breaks with the past and as being absent in practices of preservation and performance pathologizes the life of tradition in society. This notion of change projects continuity in the life of tradition as cultural paralysis. The continuity of tradition, whether in embodied practice or in intellectual labor, is conceptualized as anachronistic specifically because "modernist assumptions about time and creativity combine to collapse past authority, with its emphasis on emulation and repetition, into repression of the self's essential creative freedom."[18] If a practice is linked to and legitimated by a tradition of texts and concepts then it must be,

[16] Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[17] Agrama, 223.
[18] Agrama, 169.

according to these assumptions, a mechanistic performance with no creative content. As Agrama observes, this logic ignores the complex temporalities that tradition occupies and forecloses the possibilities of novelty in practices of actualizing a cultural identity. The charge of the incapacity for creativity in those who discourse with pre-modern traditions ignores the reality that, as Edward Shils writes, "all novelty is a modification of what has existed previously."[19]

Extending this analysis to post-*Naksa* studies of *turāth*, the proposition that such experimentations represent an intellectual regression applies the same set of modernist assumptions in regards to cultural production. These assumptions define the life of culture as built on accumulation and permanent breaks. Submitting such view to scrutiny reveals its reliance on the logic of the acultural account of modernity in its evolutionary framework. This position projects the modernity of culture as not only the process of shedding the limitations of past experiences but also the development along determined patterns of the modern.

2.3 *Turāth* between Cultural and Acultural Accounts of Modernity

The Syrian psychoanalytical critic Georges Tarabichi (1939-2016) put forward provoking premises on the post-*Naksa* rise of *turāth* studies. His assessment reflects, however, the reductive consequences of thinking of modernity in the way of the acultural account and its "subtraction stories." In his book *al-Muthaqqafun al-ʿArab wa-l-Turāth: al-Taḥlīl al-Nafsī li ʿUṣāb Jamāʿī* (Arab Intellectuals and their Cultural Heritage: Psychoanalyzing A Group Psychosis) published in 1991, he qualified this phenomenon as a case of "group psychosis" (*ʿuṣāb jamāʿī*) experienced

[19] Edward Shils, "Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): 122.

by the Arab intelligentsia.[20] Tarabichi argued that after the demise of the pan-Arab socialist project personified by Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) who passed away three years after the War (the symbolic father figure in Tarabichi's terms), Arab intellectuals were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and loss. They redirected themselves to *turāth* which they felt was marginalized by the 19th century *Nahḍa* project. *Turāth*, then, emerges as a "surrogate father" making up for the symbolic loss. In it, these intellectuals attempted to find answers for their present predicament and cure the "narcissistic wound" inflicted on their collective identity after the defeat (*al-tarmīm al-narjasī*). Tarabichi writes:

> The visible impotence of the effective father, in whose capacity Nasser was expected to act, produced an obsessive need not only to revive the memory of the protective historical father epitomized for four centuries by the Ottoman Sultan, but also to hold firmly to a more historically rooted and malleable symbolic father, i.e., the *turāth*. In fact, it never happened in the history of the Arabs that *turāth* was sought out as a protector and that it was assigned a magical power of the phallic type as it did with the regressive wave that overtook the Arab intellectual scene after the June War [of 1967].[21]

Tarabichi's argument develops in his study through countless Freudian motifs such as identifying *turāth* as the "mother's milk" of psychotic intellectuals who regressed to an "infantile stage."[22] These cynical images cannot, however, make up for the reductive consequences of applying clinical psychoanalytical terms, such as psychosis and obsessive neurosis, to the study of cultural discourse.

Tarabichi's discussion of the Arabs' historical relation to their *turāth* reveals the limitations of the psychoanalytical method and its lack of historical and philological depth. His analysis which transposes the modern notion of *turāth,* one that comes after colonial rupture, on

[20] Georges Tarabichi, *al-Muthaqqafun al-ʿArab wa-l-Turath: al-Tahlil al-Nafsi li ʿUsab Jamaʿi* (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1991).
[21] Tarabichi, 29.
[22] Tarabichi, 31.

the relation pre-modern Arabs had with their learnt traditions and customs which they experienced as part of their lived contemporaneity. Pre-modern Arabs never sought the protection of *turāth* because *turāth* in its modern sense did not exist. In its binary thinking that opposes *turāth* and modernity, Tarabichi's study is guided by the logic of the acultural account of modernity in that it treats certain key elements of Arabic cultural discourse as relics of the past that should have been cast aside.[23] As it identifies with an accumulatively linear cultural history (the becoming modern in a modular way), it pathologizes dialogue with pre-modern intellectual traditions as forms of intellectual regress and infantile dreams.

The trajectory of Tarabichi's intellectual enterprise and its contradictions symbolize, however, the ways in which *turāth* imposes itself as an object of Arab thought. In the 1990s, Tarabichi objected to the "pathological" investment in *turāth* and analyzed in the aforementioned work its psychological underpinnings. He also critiqued the ideological restoration of *turāth* and the selective application of Arab Marxists, nationalists, and Islamists to its history. This phenomenon he described in a second book published in 1993 as "the massacre" of *turāth* in contemporary Arab culture.[24] However, in the 2000s Tarabichi authored a number of studies on *turāth* that included, for instance, his works on the dynamics of reason and the miraculous in Islam,[25] and the differences and competition between the Islam of the Quran and the Islam of the

[23] Charles Taylor defines subtraction stories as "stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge." Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 22.
[24] Georges Tarabichi, *Madhbahat al-Turath fi al-Thaqafa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿasira* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1993).
[25] Georges Tarabichi, *al-Muʿjiza aw Subat al-ʿAql fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2008). In this work, Tarabichi argues that while the Quran acknowledges in the stories of past prophets their miraculous deeds, as far as Islam is concerned, it did not advance a notion of the miraculous as a supernatural and suprarational phenomenon. Instead, its miraculous is linguistic excellence and

Hadith.[26] This set of works came out of his critical engagement with the Moroccan thinker Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri and his refutation of al-Jabri's thesis that the decline of rationality in Islam was the product of the influences of non-Arab cultures. Going beyond this debate, however, Tarabichi continued to draw on Islamic cultural history in his writings on the problematics of democracy and secularism in the contemporary Arab world.[27] His thesis that the delving into *turāth* is an escapist defense mechanism that threatens Arab intellectuals with becoming out of sync with the global language of philosophy could not prevent him from anchoring his discourse in the cultural terrain of *turāth* actors and texts (even as *turāth* is called upon within a negative theology of modernity). His objection to the ideological application to *turāth* gave way to a selective reading of the history of Islamic theology and politics. In a way, the development of Tarabichi's relation to *turāth* affirmed the view of the Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944) who maintained that "there is no way to detach ourselves from the historical reality of *turāth* even if we tried. This reality, while appearing to be distinct and separate as it is connected to the past, is an essentially continuous reality which surrounds us from all sides and penetrates us from every direction."[28] Far from being an archive of pre-modern knowledge, *turāth* as Taha emphasizes, is a continuously lived Islamic reality.

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eloquence. However, prophet biographers and hadith scholars assigned to Muhammad countless miracles and institutionalized the miraculous as a source of knowledge and authority in Islam.

[26] Georges Tarabichi, *Min Islam al-Qurʾan ila Islam al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2010). In this book, Tarabichi expands his earlier thesis to explore how the Quranic emphasis a limited role of the prophet as a law-giver was eclipsed by the later growth of the "Islam of the hadith" in which the prophetic model became a source for an all-encompassing system of law (*sharīʿa*). This later growth was, according to Tarabichi, occasioned by the expansion of Arab caliphate during the Umayyad and the Abbasid period and their need to manage their ethnically diverse subjects.

[27] Georges Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: ʿan al-ʿIlmaniyya ka Ishkaliyya Islamiyya Islamiyya*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2008).

[28] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Tajdid al-Manhaj fi Taqwim al-Turath* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 1994), 19.

In his *Tajdid al-Manhaj fi Taqwim al-Turath* (The Renewal of Method in the Assessment of Cultural Heritage) published in 1994, Taha spoke of the meaning of *turāth* as not only a question of past knowledge but, most importantly, a shared language and an ethical repertoire informing the practice of contemporary Muslims. Taha emphasized the life of ideas in cultural spheres through their circulation in an intersubjective communicative space (*al-majāl al-tadāwulī*) that speaks a certain language and has its own parameters of the thinkable and unthinkable. As he writes, "The intersubjective space is the realm of communication and interaction between the members of society as enactors of a certain *turāth*. Thus, this realm rests on three pillars: religious belief, language, and [accumulated] knowledge."[29] *Turāth*, for Taha, is at the heart of the Arabic communicative space in the way of both transmitted past knowledge but most importantly a referential language through which the problematics of culture are posed. *Turāth* is then a key component of the Arabs' sense of historicity as well as their experiences of modernity.

A major problem that Taha identifies with modern Arab approaches to *turāth* is in its reduction to an issue of purely epistemological content which is then evaluated on the basis of its compatibility with modern knowledge or significance for political agendas. The question of *turāth*, of pre-modern literary and religious texts, is, for Taha, a question of moral and aesthetic guidance and the human dependency on cultural models of ethical and aesthetic excellence. As he notes, when texts of *turāth* are treated in a Salafist fashion as the decisive locus of doctrinal truth and as manuals informing purely ritual practice, they become "lifeless texts."[30] When they are read through a nationalist, socialist or liberal lens, they become political texts serving an

[29] Taha, 270.
[30] Taha, 27.

ideological function which distorts their historical meaning and cultural function. For Taha, much like El Messiri, texts of *turāth* are neither records of theoretical knowledge nor precursors of modern ideologies. They are humanist texts (*wiḥda taʾnīsiyya*) in a special sense of having a pedagogical moral effect on their reader. Taha writes:

> We mean by humanism allocating to the ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions significant roles in the development of the intellect. Hence, the humanist value of the [*turāth*] text lies in its practical [i.e., influencing modes of conduct] and moral impact on the reader rather than in any politicizing materialist value.[31]

For Taha, the humanist aspect of *turāth* lies not only in its direct pedagogical effects on the individual reader but also in the dialogical practices it allows within Muslim society. As he argues, the Islamic form of reason which constructed *turāth* is primarily a dialogical rationality (*ʿaqliyya ḥiwāriyya*), folding practices of analogical and demonstrative reasoning as well as non-reason-based modes of knowledge formation (such as spiritual intuition) within intersubjective encounters, debates, and collective deliberations.[32]

In this sense, Taha evokes a meaning similar to Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a "discursive tradition," a set of practice-authorizing discourses which extend historically through the dialogic or "narrative" relations between the lived realities of Muslims and their past experiences.[33] For Asad, the existence of multiple competing Islamic practices do not, then, signal the crisis of tradition and authority in Muslim societies as it is often held. It rather indicates the natural life of tradition that is sustained by different Islamic reasonings and their materialization into diverse practices. Similarly, for Taha the presence of *turāth* within modern Arabic thought is a natural extension of the dialectical relation of textual tradition and social life

[31] Taha, 27.
[32] Taha, 38.
[33] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

in which, on the one hand, texts impose themselves as sources of practice and, on the other hand, practice perpetually opens the text to new interpretive demands. Unlike Tarabichi, Taha considers the language of *turāth* a viable language for modern Arab thought, rejecting the notion that the modern is philosophically monolingual.

Taha and Tarabichi have two opposing visions of the place of *turāth* in the modernity of Arab thought. For Taha, the presence of *turāth* in the Arab intellectual scene is a direct result of the dialogical nature of thought itself both in an intersubjective and temporal sense. In an intersubjective sense, *turāth* is a recognizable means of communication with mass diffusion which allows ideas to have broader currency in society. As such, it is a valid language of the present. In a temporal sense, the presence of *turāth* results from the fact that the past does not lie in a spatial sense behind the present but is folded within it in constitutive dialogical ways. In the words of Sudipta Kaviraj, a past practice continues to live in the structures and new practices of modernity "existing within the newer one as 'memory' and substantially altering its operation."[34] *Turāth* is a type of memory as far as memory allows consciousness to recognize, manage, and retain present experiences. For Tarabichi, on the other hand, the presence of *turāth* in modern Arab thought is the product of a traumatic experience of modernity whose renewed crises push Arab intellectuals to seek the escapist route of resurrecting past languages. Taha and Tarabichi reflect the intellectual polarization in contemporary Arab thought around the significance of Islamic *turāth* in an Arab cultural modernity. Their opposition is emblematic of broader trends in the Arab intellectual scene.

[34] Sudipta Kaviraj, "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie: European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 3 (December 2005): 518–19.

In the sum of post-*Naksa turāth* projects then, the meaning of *turāth* emerges in diverse articulations. *Turāth* is the unfolding product of a complex historical identity. It is an anchoring cultural repertoire and an anthology of authentic literary motifs and styles, and to use the words of Belqaziz, an Arabic "existential reality."[35] On the other hand, it is considered a library that must become the archive of culture and a diagnostic site that reveals the trans-historical ills of Arabic subjectivity. To use Tarabichi's words, this library is the product of an Arab "pathological obsession with the past" (*maraḍ bi-l-māḍī*).[36]

The substance of *turāth* is of the past but this past, made of fragments of historical reality, emerges as a discursive formation which draws its coherence from the demands of the present. It is the ongoing crises of the present which give the ethical and the humanist contents of *turāth* their contemporary relevance. In the words of Wael Hallaq, *turāth* imposes on Arab intellectuals of different dyes "a theology of ethical reversion."[37] As Hallaq remarks, while the theology of progress reduces the present in global time to the impoverished state of perpetual transition, the Arabic present remains shot through with "the ethical time" of its Islamic experiences which operate as memories and ideals of ethical life. In this capacity, *turāth* thickens the present and resists its transitional function in modernity. While performing this role, it also offers its own articulations of time as a heterogenous and meaningful reality.

2.4 The *Turāth* of Philosophical Sufism from Marxist, Islamic, and Literary Perspectives

While Arabic studies of *turāth* are encyclopedic as they advance comprehensive narratives of the development of Islamic knowledge traditions, one can distinguish two broad

[35] Belqaziz, *Naqd al-Turath*, 11.
[36] Tarabichi, *al-Muthaqqafun al-ʿArab wa-l-Turath: al-Tahlil al-Nafsi li ʿUsab Jamaʿi*, 11.
[37] Wael B. Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of ʿAbdurrahman Taha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 10.

trends which are not easily separable but can be differentiated on the basis of their central questions. There are, on the one hand, studies which are animated by political concerns which include discussions of the history of Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) and governance weighed against questions of the state, secularism, and democracy in the Arab world. The focus of these studies is the development of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and sciences of prophetic traditions (*hadīth*). On the other hand, there are cultural studies whose concern is the analysis of the development of Islamic rationalities, the history of ideas in the Muslim world, the coexistence of different forms of Islam, and the relation between pre-modern knowledge traditions and modern ideologies. These studies often focus on the traditions of Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*), Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), Islamic theology (*kalām*), and the Arabic literary tradition (*adab*). These works certainly have their political stakes as they constitute an intervention in an intellectual field animated by the claims of secular and Islamic thinkers. However, they are oriented toward cultural change rather than legal or political reforms.

As elucidated earlier, Arabic reformulations of *turāth* are diverse and prolific. A schematic analysis of their content will not do justice to their history. This, however, does not impede the development of the present argument as it is focused on those traditions of *turāth* which occasion the consideration of Islamic notions of time. It is within this second trend of cultural studies that the issue of Islamic time emerges. More specifically, it is the conversation around the value of philosophical Sufism which occasions a discussion on the modern significance (or lack thereof) of Islamic concepts of time. While the next chapters will carry out the task of analyzing this debate, this chapter draws the broader image of the place of philosophical Sufism in twentieth century Arab thought.

Throughout the twentieth century, modern Arab thinkers and creative writers entertained a complex relation with Sufi thought. This relation progressed through multiple cycles of attraction and repulsion and included various practices of translation, appropriation, and critique. This history proves, as analyzed in the previous section of this chapter, that intellectual novelty depends on rootedness in discursive precedence. The encounter between Arab thinkers and Sufi ideas reflects that the popularization of new ideas often draws on local intellectual traditions which, while seeming to operate in only translational capacities, allow for key divergences between the European theory and its non-European versions.

2.5 The Sufi Tradition in Modern Arab Thought and Literature

Since the late nineteenth century *Nahḍa* period, Sufism has occupied a contentious place in modern Arab thought. Arab thinkers' critique of the social ethos of Sufism was often combined with an appreciation for its philosophical repertoire. Albert Hourani's study of modern Arab intellectual history addresses Sufism in the context of the struggle of *Nahḍa* thinkers, mainly Afghani (1838-1897) and ʿAbduh (1849-1905), against both the Ottoman court which promoted Sufi brotherhoods and the charge of backwardness leveled by Europeans.[38] The European encounter with the resistance of Sufi brotherhoods fixed Sufism in official European discourse as the fanatic Islam of "dangerous cults," while orientalist scholarship of the period constructed Sufism as an exotic religiosity of non-Islamic origin and nature.[39] These influences, along with an elitist hostility to popular culture, directed *Nahḍa* reformers to repudiate this centuries-long tradition of Islamic ethical learning. Both Afghani and ʿAbduh were in fact

[38] Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, 107.
[39] Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Sufism (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 8–9.

influenced by philosophical Sufism as reflected for instance in ‘Abduh’s composition of *Risalat al-Waridat* (the Epistle of Mystical Inspirations), a treatise dedicated to Afghani and in which ʿAbduh defends and synthesizes the Neoplatonic emanationist cosmologies of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Yet, their reformative agendas were firmly hostile to the legacy of Sufi thought.[40]

Still, the Sufi intellectual tradition remained active in the *Nahḍa* period through the works of lesser known thinkers. Sufism was not merely a popular religiosity against which *Nahḍa*’s secular and religious reformers revolted. It was also an intellectual tradition which alternative voices within the *Nahḍa*, such as the Lebanese chief judge and Sufi Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849-1932), employed to critique European-inspired reforms.[41] Nor was Sufism exclusively a tradition from which critics of modern ideas drew.

In the *Nahḍa* debates on the status of religion in the age of science, the Sufi scholar Hussein al-Jisr (1845-1909) emphasized the history of Islamic philosophical disciplines and the rational spirit of Islam.[42] In engaging with Arab popularizers of Darwinian theories, he critiqued the atheistic tendencies of evolutionary materialism but accepted a number of its premises on natural evolution as “compatible with the Quran.”[43] Al-Jisr represented the scholar of religion who is expected to draw on his tradition to negotiate the modern age. His adversaries, who were

[40] See Elizabeth Surriyeh’s discussion of Afghani and ʿAbduh’s contentious relation to Sufism, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1998), 86–102.
[41] See Amal Ghazal, *"'*Illiberal*'* Thought in the Liberal Age Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849–1932), Dream-Stories and Sufi Polemics against the Modern Era,*"* in *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 214–33.
[42] See Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 131–59.
[43] Elshakry, 141.

committed proponents of secular science, had no such obligation. Yet, Sufi thought inspired even the works of the secular proponents of evolutionary materialism that al-Jisr critiqued. In his defense of natural evolution, the Lebanese thinker Shibli Shumayyil (1850-1917) engaged pantheistic Sufi views that united the spiritual and the material towards a notion of existence as a dialectical evolutionary process.[44] Though Islamic thinkers and Arab secular intellectuals agreed in viewing Sufism as the cultural other of *Nahḍa* modernist project and the product of a long age of Islamic civilizational decay, they appropriated Sufi concepts to put their modern ideas (as well as ideas critical of colonial modernity) in circulation within their societies.

Despite the modernization vogue of the first half of the twentieth century and its demands for cultural revolution, Sufism continued to inspire Arab thinkers especially in their translation projects. Sufi concepts facilitated the adaptation of modern schools of European thought. More importantly, these concepts occasioned key divergences between these philosophies and their Arabic versions. A prominent example is Arab psychoanalysis of the first half of the twentieth century. As Omnia El Shakry demonstrated, it was the vocabulary and ideas of the soul attributed to al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111) and Ibn ʿArabi (d. 637/1240) which were used in the 1940s to erect the "Arab Freud" in the circle of Yusuf Murad (1902-1966), the forefather of Egyptian psychoanalysis.[45] Murad's translations of the unconscious (*al-lā shuʿūr*) and the ego (*al-nafs*) were sourced from the writings of Ibn ʿArabi on the mystical states of the soul. More importantly, it is the worldview of these writings which distinguished Murad's psychoanalytical model from the Freudian ego-centered one.

[44] Elshakry, 99–100.
[45] Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Through the concept of *nafs*, Murad and the generation of Egyptian psychoanalysts after him maintained a notion of "a spiritual core, alongside the presence of the unconscious (*al-lā shuʿūr*)." Arabic psychoanalysis was able to give a serious consideration of the religious experience and its role in the healthy life of the psyche.[46] Moreover, Ibn ʿArabi's concept of the unity of being (*wiḥdat al-wujūd*) that stresses the relation between essential unity and phenomenal multiplicity inspired Murad to develop what he termed "integrative psychology" (*ʿilm al-nafs al-takāmulī*) which focuses on the life of the self within the community. Murad defined the integrative subject as the unity of "psychic, bodily, and societal aspects."[47] For him, the totality of the integrative subject combines heterogeneous states, identifications, temporalities, and regressions which are ever present in the life of the psyche and cannot be accounted for within a developmental model of personality. These diverse influences oriented Murad to embrace a Bergsonian notion of lived time which rejects the "linear temporal conception of human personality" and instead views temporality as the interpenetration of "heterogenous yet holistic" states of consciousness which succeed each other but cannot be separated into a serial reality.[48] These qualities of psychic, experiential, and temporal multiplicity within unity are, for Murad, directed to facilitate the integration of the subject in an external reality which is irreducibly social. Murad then develops his model of psychanalysis in ways that suited the needs of Egyptian society in its emergence from colonialism including directing his studies of integrative psychology to help Egypt's industrialization plans.[49] Sufi ideas allowed

[46] El Shakry, 14–15.
[47] El Shakry, 24.
[48] El Shakry, 27.
[49] In his *Dirasat fi al-Takamul al-Nafsi* (Studies in Integrative Psychology), Murad addresses the role of psychological study and psychiatric expertise in supporting the industrializing plans of the state by helping produce competent workers and warns also against the focus on material progress in standard of living without paying attention to the social, spiritual, and ethical life of

Murad to engage in a highly creative process of translating the preeminent modern science of the individual into a science of collectivities. Similarly, for Arab existentialism of the 1960s, philosophical Sufism provided helpful terms to reflect on the meaning of being while guarding against the slide of existentialist thought into nihilism and the absurd.

Yoav Di-Capua has explored how Arab existentialism of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the work of the Egyptian philosopher Abdelrahman Badawi (1917-2002), made recourse to Sufi ideas to argue for the primacy of existence over essence.[50] He, however, does not fully flesh out the categories of Sufi thought which were repurposed by Badawi to develop his existentialist philosophy. It is the Sufi explorations of time and existence which constituted for Badawi an important source to develop his project and think authentic being after colonialism.

Influenced also by Heideggerian thought, Abdelrahman Badawi was a pioneer of existentialist philosophy in the Arab World who located the coordinates of an Arab existentialism in Sufi *turāth.*[51] For Badawi, the Sufi concepts of *wujūd* (existence/the divine), *waqt* (the present moment) and *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human) are key terms which can inspire the Arab venture into the modern study of being. Badawi synthesized the existential thrust of these terms in producing a notion of human existence as a privileged and individuated case of being whose "presentness" to itself directs it to realize its radical freedom and to open its possibilities for action.[52] Sufi concepts of time proved instrumental for Badawi's philosophy but

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the human being. See Yusuf Murad, *Dirasat fi al-Takamul al-Nafsi* (Cairo: Muʾassasat Hindawi, 1998).

[50] Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[51] See Muhammad Fadil Abbas, *'Abdurrahman Badwi : Ra'idan li-l-Falsafa fi al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir* (Beirut: Dar al-Rawafid al-Thaqafiya, 2013).

[52] Badawi summarizes his view in his Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Real actualized existence is the existence of individual being. Individuality is selfhood. Pure selfhood implies freedom and

the realization of their value came gradually in the development of his thought. In *al-Zamān al-wujūdī* (Existential Time), his doctoral dissertation published in 1945, Badawi praised the ways in which Sufis define time as an internal feature of individuated being but rejected the theistic content of this idea which ultimately undermines its existentialist potential.[53] In his 1947 book *al-Insaaniyya wa-l-wujuudiyya fi al-Fikr al-ʿArabi* (*Humanism and Existentialism in Arab Thought*), his approach changed as he affirmed Sufi writings on temporality to be useful pre-modern reflections on the anxiety of being.[54] Again, these terms not only facilitated the translation of a modern project, their substance made an impact.

What Badawi appreciated about Sufi ideas is how their focus on the affective and existential experience of the present moment succeeds to disclose the meaning of being as individual, free, and imbued with perpetual novelty. While the Egyptian philosopher insisted on existentialism as an atheistic philosophy of forging one's meaning without predetermined

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freedom means the presence of possibilities [for action]." ʿAbdurrahman Badawi, *Mawsuʿat al-Falsafa*, vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1984), 307.

[53] Badawi writes, "It is obvious that we cannot adopt this idea [the Sufi notion of being fully present to one's being] despite its depth. This is so because the ground of its premises is radically different than ours. This idea rests on the notion of an ultimate being which we have rejected. Being is only the realm of discrete *daseins*, there is nothing called ultimate existence (*al-wujūd*) or the ultimate being." ʿAbdurrahman Badawi, *al-Zaman al-Wujudi*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1973), 257.

[54] Commenting on Kamal al-Dīn al-Kāshi's definition of *waqt* as a present moment in which one is moved by anxiety (*qlaq*) to realize the immediate, unique, and self-contained reality of being, Badawi writes, "This is a proof of the extent to which [Sufis] have ventured in both psychological and existential inquiry. This makes our study of Sufi states and their articulations extremely beneficial on two counts: first to value these articulations on their own right and shed a modern light of existentialist analysis on them which would accentuate their richness and, second, to profit from them and be inspired by them in setting up our Arab existentialism which we aim to be a new [Arab] philosophic outlook on life and existence." ʿAbdurrahman Badawi, *al-Insaniyya wa-l-Wujudiyya fi al-Fikr al-ʿArabi* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1947), 99.

designs, the terms he sourced from Sufism retained a notion of existence as inherently meaningful and directed by a transcendental principle to human flourishing.

In his philosophy, Badawi initially theorized individuated being (*al-wujūd al-ʾānī*) as anatomized and self-sufficient. As he came to stress the relation between freedom and the imperative of action, he was forced to consider the connection between the self and the social. He thus made recourse to the theological term of *ṭafra* (leap) to argue for the innate desire of the self to overcome the nothingness (*ʿadam*) that separates it from others, and open to the possibilities of an action that necessarily has social ramifications. By so doing, and in the terms of Badawi that exhibit a clear Sufi influence, the self sets itself on a course of perpetual "self-elevation" (*taʿlu bi dhātihā*).[55] The Islamic terms that Badawi used left their influence in his work as far as stressing the meaningfulness and teleological nature of human existence (the perfect human). These terms echo in Badawi's poetic and autobiographic works in which his theological musings are influenced by Ibn ʿArabi's unity of being.[56]

Arabic thought of the first half of the twentieth century made use of the Sufi tradition within translational functions that proved to be productive of important divergences. Arabic literature of the same period, however, was less receptive to Sufi ideas since it functioned as *secularizing* aesthetic discourse which is set against discourses of the religious type. This

[55] Badawi, *Mawsuʿat al-Falsafa*, 1:314.
[56] Badawi writes, "I am a monotheist and my monotheism has the vitality of paganism. I am a pagan and my paganism has the purity of monotheism. My monotheism is the freedom of the Creator with His creation and their monotheism is submission to the Creator. Creator and the created, to me, are one" (6). In this text, he interprets Surat al-Nās (Quran 114) along the lines of his individualistic existential philosophy (16), quotes from al-Suhrawardi's metaphysics of light (25), and puts Sufi conceptions of God in conversation with the thought of the Austrian poet and romanticist critic of the Enlightenment Rainer Maria Rilke (126-134). ʿAbdurrahman Badawi, *al-Hur wa-l-Nur* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1951).

antagonism, which would be challenged in the second half of the twentieth century, is one of the markers of the difference between pre-modern *Adab* and modern Arabic literature.

In the first half of the twentieth-century, Arab writers approached the question of religion, and by extension Sufism, within the parameters of the traditional elements of society that modernity eventually abolishes. Arabic literature of this period, which Albert Hourani called "the liberal age" of Arab thought, was largely inspired by Europe developing along a diminishing influence of Islamic civilizational history. As Muhsin al-Musawi argues, the religious worldview was either absent from Arabic literary production of the period or present as an object of critique. Al-Musawi writes:

> In the process of encountering the rise of secular thought ever since the *nahḍah* (during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth), [Arabic writers] rarely speak of religion as a reality that also informs structures and currents of feeling. They consistently speak of it in a pejorative or condescending manner. Religion falls outside their immediate concerns. Its representation in narrative can serve to either debase or elevate it beyond its actual existence in the lives and practices of people.[57]

Al-Musawi notes that a master narrative of the Arabic novel of the first half of the twentieth century is the progress of the protagonist from "religiosity and traditional learning to a headlong engagement with secular ideology and thought."[58] This narrative often includes the motifs of the contrast between rural life and urban modernity, social progress through education, the experience of European metropole, the clash between religious belief and scientific truth, and the civilizational mission of the educated.[59] The literature of the Arabic liberal age locates the

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[57] Muhsin Jasim Musawi, *Islam on the Street: Religion in Modern Arabic Literature* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), XIX.
[58] Musawi, 15.
[59] To cite but a few examples, the Egyptian Taha Husayn's autobiographic trilogy *al-Ayyam* (The Days, published between 1926-1967) is bildungsroman of the progress of the writer from village life to his studies in France; Tawfiq al-Hakim's *ʿAwdat al-Ruh* (Return of the Spirit, 1933) recounts the life of Muhsin, the son of a feudal lord, who relocates form the rural Damanhur to Cairo to pursue his studies and comes to gain a nationalist consciousness as he witnesses the

religious worldview outside the parameters of literary subjectivity. In the few cases where religion is the central theme of the literary work, it functions as a cultural discourse that anchors modern ideologies such as nationalism. M. M. Badawi, for instance, noted how prophet biographies and devotional poetry of Egyptian literature of the 1930s and 1940s construct, instead of the traditional mystical image of Muhammad, a secularized image of the prophet as the wise leader of Arab tribes: a law-giver and an administrator of a successful polity.[60] As Badawi remarks, while Islamic history provides in these works anchorage for emerging pan-Arab ideals, Sufism, specifically, functions as the locus of the critique of religion as an ongoing "social reality."[61] In this period, Sufism figures prominently in the literary critique of authority and subjugation in Muslim societies. Anticlericalism in the literature of Christian Arab writers played out in narrative and poetic dramatizations of the abuses of Levantine priesthood.[62] In the literature of Muslim novelists, Pierre Cachia argued, it is mostly Sufi shaykhs and Quranic teachers which are portrayed as the locus of backward religious authority.[63] The thematics of religion in this period is either neglected or instrumentalized as cultural symbology with modern

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1919 revolution and rejects the feudal privileges of his family; the Syrian Shakib al-Jabri's (1912-1996) novel *Naham* (Greed, 1937), considered by many as the first modern Syrian novel, is set in Germany and dramatize the romantic life of a young German who ends up joining the Spanish Civil War; the Moroccan ʿAbdelmajid Ben Jalloun's *Fi al-Tufula* (During Childhood, 1949) dramatizes the relocation of the narrator to Marrakesh after spending the first half of his childhood in England and his struggles to readjust to life in Morocco after the death of his sister.

[60] Badawi's study focuses on the essays of Mahmud Taymur (1894-1973), the plays and biographies of Mohammed Hussein Haykal (1888-1956), Taha Husayn (1889-1973), Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987), Fathi Radwan (1911-1988), and ʿAbdurrahman al-Sharqawi (1920-1987). See M. M. Badawi, "Islam in Modern Egyptian Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971): 154–77.

[61] Badawi, 175.

[62] See for instance, Jibran Khalil Jibran's (1833-1931) novella *Yuhanna al-Majnun* ʿ(Yuhanna the Madman) in his collection *ʿAraʾis al-Muruj* (Nymphs of the Valley, 1905).

[63] See Pierre Cachia, "Freedom from Clerical Control: The Portrayal of Men of Religion in Modern Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26, no. 1/2 (1995): 175–85.

significance, but the ongoing substantive reality of religion and its social experience present the literary persona with images of a bygone past which the present must overcome. As Christina Philip argues, the critique of parental authority and especially the repudiation of the father figure often allegorized in this period "the death of God."[64] Because in the modern age of national literatures, the literary came to be conceptualized as the aesthetic expression of secular affect in "a world emptied of God," the age-long creative relationship between Arabic literature and Islamic humanism was challenged.[65]

As critics noted, there is a rupture between twentieth-century Arabic literature and its pre-modern predecessor *adab,* not only, and understandably, in terms of its forms and themes but also in the cultural function of literary discourse. Pre-modern *adab* denoted literature as *a type of knowledge and practice* which is conducive to "the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral refinement" of the human being.[66] This knowledge distinguishes the *adīb* (the writer/scholar) with the

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[64] In the aforementioned master narrative, the substantive experiences of religion are often portrayed as the ways of life of the parents against which the young protagonists revolt. See Christina Phillips analysis of the patriarch ʿAbd al-Jawwad and his relation to his son Kamal in Mahfuz's Trilogy. Christina Phillips, "The Secular Scripture," in *Religion in the Egyptian Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 77–110.

[65] Anthony Domestico writes, "High modernist engagement with religion was knotty, to say the least. Many modernists saw a tight, even causal relationship between the death of God and the birth of a new literature: modernism was the kind of literature that could be written—had to be written—in a world emptied of God." Anthony Domestico, "Modernism and Religion," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, ed. Mark Knight (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 39.

[66] As Bonebakker notes, the semantic applications of the term *adab* in pre-modern Arabic writing includes "the good attributes of the mind and the soul," ancestorial custom, ethical conduct, moral education, the philological sciences, and literary culture. These latter two meanings of *adab* become consolidated beginning with the second/eighth century. By the third/ninth century, the notion of *adīb* as an expert in multiple fields of Islamic knowledge emerges in opposition to the notion of *ʿālim* who is a specialized expert in one field of Islamic knowledge. Frantz Rosenthal argues that the notion of *adab* corresponds to the Greek *paideia* which denotes a general process of education that produces in the individual intellectual, aesthetic, and moral refinement. S. W. Bonebakker, "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres," in

command of the diverse Islamic sciences and with a cultural role of cultivating the humanist currents of religious discourse. Modern Arabic literature, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, moved away from the concept of *adab* as an intervention into Islamic debates and worldviews towards a notion of literature as creative individual expression which is distinct from the language of the masses and which functions as the pedagogical tool of modernizing intelligentsia. Nadia al-Bagdadi described how the modern transformation of *adab* into national literature took place during the imperialist age in which the hegemony of the European cultural model diminished the importance of the literacy of the writer in Islamic knowledge traditions and Arabic literary heritage.[67] The modernization discourses of the period projected religion as an

Abbasid Belles-Lettres, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16–30.

[67] In her insightful study of Arabic literary history, Nadia al-Bagdadi speaks of three periods of globalization for Arabic literature. First, "Oikumenical globalization [which] demarcates a period stretching from late antiquity to the twelfth century." It is a period in which Arabic literature develops as a multi-ethnic enterprise of creative compositions and translations following the establishment of Arabic as the lingua franca of the various Muslim dynasties. In this period, *adab* develops as a multi-disciplinary field which includes religious and secular sciences (with no strict differentiation between the two). The second period of globalization is modern described by al-Bagdadi as "expansionist globalization." It spans the imperialist age of the eighteenth to the twentieth century. It is the period of the rise of Arabic national literatures which are influenced by European literary models. These developments "coincide with a shifting understanding of *adab*, which becomes coterminous with belles-lettres and fiction." In this period, paradoxically, the Arabic language loses its status as a language of learning and high culture; it "sinks to the rank of backwardness." Arabic literary heritage loses its "normative role," Arab intellectual and students returning from European metropoles work to infuse Arabic literature with translations of European Art. Local traditions such as the writings of *maqāma*s (humorous short stories in rhymed prose) persist, but they are increasingly decentered from Arabic literary production. Finally, the third wave of "dispersal globalization", for al-Bagdadi, falls under the rubric of postmodern cosmopolitanism. It stretches over the second half of the twentieth century and marks the rise of exilic literature of Arab writers in European metropoles, the break with the concept of national literature, and the reinforcement of Arabic as a transnational lingua franca. Thematically, Arabic literature transcends the romanticism and realism of the first modern wave of globalization and becomes increasingly experimental. Nadia al-Bagdadi, "Registers of Arabic Literary History," *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (2008): 437–61.

impediment to individual creativity and social progress. In this liberal period of Arab thought, Sufism served to give shape to these anxieties and modernizing demands in literary texts.

The postcolonial realities of disenchantment with the nation-state model and its repressive politics, with modernization strategies and their violent outcomes, with the Western cultural model and its colonial effects shifted the mood of Arabic literary production of the second half of the twentieth century. The conviction that only secular discourse secures for literature a pedagogical role in society had already been shaken by the global mood of post-World War II critique of Enlightenment reason and its political forms. Allegorizing this critique within literary works, the figure of the Sufi shaykh, as Christina Philips remarks, emerges in Arabic texts of the midcentury not as the stock character of rural backwardness but as "a spiritual counterpart to modern life and an alternative route to truth."[68] The mood of self-critique of the post-*Naksa* period accelerated the literary turn to questioning the religious experience in Arab history and society. This experience was now treated as a complex phenomenon instead of the monolithic obstacle to modernity it used to be in the liberal period. In the late postcolonial phase, Arab writers faced the ideological vacuum created by the ebb of decolonial Arab socialism and the arising of new political realities in which Islamic discourse is appropriated by oppositional and insurgent movements, state bureaucracy, and global actors. In response, Arab writers drew on Islamic *turāth*, reenacting images, figures, and concepts sourced from Sufism, Islamic history,

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For the influence of modern educational institutions in transforming *adab* into the field of the aesthetic education of secular subjects in countries like Egypt, see Michael Allan, "How Adab Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institutions of World Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, no. 3 (2012): 172–96.

[68] Christina Phillips, *Religion in the Egyptian Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 189.

and philosophy that were applied to communicate a certain Islamic civilizational experience which they contrasted with official and insurgent forms of Islamic politics.

Rekindling the tradition of *adab*, postcolonial Arab writers increasingly locate their craft in the field of broader cultural intervention in which religion is treated as a substantive language of art. Certainly, secular hopes and aspirations continue to inspire the cultural projects of the majority of these writers until today.[69] However, the difference between the literature of the liberal period and that of the post-*Naksa* phase lies in the way in which *the horizon of secularity is no longer exclusively identified as the reproduction of the European model* but increasingly articulated as the excavation of the internal diversity of the Islamic tradition and the ways in which it balanced this-worldly matters with ethical ideals.

As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, Sufism emerges as a key element in post-*Naksa* literary negotiations of the experience of political crisis. Focusing on the contemporary Arabic novel, Ziad Elmarsafy argues that the literary use of Sufi themes signal Arab writers' search for a new aesthetic of individuality to express "a selfhood under siege" which is assaulted by repressive state apparatuses, neocolonial machinations, and Islamic revivalism.[70] Relying on Louis Dumont's historicization of the individual which the French anthropologist traces to early Indian ascetics who renounced social life to meditate on selfhood, or what Dumont called, "the extra-worldly individual," Elmarsafy views the post-*Naksa* literary turn to Sufism as a redefinition of the process of writing itself as a means of individual survival, a quasi-religious

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[69] Analyzing Naguib Mahfuz' fiction of the post-*Naksa* period in which Sufi themes figure prominently during a period of a growing visibility of Islamic oppositional currents, Muhsin al-Musawi remarks, "Maḥfūẓ transposes his early secular preferences into Islamic trends that were actively displacing those same secular ideologies." Musawi, *Islam on the Street: Religion in Modern Arabic Literature*, 75.

[70] Ziad Elmarsafy, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 5–6.

meditation on the self. While this retreat into the world of the self recalls ascetic seclusion, it nonetheless occasions reflections on the structural and collective foundations of individual suffering. Arab writers summon the thematics of Sufism to negotiate an individuality inhabited by collective concerns with the status of political fragmentation in the Arab world and the violences of neocolonial designs.

Sufi *turāth* provides post-*Naksa* Arab writers with culturally anchored form and content for literary experimentation. It also provides contemporary Arabic literary discourse with alternative temporalities to the linear vision of liberal Arab thought. This vision seemed in the first half of the twentieth century to drive Arabic literature to a future of cosmopolitan expression cleansed of religious claims and sub-narratives.[71] The adoption of Sufi concepts, poetics, and worldviews reconnects Arab thinkers and writers with a number of cultural temporalities that not only include Abbasid society and Muslim Spain but also the post-classical period of Islamic history which has been dismissed since the *Nahḍa* as the Islamic age of civilizational decay. Acknowledging these temporalities reflects Arab thinkers and writers' awareness that no global language of thought can make obsolete historical and civilizational experiences which even when enlisted within translational projects leave their substantive marks on the final product.

The broader trend of Arab thought and literature of the twentieth century has been to incorporate Sufi figures and concepts in translational and discursive capacities, adopting this language to accommodate modern schools of thought or to register a position on the issue of religion in society. Arabic literary discourse of the post-*Naksa* period embraces Sufi ideas within

[71] See Gamal al-Ghitani, *Muntaha al-Talab ila Turath al-ʿArab* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1997).

their critical *Adab* functions. Arab thinkers of the same period remain ambivalent on the uses and abuses of Sufi thought.

Arab thought of the post-*Naksa* period rereads the history of Islamic philosophy and Sufism in diverse projects that seek to reconstruct Islamic thought from within and bring it in line with a modern ideological narrative. Sufism remains an element of major contention but comes to symbolize a temporality of revolutionary subversiveness or insidious enchantment which can either inspire or impede modern Arabic thought.

2.6 Sufism and Islamic Philosophy in Post-*Naksa Turāth* Projects

Post-*Naksa* studies of *turāth* produced diverse arguments on the historical and intellectual significance of Sufism. My consideration of these works does not purport to be exhaustive. I rather highlight a duality in the broad trends of *turāth* studies through competing readings of the intersected trajectories of Islamic philosophy, theology, and Sufism. These opposed trends constitute the intellectual ground of the case studies that will be analyzed in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

In exploring this body of post-*Naksa* Arab scholarship, the different approaches to the Sufi intellectual tradition can be distinguished along two lines. On the one hand, one notes the valorization of Sufi ideas by cultural materialist trends in their focus on the contributions of Sufi actors to historical Muslim societies and politics. On the other hand, there is the hostility of rationalist trends of Arab thought to Sufi ideas within both secular and religious reform projects. These latter projects seek to excavate, reconstruct, and restore the discourse of reason in the history of Islamic knowledge traditions. The textual approach leads them to different conclusions

than the first trend espoused by Arab Marxists who insist on the social and political life of rational and non-rational discourses in Islamic history.

In 1971, the Syrian Marxist Tayyib Tizzini (1934-2019) published his *Mashruʿ Ruʾya Jadida li-l-Fikr al-ʿArabi fi al-ʿAsr al-Wasit* (A New Perspective on Arabic Thought in the Classical Age of Islam).[72] In this work, Tizzini explores how the metaphysical "idealist" inquiries of important strands of Islamic philosophy and Sufism developed to affirm the centrality of matter and the material world in human existence. His project, which expanded into a multiple-volume publication entitled *Min al-Turath ila al-Thawra* (From Heritage to Revolution) makes the case for the method of cultural materialism in the study of Islamic history.[73] Its central aim, however, is to locate the vestiges of materialist philosophy that can inspire the cultural projects of modern Arab Marxism within pre-modern Islamic thought.

In his book, Tizzini surveys the emergence of theories of matter from the pre-Socratic Heraclitus to Aristotle (d. 322 BC) which were passed later to Muslim thinkers through the Graeco-Arabic translation movement. Turning to the Islamic context, he explores the growth of the agrarian and mercantile base of Muslim societies, the rise of demand for translation of technical and scientific works, and the spread of ontological theories premised on the eternality of matter and the empiricism of natural sciences through the encounter with Greek and Indian atomism and Aristotelian physics. This trend, according to Tizzini, reached a watershed moment with Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), whom he describes using Spenglerian terms as the bearer of the "progressive Faustian spirit" in classical Islam and continued in Andalusia with Ibn Tufayl (d.

[72] Tayyib Tizzini, *Mashruʿ Ruʾya Jadida li-l-Fikr al-ʿArabi fi al-ʿAsr al-Wasit* (Damascus: Dar Dimashq, 1971).
[73] Tayyib Tizzini, *Min al-Turath ila al-Thawra*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1978).

580/1185) and Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198).[74] The trend culminated in the discovery of historicity and the objective laws of the movement of history with Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) and al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1442).

Among other themes, Tizzini explores how the Neoplatonic theory of the emanation of the world from the One was interpreted in Islamic philosophy and Sufism in ways that annulled the duality between form and matter and elevated matter to be an ontological necessity for the actualization of form.[75] While for Aristotle, prime matter is passive and form is the active principle, for Ibn Sina the effectivity of form is equally supported by the predispositions and receptivity of matter which in itself constitutes an active force. This development led to the recognition of the material world as having a dialectical ontological continuity with form and as being imbued with creative energy. According to Tizzini, the contribution of Ibn Sina lies in abolishing the differentiation between active form and passive matter making both entities codependent and agential.[76]

The dialectical continuity between the material world and the theophany of forms finds, according to Tizzini, a Sufi expression in the concept of the "unity of being" of Ibn ʿArabi (d. 1240) and his followers.[77] Ibn ʿArabi's doctrine, which defines God as pure existence (*wujūd*) whose names effuse being, projects the world as a perfected image of the divine realities existing in a permanent dialectic of self-disclosure with God (this theory will be expounded in Chapter Four).[78] For Tizzini, however, the highest expression of this philosophical focus on the world of

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[74] Tizzini, *Mashruʿ Ruʾya Jadida li-l-Fikr al-ʿArabi fi al-ʿAsr al-Wasit*, 302.
[75] See for instance his discussion of al-Farabi's cosmology and his positions on matter, Tizzini, 283–301.
[76] Tizzini, 323–29.
[77] Tizzini, 232.
[78] Thus, Ibn ʿArabi writes in *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), "When we witness Him we witness ourselves, and when He witnesses us, He witnesses Himself. We do not doubt that we

matter lies in Ibn Khaldun's inquiries into the laws of the self-regulating motion of the historical (material) world.[79] In his study, Tizzini advances a nuanced position on the relation between *falsafa* and *taṣawwuf*. In his objection to al-Ghazali's (d. 504/1111) critique of the philosophers, Tizzini denounces the purely other-worldly mysticism.[80] In his positions on Ibn ʿArabi and his followers, the Syrian Marxist valorizes the doctrine of the unity of being which bestows other-worldly perfection on the world of matter. The Arab Marxist approach to *turāth*, to which Tizzini tremendously contributed, developed further through the works of the Lebanese Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987) who after fourteen years of study in the *hawza* (Shiʿī seminary) of Najaf in Iraq embraced communism.[81]

In 1978, Muruwwa published his four-volume study *al-Nazaʿat al-Madiyya fi al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya al-Islamiyya* (Materialist Tendencies in Arabic Islamic Philosophy).[82] In it, he analyzed Islamic history from the late pre-Islamic period to the eleventh century focusing on the ways in which changes in economic and political relations contributed to key developments in Islamic theology and philosophy. In the first volume of his study, Muruwwa critiqued what he called "Arab Bourgeois solutions to the issue of *turāth*" which include in the case of Arab liberals the requirement of radical break with *turāth* and in the case of Arab Salafists the desire to transpose a reductive vision of *turāth* on contemporary Arab affairs.[83] He also studied the

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are multiple in number and kind. Though there is one reality which unites us, our knowledge is decisive that there are differences that distinguish us from each other. Otherwise, there could not be multiplicity in unity. " Ibn ʿArabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (Cairo: Dar Afaq li-l-Nashr, 2016), 52.

[79] Tizzini, *Mashruʿ Ruʾya Jadida li-l-Fikr al-ʿArabi fi al-ʿAsr al-Wasit*, 405–10.

[80] Tizzini, 331–38.

[81] See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Deconstructing the Modular and the Authentic: Husayn Muroeh's Early Islamic History," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (2008): 239–59.

[82] Husayn Muruwwa, *al-Nazaʿat al-Maddiyya fi al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1978).

[83] Muruwwa, *al-Nazaʿat al-Maddiyya fi al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya al-Islamiyya*, vols. 1, 16.

racial theories of orientalism and the ways they influenced Arab intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century.

While Tizzini's study explores materialist theories in Islam, Muruwwa focuses on the relation between economic life, political struggles, and the development of ideas.[84] His project explores the intellectual currents of dissent in Islamic history that were in tune with the implicit collectivist ideology of the masses which, according to him, continues to be the base for Arab socialist discourse despite Arab political fragmentation and the entrenchments of capitalism.[85] For instance, in his study Muruwwa links the growth of proto-Shi'te oppositional groups and the proliferation of their messianic salvation theologies in Baghdad and Khurasan to the changes in land allocation in the early Umayyad period under the caliphate of Muʿawiya (d. 60/680). In contrast with the earlier policy of the first three Muslim caliphs which consisted in observing local property rights in conquered cities and building new cities for Arab troops, Muʿawiya encouraged the settlement of Arab troops in the existent cities of the conquered areas, dispossessing local residents. As this example proves, the birth of new ideas is occasioned by material structural changes.[86]

In relation to Sufism, Muruwwa traces its development from the voice of an individualistic ascetic movement in the Islamic polities of the ninth and tenth centuries to its later

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[84] To use R. J. Abisaab's words, "*Al-Nazaʿat*'s importance lies in bringing political economy to bear on the study of turath as a dynamic historical enterprise that has Islamic and universal human facets." Abisaab, "Deconstructing the Modular and the Authentic: Husayn Muroeh's Early Islamic History," 240.

[85] Muruwwa defines the aim of his project as "revealing the historical dimensions of the Arab revolutionary movement of the present in the sense of revealing the unity between its past and contemporary dimensions, and bestowing an authentic quality on its contemporaneity. That is to say, to reach a vision in which authenticity and contemporaneity are reconciled and their alleged incompatibility which has been touted by colonial and Arab bourgeois discourse is negated." Muruwwa, *al-Nazaʿat al-Maddiyya fi al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya al-Islamiyya*, vols. 1, 36.

[86] Muruwwa, vols. 2, 16–17.

more developed social forms in which it produced a consistent critique of wealth and power in Muslim societies and popularized the metaphysics of the unity of being which divinized the human.[87] The Lebanese Marxist rejects the idealist interpretation of Sufism as the universal mystical dimension of religions and, instead, emphasizes its material reality in Muslim societies as a prominent social force instead of a private spiritual phenomenon (such as in the history of Christianity for instance).[88]

Muruwwa's interpretation of the historical role of Sufism influenced the Iraqi historian Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998) who authored a number of *turāth* studies on the sociopolitical history and function of Sufi discourse in pre-modern Muslim societies. Al-ʿAlawi published in 1988 *Min Qamus al-Turath al-Islami* (From the Anthology of Islamic Heritage),[89] in 1995 *Shakhsiyyat ghayr Qaliqa fi al-Islam* (Non-Anxious Figures in Islam),[90] and in 1997 *Madarat al-Sufiyya* (*Sufi Orbits*).[91] In these works, which will be examined closely in the final chapter of this dissertation, he focused on ascetic figures in Islamic history whose significance lies in instituting the opposition against political and economic elites as a primary stage in spiritual training.

Another Marxist, the Lebanese Mahdi ʿAmel, addressed the ideological role of the Sufi tradition in pre-modern Arab societies. In his 1988 work *Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmi* (The Critique of

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[87] Muruwwa writes, "Sufism began in its inaugural period as a nihilist ascetic practice (*zuhdan maslakiyyan ʿadamiyyan*) and developed to become an intellectual oppositional stance in two ways: religious through its practices of reinterpretation (*taʾwīl*) and political in denouncing social injustice and oppression. Then we will see later how, in its highest level of development, it became a new form of Arab philosophical consciousness during the Medieval period." Muruwwa, vols. 3, 65–66.
[88] Muruwwa, vols. 3, 43-45.
[89] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *Min Qamus al-Turath al-Islami* (Damascus: al-Ahali li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr, 1988).
[90] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *Shakhsiyyat Ghayr Qaliqa fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 1995).
[91] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *Madarat al-Sufiyya* (Damascus: Markaz al-Abhath wa-l-Dirasat al-Ishtirakiyya, 1997).

Everyday Thought), ʿAmel analyzed the de-historizing notion of Islamic and Western essences and how they function in contemporary Arab nationalist, Islamist, and liberal discourses. He argued that the critique of religion must not be a critique of systems of belief but must focus on the history of the embodied experience of religion within specific social formations and their material effects.[92] ʿAmel views Sufism as the popular form of religiosity which existed outside the parameters of scholarly and institutional Islam and in opposition to them. This perspective allows ʿAmel to interpret the revolt of Sufism against rationality as fundamentally the revolt against politically sanctioned and economically dominant forms of rationality and the social orders they legitimate. He writes:

> To use contemporary political vocabulary, not every rationalist thought is per force a 'progressive' thought. Nor is every anti-rationalist thought necessarily 'regressive.' On the contrary, the opposition of rationality, within certain circumstances, can have a 'progressive' dimension especially when the reason opposed is the reason of political tyranny and its establishment. [93]

In this specific sense, ʿAmel designates the role of Sufi movements and ideas in the history of Muslim societies as "revolutionary."[94] He advocates this assessment while maintaining a persistent critique of the idealist otherworldly dimensions of this tradition.[95]

In Arab Marxist explorations of *turāth*, Sufism is then redefined as the subversive temporality in Islamic civilizational history which can lend itself to projects that seek to dislodge the cultural hold of capitalist time on Arab thought. Maxime Rodinson calls this effort Arab leftist "concordat" as a "systematic reinterpretation" that highlights the links between trends in

[92] See Mahdi ʿAmel, *Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmi* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1988).
[93] ʿAmel, 251.
[94] ʿAmel, 254.
[95] ʿAmel, 277.

Islamic knowledge and society and modern leftist ideologies.[96] Emphasizing the similarities between certain Islamic experiences and Marxist ideas is not purely an invention of post-*Naksa* intellectuals. This gesture was initiated by their critics decades ago. It was the Grand Mufti of Egypt Shaykh Hasanayn Makhluf who in the 1950s objected to communism on the grounds that it is a continuation of the gnostic and subversive philosophy of medieval Ismaʿili Shiʿism.[97]

In opposition to Arab Marxists, a number of contemporary Arab thinkers who focus on rationalist philosophy and theology objected to the Sufi tradition and its harmful effects on Islamic civilizational progress. In his *Tajdid al-Fikr al-ʿArabi* (The Renewal of Arab Thought) published in 1971, the Egyptian philosopher Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (1905-1993) distinguished between three groups in the history of Islamic knowledge production: first, the rationalists who include Mutazilite theologians and Muslim philosophers; second, the anti-rationalists or spiritualists who include Sufis and Shias; and, third, the pragmatists or behaviorists who include Sunni jurists, hadith scholars, and theologians.[98] The crisis of rationality in Arab societies, for Mahmoud, derives from the fact that the spiritualists have succeeded to spread and canonize a platonic vision of existence in Islamic thought. This vision ignores the particulars of lived experience and their causal relationships and searches for eternal forms which lie behind the particulars.[99] The spiritualist trend in Islamic culture manifests in Sufi pantheistic philosophy, in Shi'i hermeneutics which focus on latent meanings of the Quran, and in the dominance of poetry

[96] Maxime Rodinson, *Marxism and the Muslim World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 104.
[97] Rodinson, 103.
[98] Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, *Tajdid al-Fikr al-ʿArabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1971), 144–45.
[99] Mahmoud writes, "That is the Arabic position in its essence. You might say it is a Platonic rather than an Aristotelian stance. It is the stance of those who attribute permanence to the Heavens and corruptibility to the worldly for the originals of things are in the Heavens while on earth there are only shadows." Mahmoud, 294.

in the arts of Muslim societies (which is the privileged literary expression of unreason). The Platonic Sufi vision which colors the Arabs' outlook on the world is reflected in the Arabic language which expresses particulars only through recourse to universals. That is to say, for Mahmoud, Arabic speakers communicate about a given topic with a great deal of proverbs, aphorisms, poetic verse, and religious expressions. Eloquence then is the sign of the lack of rational argument and the inability to see reality for what it is. The reform of Arab thought must begin by the reform of the Arabic language and, consequently, the ways Arabs express and relate to their world.[100]

In his text, Mahmoud calls for the "rebirth" of the Arab person through a number of measures, including a new transparent and direct relationship between the linguistic sign and its "real" referent, the transformation of thinking ethics deontologically (as ethics of duty) to thinking ethics consequentially (as ethics of happiness), the embrace of naturalist science, and the restoration of the rationalist traditions of Islam.[101] The restorative work that Mahmoud envisioned was carried out by other thinkers who embraced the Egyptian philosopher's antagonistic position to Islamic Platonic and Neo-Platonic traditions.

The Egyptian scholar Hasan Hanafi (1935-2021) is the author of a prominent *turāth* project pertaining to what he has termed, after the Iranian Revolution, the "Islamic left." According to Hanafi, the Islamic left is a continuation of the legacy of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

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[100] Mahmoud affirms, "I believe that no nation is able to accomplish a transformative intellectual revolution without beginning by a deep revision of its language and the ways of its usage. For language is thought and the change in one cannot occur without the change in the other. It happens that an epoque becomes dominated by a Sufi religious spirit that seeks the otherworldly, the hidden behind the manifest, the permanent behind the transient, the absolute behind the changing particular, the remaining (*baqāʾ*) behind the annihilation (*fanāʾ*). Then, this spirit becomes manifested in the ways people express themselves in their language." Mahmoud, 205–6.

[101] Mahmoud, 297–302.

(1838-1897) who emphasized the harmony between the Islamic worldview and the cultivation of modern sciences, while developing an anti-imperialist Islamic agenda.[102] What distinguishes Hanafi's work from the likes of Tizzini and Muruwwa is his commitment to liberation through the reconstruction of rationalist thought in the various Islamic disciplines instead of the excavation of Islamic materialist or revolutionary ideologies. In channeling this effort towards a notion of liberation from the anti-rationalist elements of tradition and colonial domination, Hanafi acknowledges his indebtedness to Latin American liberation theology, especially the thought of the Colombian priest and activist Camilo Torres Restrepo (1929-1966).[103]

Hanafi's major work *al-Turath wa-l-Tajdid* (Heritage and Renewal), published between 1980 and 1988, includes five volumes in which Hanafi sought to reconstruct the rationalist tradition in Islam as manifested in Mutazilite theology, peripatetic Islamic philosophy, and the pragmatic discourse in Maliki jurisprudence which rests on the notion of the public good (*maṣlaḥa*). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Hanafi embraced an adversarial position on Sufism and its Neoplatonic philosophies which he considered to be part of the "Islamic right;" the base of superstitious, authoritarian, and fatalist sentiments in Muslim societies.[104] Sufism in his thought occupies the temporality of reactionary nihilism. It condenses the elements in Islamic

[102] Hanafi writes, "The Islamic left is the development of religious reform which we undertook in the last two hundred years not only in opposing the calamities of our age, i.e., colonialism, aristocracy, capitalism, social backwardness and political oppression, as in the fashion of al-Afghani, but also in reconstructing our religious thought from the inside. This reconstruction follows the foundational work of Ibn Rushd in philosophy, the Muʿtazila in the principles of religion, al-Shatibi in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, Ibn Khaldun in history, and Ibn Taymiyya in Islamic law." Hasan Hanafi, "Madha Yaʿni al-Yasar al-Islami," *al-Yasar al-Islami* 1, no. 1981 (n.d.): 16–17.

[103] Hanafi was influenced by the Latin American liberation theology tradition and specifically the thought of the Colombian Catholic priest and activist Camilo Torres Restrepo. See John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, "Hasan Hanafi: The Classic Intellectual," in *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

[104] Hanafi, "Madha Yaʿni al-Yasar al-Islami," 22–24.

thought which are hostile to the cultivation of rational sciences and turns social vices, such as dependence on others (*tawākul*), into religious virtues. In its way of turning religion into a matter of individual psychological compensation, it "transformed Islam from a horizontal movement in history to a vertical movement into the other worldly, from a telos in history to a telos outside of history."[105] In his later works however, Hanafi argues for the possibility of reconstructing the Sufi tradition to contribute positively to Islamic liberation theology.[106] This reform consists in the preservation of the moral literature and religious psychology of Sufism and the abolishing of its metaphysics, occult sciences and, especially, its social networks. Even in this later stage of reconciliation, Hanafi, in opposition to Arab Marxism, views the social history of Sufism as the history of the age of Islamic civilizational decline which can offer no insight into the ways in which different forms of embodied religiosity impact social and political orders.

Hanafi's dedication to the rationalist trends of Islamic philosophy and theology and Mahmoud's tripartite divisions of *turāth* resonate with the structuralist school of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) whose epistemological critique of pre-modern Islamic thought took center stage in the last three decades of Arab intellectual debates. Al-Jabri's work builds on Mahmoud's diagnostics of the ailments of rationality in Islamic history and echoes certain tendencies in Hanafi's thought especially the partisanship for peripatetic Islamic philosophy. His arguments widen the gap between the post-*Naksa* Marxist and rationalist readings of Sufi *turāth* more so than Mahmoud and Hanafi. Al-Jabri's structuralist approach projects the history of religious phenomena as the history of structures of thought and competing epistemes, making historical actors and conditions secondary to the development of ways of thinking. More

[105] Hanafi, 23.
[106] Hasan Hanafi, *Min al-Fanaʾ ila al-Baqaʾ: Muhawala li Iʿadat Binaʾ ʿUlum al-Tasawwuf* (Cairo: Dar al-Madar al-Islami, 2009).

importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, al-Jabri's work, while participating in the circulation of diverse arguments on the place of Sufism in modern Arabic and Islamic thought, raises the question of Sufi *turāth* through the notions of cultural temporality and competing concepts of time.

Al-Jabri's structuralist school, which this dissertation reads closely in the next chapter, both occupies a defined place within the intellectual binaries of post-*Naksa* approaches to Sufism and stands symbolically as an exemplar of the larger trends of the self-critical endeavors of the period. His arguments condense the diverse elements of the post-*Naksa* paradigm of Arab thought discussed in the first two chapters and which have been hitherto assembled from the works of multiple thinkers. In al-Jabri's texts, one finds the clearest expression of the post-*Naksa* discourse of Arab failure in modernity, the notion of the inability of the "Arab mind" to grasp linear progress in historical time, and the rationalist hostility to temporal heterogeneity. This is so because his operative notion of rationality, which is modeled on Enlightenment reason, "claims to be the only form of rationality and therefore does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material."[107] Al-Jabri's discourse allows a close reading of how the acultural account of modernity reads the plurality of time concepts in a given cultural sphere.

Conclusion

Post-*Naksa* Arab thought inquired into the questions of historical continuity versus rupture, into the notions of living time as a homogenous flow or a grouping of unique events, and

[107] Santos, "A Critique of Lazy Reason: Against the Waste of Experience and Toward the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences," 165.

meditated upon the value of pre-modern Islamic knowledge traditions. Arab thinkers developed a view of *turāth* which oscillates between, on the one hand, the notion of transposing the past on the present and, on the other hand, the view of living the present as constitutively interpenetrated by past experiences. The various *turāth* projects of the period opened the Islamic library to contemporary Arab cultural production. Arab thinkers and creative writers reevaluated the different facets of Islamic cultural history, focusing on Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and the pre-modern *Adab* tradition.

The Sufi intellectual tradition emerges in these projects in diametrically opposed images. While Arab Marxists focused on the historical, social, and philosophical difference that Sufism occasioned and which allows this tradition to occupy a subversive and subaltern cultural temporality, Arab rationalists viewed Sufi ideas as expressions of the decay of the rational impulses in Islamic civilization. The cultural temporality of Sufism is then defined as one of reactionary anachronism and of timeless and mindless religiosity.

Post-*Naksa* projects build on attitudes to Sufism which had been in circulation in the Arabic intellectual scene since the *Nahḍa* period. Sufism is often repudiated but its concepts are appropriated. The continuity of the impact of this intellectual tradition on Arabic thought is thus ensured by both its sympathizers and detractors who make the "timeless" tradition timely. Sufism is a key entry point into "the problem space" of pre-modern Islamic concepts of time. The remainder of this dissertation will perform a close reading of representative case studies of Arab thinkers who engage deeply with these concepts, coping in various ways with the intersection of secular history, linear capitalist time, and Islamic temporalities.

Chapter 3: Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, "Arab Reason," and Timeless Sufism

Examining Arabic time and the effects of Islamic temporalities on Arab thought is one of the major culturalist themes of post-*Naksa* self-critique. Questioning the temporality of culture and the function of historical tradition in modernity occupied the thought of Arab Marxists, secular and Islamic rationalists, and creative writers as they examined Islamic cultural heritage (*turāth*) armed with different understandings of cultural reform after crisis. Whether in their critiques of the Arabic sense of history and society or in their re-readings of the place of *turāth* in modernity, Arab thinkers addressed Islamic temporalities and their impacts on Arabic cultural progress.

The pre-modern view of time as a heterogenous reality, in which multiple time systems are transposed on the moment of the now, emerges as a challenge to modernist thought and its obsession with progress. As this chapter demonstrates one consequence of the refusal to grant concepts of heterogenous time their due philosophical merit is the designation of entire pre-modern traditions as timeless and defective in relation to thinking the value of time in human existence. It is through examining the premises of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) in light of Henry Bergson's philosophy of time that I tackle, in a deeper sense, Arab modernist reductionism in relation to Islamic concepts of time. Through its case study, this chapter demonstrates how the modernist suspicion of heterogenous time rests on internalized racial and evolutionary theories and how its concept of rationalism leads to reductive conclusions in relation to language and cultural history. Despite his oft-stated preference for cultural authenticity, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri enacts the modality of "subtraction stories" in its demands for the eliminations of the confining horizons of culture and the convergence into post-

Enlightenment temporality. Along the line of the author's nationalist ideology, these confining horizons of Islamic culture have ethnic demarcations.

This chapter focuses on the intellectual project of the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) and explores his critique of "Arab reason" and the effects of the Arabic language and Islamic views of time on Arabic culture. For the Moroccan philosopher, enchanted temporalities constitute the internal agent that impedes Arabic cultural progress. In the exemplary narrative of the development of philosophy in the Islamic world, philosophical Sufism emerges as the othered self which has corrupted the original Graeco-Arabic project. Only through its systematic repudiation can Arabic Islamic culture emerge into the modernity of critical thought. While al-Jabri's arguments on Arab reason, Islamic philosophy, Sufism and their respective temporalities will be addressed in this chapter, his reductionism in relation to Sufi concepts of time will be further challenged in the rest of this dissertation in two ways. First, in Chapter Four, I provide evidence for the contribution Sufi thought to the valuation of time in the pre-modern. In Chapter Five, I address Alternative Arab reformulations of Sufi time.

3.1 Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri: Life and Works

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's critique of "Arab reason" have secured for him a prominent position in Arabic *turāth* studies. According to the Syrian scholar Muhyiddin Subhi, al-Jabri grants his readers a comprehensive "map" of the historical trajectory of the learnt traditions of Islam.[1] For more critical voices like Georges Tarabichi, al-Jabri's narrative represents "an

[1] In his interview of al-Jabri, the Syrian writer Muhyiddin Subhi notes, "After Dr. al-Jabri divided Arabic [cultural] heritage into the hermeneutical system (*al-niẓām al-bayānī*), the gnostic system (*al-niẓām al-ʿirfānī*), and the demonstrative system (*al-niẓām al-burhānī*), the Arab researcher was granted clear-cut concepts about heritage, and a map that allows him to perceive

epistemological obstacle" for the new generation of Arab thinkers.[2] Whether as admirers or critics, the majority of Arab intellectuals had to wrestle with al-Jabri's arguments. In this sense, the Moroccan scholar occupies an "author function" that Michel Foucault called "initiators of discursive practices" who "produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts."[3] The significance of writers such as al-Jabri is that their discourse and method do not only, as Subhi remarked, equip others with conceptual tools to produce similar texts, they also occasion possibilities of discursive divergences. The Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha and the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi represent a testament to al-Jabri's author function. Both thinkers were influenced by his project, but diverged from his premises.

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri was born in 1935 in the Berber town of Figuig in Eastern Morocco. In his autobiography, *Hafriyyat fi l-Dhakira min Baʿid* (Mining Memory from Afar), he describes his coming of age through the experience of three educational spaces. He first frequented the *masīd* (the Quranic school) which reflected the "collectivist" and emotive religious culture of the town. He then attended the French primary school which introduced him to Western-style education and, as he phrases it critically, "the individualistic tendency of European liberal heritage."[4] It was the third space of the *al-Nahda al-Muhammadiyya* network of schools which left a deep impact on the young scholar.[5] The local Figuig branch of the school was founded by Haj Mohammed Faraj who was a follower of the prominent figure of Moroccan

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where other intellectuals are located as well as how and why." Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri and Muhyiddin Subhi, "Hiwar maʿa al-Jabri: Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi fi Mashruʿ al-Jabri," *al-Wihda*, October 1986, 165.

[2] Georges Tarabichi, *Naqd Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1996), 8.

[3] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," *Screen* 20, no. 1 (1979): 24.

[4] Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Hafriyyat fi al-Dhakira min Baʿid* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1997), 52.

[5] al-Jabri, 81–82.

nationalist Salafism, Mohammed Belarbi Alaoui (1880-1964). The school provided a reformist education, opposed the Sufi-based religious culture of the town, and promoted an anti-colonial spirit amongst the townspeople.[6] The experience of *al-Nahda al-Muhammadiyya* sparked in al-Jabri a lifelong interest in Arabic Islamic history, the learnt traditions of Islam, and the anti-colonial agendas of Islamic and, later, pan-Arab nationalism.

The field of education continued to preoccupy al-Jabri in his professional career. Throughout the 1960s, he taught in the secondary school system in Morocco and worked in the capacity of education inspector on the national curriculum of philosophy.[7] He also continued his academic studies between Syria and Morocco. In 1967, he joined the philosophy faculty of Mohammed V University in Rabat while finishing a doctoral dissertation on Ibn Khaldun's political theory.

Al-Jabri's dissertation was first published in 1971 under the title *Fikr Ibn Khaldun: al-ʿAsabiyya wa-l-Dawla* (Group Solidarity and the State in the Thought of Ibn Khaldun).[8] In studying Ibn Khaldun's science of urban life (*al-ʿumrān*), he introduced an analytical pair that would become a cornerstone of his works, that of the distinction between the rational elements of Islamic heritage (*al-maʿqūl*) and its non-rational elements (*al-lāmaʿqūl*). While the concept of rational sciences (*al-maʿqūl*, *al-maʿqūlāt*) is part of pre-modern Islamic terminology, al-Jabri delinked this term from its classical pairing with the textual sciences (*al-manqūl*, *al-manqūlāt)* and established its antonym alternatively as the non-rational traditions (*al-lāmaʿqūl*) and/or the traditions of "the resigned/defective reason" (*al-ʿaql al-mustaqīl*). The Moroccan scholar viewed

[6] al-Jabri, 81.
[7] Husayn Idrissi, *Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri wa Mashruʿ Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz al-Hadara li Tanmiyat al-Fikr al-Islami, 2010), 21.
[8] Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Fikr Ibn Khaldun: al-ʿAsabiyya wa-l-Dawla* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-ʼArabiyya, 1992).

Ibn Khaldun as the example of an intellectual torn between these two opposing currents that included, on the one hand, the rational sciences of Aristotelian philosophy and political thought and, on the other hand, the traditions of unreason which included the Neoplatonic strand of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and the craft of poetry.[9]

The interest in the Maghrebi school of philosophy that comprises, along with Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064), Ibn Bajja (d. 532/1138), and Ibn Rushd (d. 549/1198) would continue to inform al-Jabri's philosophical studies. In the 1980s he embarked on a comprehensive project that connected the cotemporary state of post-1967 Arabic culture to his analysis of the history of pre-modern Islamic sciences. In this decade, he published six important works that established him as a towering figure of modern Arab thought: *Nahnu wa-l-Turath* (Us and Heritage, 1980), *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir* (Contemporary Arab Discourse, 1982), *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Formation of Arab Reason, 1984), *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Structure of Arab Reason, 1986), and *al-ʿAql al-Siyasi al-ʿArabi* (Arab Political Reason, 1990), and *al-ʿAql al-Akhlaqi al-ʿArabi* (Arab Ethical Reason, 2001).[10] These last four works constituted his magnum opus entitled *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Critique of Arab Reason). In the decades following the appearance of *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, al-Jabri published a number of studies on secularism and democracy in the Arab world as well as a multiple-volume work on

[9] See Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, "Bayn al-ʿAqlaniyya wa-l-Laʿaqlaniyya," in *Fikr Ibn Khaldun: al-ʿAsabiyya wa-l-Dawla* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-ʿArabiyya, 1992), 67–88.
[10] Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1980). Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1982). Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1984). Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1986). Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *al-ʿAql al-Siyasi al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1990). Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *al-ʿAql al-Akhlaqi al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 2001).

rereading the Quran.[11] In this final work, al-Jabri comments on Quranic suras according to their chronological order of revelation (*tartīb nuzūl al-Qurʾān*), sifting the excess of biblical lore which became attached to the meaning of the Quran through the exegetical tradition. Instead, he focuses on the rationality of the Quran as it historically developed through the interaction of its Arabic tribal environment, and reinterprets Quranic biblical stories in light of their subordination to the Quranic rationality. The aim of his final project is to reaffirm the Quran as an Arabic rational text which must be at the center any efforts of religious reform.

3.2 Reflection on Method: Structure and Structuralism in al-Jabri's Writings

As explored in the previous chapter, the post-*Naksa* period of Arabic intellectual production witnessed the application of a variety of methods to the study of *turāth*. To name a few, these methods included the psychoanalysis of the likes of Georges Tarabichi (1939-2016), the cultural materialism of the likes of Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987) and Tayyib Tizzini (1934-2019), and the liberation theology of the likes of Hasan Hanafi (1935-2021). In this landscape, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri is known for his method of structuralist epistemological analysis which borders on deconstruction. This is to say, his study focuses on structures while his reform propositions advocate their decentering.

Structuralism, to use Ferdinand de Saussure's terminology, studies the diachronic life of *parole*—the individual expression, object, or event—in light of the underlying structures of *langue*—the objective system of epistemic, semiotic, and cultural units of meaning which

[11] Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *Madkhal ila al-Qurʾan al-Karim* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 2006).

regulate in their interplay the formation and comprehension of individual phenomena.[12] These units of meaning function as structuring forces which condition in their *relations* and *contrasts* the ways in which individual phenomena are conceptualized.[13] For Jean Piaget, structures possess three attributes. They are marked by "wholeness" as they constitute systems of ordered elements which combine according to laws instead of being "aggregates" of independent elements. They are also marked by "transformation" and "self-regulation" as having internal laws does not make them static but rather organizes the ways in which their further development and modification occurs.

Inspired by the likes of Jean Piaget and digging for structures in *turāth*, al-Jabri investigates Islamic philosophy, Sufism, theology, jurisprudence, and ethics by mapping the interactions of their epistemological systems. Structures, in the Moroccan scholar's work, are primarily epistemological. They constitute modes of thought which condition the production of knowledge. This explains al-Jabri's description of his approach to *turāth* as "epistemological critique."[14] This form of critique aims to revolutionize Arabic Islamic thought from within by exposing the deficient modes of thought in the Islamic philosophical experience.[15] While drawing on the structuralist method, al-Jabri, however, is explicit about the ideological commitments of his approach and his aim to not only study structures but to modify them. His approach, as he specifies it, includes three steps: first, to perform a structuralist study (*al-muʿālaja al-bunyawiyya*) which uncovers the structures that organize the production of meaning

[12] Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 98.
[13] See Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (London: Psychology Press, 2015), 6–16.
[14] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 14.
[15] Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *al-Turath wa-l-Hadatha* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 1991), 16–17.

in a set of pre-modern Arabic texts; second, to advance a historical analysis (*taḥlīl tārīkhī)* of the development of these structures and the influence of their historical milieu; and third, to propose an investigation of their ideological effects (*al-ṭarḥ al-idyulūjī*) which investigates how they produced political effects and served ideological functions.[16] In this final step, al-Jabri's method goes beyond classical structuralism into deconstructive grounds as his analysis of "ideological effects" aims not only to explicate structures but also to rearrange and transcend them.

3.3 *Turāth* and Modernity in al-Jabri's Thought

As such, al-Jabri's project studies the historical structures of *turāth* with his eyes set on an epistemological future that conforms to the conditions of modernity. He considers the deconstructive critique of cultural tradition to be the first stage in producing an Arabic modernity. This modernity, while retaining a measure of authenticity as it is built on a critical reconsideration of *turāth*, is faced with the challenge of catching up with the European model. This "catching up" is defined as the accelerated reproduction of the European cultural experience while using tools that are sourced from the Arabic Islamic universe. In *al-Turath wa-l-Hadatha* (Modernity and Cultural Heritage), he writes:

> When we speak of modernity, we must not understand it in the way of European writers and thinkers as the stage after the Enlightenment which came after the Renaissance and its restoration of the classical heritage. Our modernity, as we can establish it in line with our current condition, is the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, and their transcendence at the same time. All aspects of this modernity must stand on the two principles of rationalism and democracy. Rationalism and democracy are not goods to import but practices to adopt according to rules. So far as we have not adopted a rational approach in our treatment of *turāth* and have not exposed the roots and symptoms of tyranny in it, we fail to accomplish our modernity proper, through which we can access contemporary global modernity and become actors in it instead of mere reactors.[17]

[16] al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath*, 32.
[17] al-Jabri, *al-Turath wa-l-Hadatha*, 16–17.

Al-Jabri is often critical of Arab liberals who think that modernity can be achieved through permanent rupture with *turāth*. Instead, he advocates taking seriously the study of *turāth* in order to locate cultural precedents of the Enlightenment experience in the Arabic Islamic sphere. While his approach is markedly different than that of Arab liberals, al-Jabri takes the Enlightenment experience and post-Enlightenment culture to be the blueprint of modernity.

In the aforementioned quote, al-Jabri describes Arab modernity as the accelerated construction with local tools of the Enlightenment model in its elevation of reason and repudiation of myth. He also speaks of transcending (*tajāwuz*) this very experience. This makes one think that al-Jabri is gesturing to post-modernist trends in their critique of the new myths of the Enlightenment.[18] However, this is not the case. While he encourages learning from the European modernist project, the Moroccan thinker considers its critiques by European postmodernists to be unhelpful to the contemporary Arab condition. Al-Jabri notes that the post-Enlightenment cult of techne and the transcendental rational subject have caused considerable destruction and produced postmodernist trends that are critical of the reign of instrumental reason. Postmodernist schools of thought turn to heterogeneity, particularity, and non-rationalist modes of thought (especially those functioning in language and art) as tools of critique. However, Al-Jabri notes:

> Arabic current affairs suffer another kind of irrationality. One that is different from the irrationality that rose in contemporary Europe as the coronation of its rationality. It is a kind that historically belongs to the Middle Ages with all its characteristics of the dominance of herd behavior and the [need for] the shepherd's stick in both our intellectual and social life. In facing this kind of irrationality which is historically anachronistic, we need the weapon of reason. Can we achieve our modernity without the weapon of reason and rationality?[19]

[18] Of the likes of the Frankfurt School of critical theory.
[19] al-Jabri, *al-Turath wa-l-Hadatha*, 18.

Encouraging rational ways of thinking (in the way of acknowledging an ecology of rationalities instead of an exclusive rationality) is a key component of successful "modernities." However, the notion of rationality and of reason as a weapon against historically anachronistic irrationalities gives the reconstruction of *turāth* in al-Jabri's work a particularly violent edge. The Moroccan thinker considers the intellectual modernity of Arabic Islamic countries a "failed project" which is fettered by the historical legacy of defective structures of thought. If Arabic Islamic modernity is a failure, it is so because the proper process of "subtraction stories" of eliminating all "confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" was not accomplished.[20] It is in Sufism and in supposedly non-Arabic Islamic traditions that all these confining horizons of thought are located.

3.4 Arabic Cultural Time and Contemporary Arab Discourse

As a multi-volume project, *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Critique of Arab Reason) stems from al-Jabri's conviction of a root crisis in Arabic Islamic culture which makes it unable to achieve intellectual progress (*taqaddum*) or adjust to the global temporality post-Enlightenment reason. Culture and time are key terms in al-Jabri's thought. They intersect through the notion of cultural time but also remain operative as distinct categories. Arabic culture, in al-Jabri's thought, refers mainly to Arabic intellectual production in the form of pre-modern *turāth* and contemporary Arab discourse. Time, on the other hand, includes the multiple layers of cultural temporality, global temporality, and the concepts of time in Arabic and Islamic thought. Overall, his discourse rests on the two poles of an Arabic cultural time internal to Arabic Islamic history

[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 22.

and a global temporality of disenchanted linear progress which reveals the deficiencies of Arabic time.

In the first chapter of *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (*The Formation of Arab Reason*) which is entitled "Arabic Cultural Time and the Problem of Progress" al-Jabri engages Jean Piaget's concept of "the cognitive unconscious" with its emphasis on the epistemological structures of the unconscious in addition to the affective.[21] He defines cultural time as the life of the latent structures of reason and ways of knowing of a certain culture.[22] The change or fixity of these structures determine, for al-Jabri, the dynamism or stagnation of a cultural identity. Al-Jabri writes:

> We can link [the logic of] cultural time to the time of the unconscious. It is known that the unconscious has no history since by its very nature it does not acknowledge 'natural' time—or let us say it has its own temporality that is different from the sober temporality of the conscious mind. The time of the unconscious is similar to the temporality of dreams. It does not acknowledge temporal or spatial distances, nor the laws of precedence, antecedence, and causality. Such is cultural time: the time of the structure of reason of a certain culture. It does not register change in the same way it is registered by societal time or even psychological time, let alone natural time which, our predecessors used to say, is measured by the movement of the celestial spheres.[23]

For al-Jabri, the life of the epistemological structures that operate in the knowledge traditions of a certain culture constitute a primary level of internal time. This is distinct from the question of the concepts of time available in a cultural tradition. Rather, this is a notion oriented to detecting dynamism in the historical experience of a culture through the history of its epistemological outlook on the world.

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[21] Jean Piaget, "Inconscient affectif et inconscient cognitif," *Raison Présente* 19, no. 1 (1971): 11–20.
[22] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 40.
[23] al-Jabri, 41.

For the Moroccan thinker, what constitutes dynamism in cultural time is determined by a strict binary logic. Epistemological continuity is the sign of paralysis; only "epistemological breaks" signal the dynamic life of culture.[24] As he emphasizes, without the total and irreversible break between pre-modern and modern epistemologies, no cultural dynamism can be said to exist. A cultural experience:

> lives in a stagnant cultural temporality as long as the new has not accomplished a permanent rupture with the old, i.e., as long as the epistemological system remains the same since the new is able to enter into a dialogue with the old. This dialogue means that the accumulation of progress did not reach the point of no return, the point which would disallow the movement between the new [epistemologies] and the old.[25]

The new and the old then must speak in radically different languages. Any dialogue between them would reverse the progressive march of cultural history.

After setting these conceptual parameters, al-Jabri presents his observations on Arabic cultural time. As he argues, its main qualities are internal stagnation, fragmentariness, and overlap. Arabic cultural time lacks the structure of linear progress which organizes the accumulation and the transcendence of knowledge traditions. Al-Jabri writes:

> It is true that we distinguish between the pre-Islamic era, the classical period of Islam, and the period of the *Nahḍa*. However, this differentiation is entirely superficial. For we do not acknowledge them in our consciousness as stages of cultural progress in which the new abrogates the old, nor do we approach them as distinctive cultural temporalities differentiated by unique qualities that make them continuous or discontinuous. On the opposite, we perceive these three eras as unconnected islands, each island isolated from the other. The gap that separates in our consciousness the pre-Islamic era and the classical period of Islam is as wide as the one that separates the classical period of Islam which ends in the 8th century Hijri [14th century C.E.] from the 19th century *Nahḍa* period. The result is the parallel presence of these three "cultural islands" in contemporary Arab consciousness.[26]

[24] al-Jabri, 42.
[25] al-Jabri, 42.
[26] al-Jabri, 44.

The historical stages of Arabic culture are then all present in its contemporaneity obstructing its progress to a post-Enlightenment time.

For the Moroccan philosopher, the non-linear sense of cultural history, which turns past historical stages into accessible spaces, reveals one aspect of the Arab deficient sense of time. Al-Jabri writes, "Our consciousness of time is dominated by our consciousness of space. We, in fact, treat time like we treat space."[27] Al-Jabri's observation on the Arabic spatialized sense of time brings to mind the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941). The French thinker is famous for critiquing conventional notions of time that borrow the attributes of space. However, there is a key difference between the two thinkers. For al-Jabri, the Arabic sense of time is spatial because of the lack of linearity and homogeneity which would disallow access to past "abrogated" periods/spaces of cultural history. For Bergson, however, it is specifically linearity and homogeneity which impose spatial structures on the true heterogenous nature of time.

In *Time and Free Will*, Henri Bergson introduced the concept of "*durée*" (duration) which describes the lived quality of time in contrast to its spatialized representation by our consciousness and our language.[28] As Bergson observed, when we often think of time and express it in language, we treat it as a homogenous reality that exists uniformly outside of our lived experiences and independent of our psychic states. We break time into countable intervals between events and make it into a line on which events and things are set side by side. In so doing, for Bergson, we are no longer in the realm of time. He writes:

> For if time, as the reflective consciousness represents it, is a medium in which our conscious states form a discrete series so as to admit of being counted, and if on the other hand our conception of number ends in spreading out in space everything which can be

[27] al-Jabri, 44.
[28] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Dover Publications, 2001).

> directly counted, it is to be presumed that time, understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, is nothing but space. [29]

Bergson remarks that in ordering the past, the present, and the future on a linear scheme, we turn them into successive spaces to traverse. In the common conception, we stand in the present, having left behind a space that we have crossed which we call "the past" and facing a space that is lying in wait for us which we call "the future." Instead, Bergson speaks of duration as an indivisible "organic whole" of interpenetrated states of consciousness.[30] These states of consciousness succeed each other but cannot be separated from each other and set side by side. This is so because they form a qualitative multiplicity instead of a quantitative one. In a quantitative multiplicity such as a number, the larger number contains all the other numbers before it. As such, it can be spread over space and counted. Qualitative multiplicities are different. Bergson often uses the example of music to explain how such a multiplicity works. In a melody, the higher note does not include the lower notes within it; it is simply a different kind of note. As it is played, however, it fuses with the previous notes which while distinct from it become key parts of how the higher note makes sense in a melody.[31] Similarly, a past moment cannot be set aside in a quantity of objective moments that we have crossed. Our individual pasts have no objective existence outside our experiences and our memories. The moments of duration are distinct, allowing as such the sensibility of change, but they are also interpenetrated. Like the notes of the melody, they *succeed* and *fuse* into the coherent whole of personality. Bergson

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[29] Bergson, 91.
[30] Bergson, 100.
[31] Bergson writes, "Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and their totality might be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected? The proof is that, if we interrupt the rhythm by dwelling longer than is right on one note of the tune, it is not its exaggerated length, as length, which will warn us of our mistake, but the qualitative change thereby caused in the whole of the musical phrase." Bergson, 100–101.

writes, "Pure duration is the form in which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its past states from its present ones."[32] In duration, the past is folded into the present; that is why it always "remains to be known." Past experiences continue to impact the self which is both *continuous* and *ever-changing*, and whose future emerges from the creative developments of its duration marked with radical novelty. To use the words of Gilles Deleuze, this makes duration "a becoming that endures, a change that is substance itself."[33] Linearity and homogeneity, for Bergson, turn time from a lived experience into a mathematical abstraction. It does not secure creative progress. It stifles it.

For Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, however, only linear progress can ensure that time does not become space in which one travels in all directions. Culture must experience successive changes but *these changes must not endure*. As a counterexample, he uses the model of European cultural history which, according to him, produces a consciousness of homogenous and linear progress from the classical age, the age of Christian Scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and its aftermath. Al-Jabri writes:

> We confront, here, a historical continuity which constitutes a fixed and clear frame of reference. Regardless whether this continuity is factual or artificial, or whether it is constituted by continuous motion or intervals, what matters is its function as far as consciousness is concerned. It orders history and separates the before and after in ways that make the return of the abrogated impossible even in dreams. [34]

For al-Jabri, while Arabic cultural history is fragmentary, European cultural history is linear and temporally dynamic. One produces a heterogenous sense of cultural development and the other a homogenous one. Based on Bergson's views, we can, however, ascertain that the Arabic heterogenous sense of cultural history reflects an organic sense of the duration of culture. To

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[32] Bergson, 100.
[33] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 37.
[34] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 43.

invert the critique and use Souleymane Bachir Diagne's interpretation of the political uses of the notion of duration, any consciousness of European linear cultural progress is a modern projection into a heterogenous past made possible only by a major mechanistic and abstracting force, i.e., capitalism.[35]

Cultural time as the temporal life of ways of knowing allows al-Jabri, then, to intervene in the post-*Naksa* discourse of Arabic cultural failure in the capacity of a scholar of Islamic philosophy. Surveying the efforts of modern Arab thinkers to produce an Arabic philosophical renaissance, al-Jabri concludes that these intellectuals exhibit similar epistemological defects. Regardless of their ideological directions, their thinking enacts the mode of "hermeneutical reason" (*bayān*). This mode of thought, central and primary to Arab reason, works through analogical inference (*qiyās*) to measure new objects of knowledge against a pre-given model/text. It is, according to al-Jabri, the unchallenged epistemological structure behind the thinking of pre-modern and modern Arab scholars. By extension, Arabic cultural time is a dead time (*zamān mayyit*), stifled by the continuation of this dominant structure from the Abbasid period to the present.[36]

In his 1982 book *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir* (Contemporary Arab Discourse), al-Jabri consolidated his critique of modern Arabic approaches to *turāth*.[37] He argued that modern Arab thinkers engage *turāth* indirectly through the mediation of pre-given models. Arab liberals, from the Syrian Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) to the Egyptian Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (1905-1993), derive their analogical inference from the European model and promote the reconstruction

[35] Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Postcolonial Bergson*, trans. Lindsay Turner, *Postcolonial Bergson* (New york: Fordham University Press, 2019), 3–4.
[36] al-Jabri, *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir*, 194.
[37] al-Jabri, *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir*. See also al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath*.

of *turāth* according to its precepts. For the Salafists, from the Iranian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) to the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the analogical focus is on the age of the first Muslim community. On the other hand, Arab Marxists, of the likes of Tizzini and Muruwwa, emphasize the need for a historicist approach to the study of *turāth*, embracing as such the method of cultural materialism. Beholden to their methodological model which is based on the duality of idealism and materialism, they end up producing an ideological and scholastic history purified of the historical details that do not fit in their dualistic view.[38] Much like the existentialism of Abdelrahman Badawi that preceded their work on *turāth*, their efforts to find analogical equivalents to their schools of thought make them turn Islamic history on its head.[39] For al-Jabri, the absurdity of the analogical mechanism of Arab Marxism and existentialism crystalizes in their attempts to turn the most "obscurantist" and "irrational" aspects of *turāth*, those pertaining to mystical thought, into a library of authentic philosophical terms to anchor their modern discourses.[40]

Al-Jabri's critique of modern Arab thinkers is sharp and intelligent. His own work, however, exhibits the same tendencies for which he faults other Arab intellectuals. While emphasizing the need to take history seriously, al-Jabri's critique of his colleagues focuses on the effects of a *trans-historical* Arab reason on their thinking. Whether in 10th century Baghdad or in the 20th century Arab World, Arab reason works analogically to model its ongoing knowledge production on a pre-given text. The history of this reason stretches back to the Abbasid age of the recording of Islamic sciences and, before it, to pre-Islamic Arabia. It makes the contemporary

[38] al-Jabri, *al-Khitab al-ʿArabi al-Muʿasir*, 167.
[39] al-Jabri, 170.
[40] al-Jabri, 171-175.

Arab subject a copy of the trans-historical Bedouin that Nizar Qabbani lamented in his verse by proclaiming that "our spirit remains '*jahili*.'"[41] Al-Jabri writes:

> We consider Arabic culture, which is the referential frame of Arab reason, to possess one temporality since the beginning of its formation to the present, a stagnant temporality occupied by the Arab today in the same way his predecessors in the bygone centuries did. The Arab lives this temporality experiencing no alienation or rupture from the past when he engages with its figures, writers, and thinkers. On the opposite, he only finds the totality of his selfhood, its stability, and sociability in his absorption in the past.[42]

Arabic cultural time is the product of a trans-historical Arab reason which is, as al-Jabri will tell us, born out of the Bedouin desert experience. As the Islamic polity grew, this reason interacted with two other modes of thought: one Greek operating through demonstrative reasoning (*burhān*) which brought it into proximity with what al-Jabri terms universal reason (*al-ʿaql al-kawnī*); and one Persian operating through a gnostic mode of knowledge (*ʿirfān*) which opened for it the gates of unreason (*al-lāʿaql*). If Arabic cultural time is dead, it is because the Arabic atomistic sense of time was further paralyzed by the temporality of mystical enchantment. In delving deeper into the structural attributes of Arab reason and the history of its epistemological encounters, al-Jabri's method reveals more similarities to the allegedly deficient approaches of his colleagues. We both encounter a pre-given model of analysis, that of the orientalist theory of Semitic atomism, and a selective narrative on the development Islamic philosophy.

3.5 Atomistic Arab Reason: Structural Qualities and Defects

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri is aware of the racial undertones of speaking of an "Arab reason." He is also aware of the history of this term. He emphasizes that he does not refer to the

[41] Qabbani writes "The heart of the matter / can be said in one sentence / we donned the husk of civilization / and our spirit remained *Jahili* [Pre-Islamic/barbaric]." Qabbani, "Hawamish ʿala Daftar al-Naksa," 2.
[42] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 70.

question of mentality (*ʿaqliyya*) with its prominent place in French orientalism and the racial theories of the likes of Ernest Renan (1823-1892) and Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882).[43] These theories, he writes, set "a Semitic atomistic and otherworldly mentality against an Aryan constructivist and scientific one."[44] Instead, al-Jabri insists that, in his usage, reason refers strictly to epistemological patterns and to "the tool of theoretical production" that is dominant in a certain cultural sphere.[45] He makes recourse to André Lallande's notion of "la raison constituée" which, he specifies, refers to "the system of laws of thinking which is normative in a certain historical period." [46] Yet and as stated earlier, al-Jabri takes this notion of "la raison constituée" into the direction of a *trans-historical* form of reasoning. Further, as his archeology of the rules that historically, and presently, organize Arab thinking unfolds, a linguistic and environmental determinism emerges. While the racial theory is nominally sidestepped, it is substantively affirmed. Before engaging al-Jabri's arguments on the structural qualities of "Arab reason" and its temporality, it is important to recall the orientalist notion of Semitic atomism. This notion is a key element in the history of how Arab time is constructed as deficient concept in the twentieth century orientalist and Arab scholarship (as detailed in Chapter One).

The theory of the atomistic mentality of Semites circulated in the orientalist philological circles of the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1781, the German historian August Schlözer introduced the term "Semitism" into European usage to refer to the linguistic grouping that includes Arabic, Hebrew, and

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[43] al-Jabri, 11.
[44] For further reference on these positions, see Renan's preface to his study on Averroes which addresses the Semitic deficiency in producing philosophical synthesis. Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l'averroïsme: essai historique* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1861). Also see de Gobineau's writings on the similarity between the Greek and Persian Aryan spirits and the effects of their intermixing with Semitic groups. Arthur De Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1967), 466–68.
[45] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 15.
[46] al-Jabri, 15. See also, André Lalande, *La raison et les normes* (Paris: Hachette, 1948).

Aramaic.[47] Orientalist scholarship then developed different motifs to describe the mental habits of the speakers of these languages. Chief among these motifs is the idea that the Semitic mind is unable to synthesize a holistic vision of the elements it processes. Ernest Renan's *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* published in 1855 is an authoritative text in this tradition.[48] In his work, Renan establishes a direct link between the "impoverished" status of syntax, the paucity of conjunctions in Semitic languages, and the inability of Semites to develop abstract thought. [49] While resting on ethnic boundaries, the application of the theory to Muslims often mixed racial and cultural parameters.

Arthur J. Arberry locates one of the earliest articulations of the atomistic imagination of Muslim poets in the circle of the 18th century English philologist William Jones (1746-1794) whose translations of Persian poetry stressed their incoherence.[50] The classicist Walter Leaf (1852-1927) further developed this view to explain why, unlike Greek and Latin poetry, Persian poetry lacks organic unity. Leaf observed that "Eastern art" is often a combination of discrete conventional motifs which lack an overall message. These poems reflect an incapacity to develop a holistic vision. Leaf links the incoherence of the Persian poem to the discontinuous, euphoric,

[47] Gil Z. Hochberg, "'Remembering Semitism' or 'On the Prospect of Re-Membering the Semites,'" *ReOrient* 1, no. 2 (2016): 202.
[48] Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1863).
[49] Renan writes, "The unity and simplicity, which distinguishes Semitic races, can be found in their languages. Abstraction is unknown to them; metaphysics impossible. Language, being the mold of the intellectual activities of a people, is [in their case] an idiom stripped of syntax, poor in linguistic construction, and lacking conjunctions that establish delicate relations among the units of thought. It refers to objects only by their exterior qualities. Their language is the outcome of the eloquent inspirations of soothsayers and irrational impressions, devoid of philosophy and purely intellectual speculations." Renan, 18. Translation own.
[50] A. J. Arberry, "Orient Pearls at Random Strung," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11, no. 4 (1946): 699–712.

and non-analytical workings of Eastern imagination, the whole process "recalling the voluptuous dreams of hashish."[51]

Throughout the 20th century, the theory of the atomistic mentality of Muslims more broadly, and of Arabs more specifically, operated in orientalist scholarship to explain the limitations of Islamic knowledge traditions. Certain authors observed the racial parameters of the theory in distinguishing between Arabs and Persians, while others mixed its ethnic and racial categories.

The British orientalist Reynold A. Nicholson used the theory of the atomistic Semitic mind "properly." He drew a distinction between Arabs, Persians, and Indians and contrasted the richness of Persian mystical verse to the Arabic lack of mystical intuitions. In his 1921 *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, he writes:

> It is remarkable how seldom [Arab poets] possess the note (as Newman would say) of mysticism. The main reason, I think, lies in racial endowment. The Arab has no such passion for an ultimate principle of unity as has always distinguished the Persians and Indians. He shares with other Semitic peoples an incapacity for harmonizing and unifying the particular facts of experience: he discerns the trees very clearly, but not the wood [i.e., the forest].[52]

For Nicholson, possessing the note of mysticism requires the ability to grasp the spiritual unity behind the particular details of religion. This is, however, impossible for the Arab mind which is fettered to the fragments of immediate facts. Mysticism and atomistic thinking are not compatible. They constitute opposing worldviews.

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[51] For Arberry, "this high-flown nonsense" not only reflects racial prejudice but also a stubborn inability to understand the nature of Arabic and Persian poetic art which, in its innovations on conventional motifs and its sequencing of themes, prioritizes social and cultural communicability and produces "an artistic unity that is found in the finest mosaic pattern. Arberry, 705.

[52] Nicholson's study is originally published in 1921. See Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 125–26.

In another variation that begins with race and ends with religion, the Scottish Islamicist Hamilton Gibb maintains that it is specifically atomism which characterizes the whole phenomenon of Islamic mysticism. In his 1947 *Modern Trends in Islamic Thought*, Hamilton Gibb notes:

> If the orthodox pushed a narrow and literalist conception of knowledge to excessive lengths, the mystics, on the other hand, allowed an equally excessive liberty to pure intuition. Now, however great the value that we may set on the unitive experience in religion, it is nevertheless true that intuitive thought is rarely associated with precision, whether of content or of expression. And if we bear in mind the atomistic discrete character of the Arab imagination, which we discussed in the first chapter, we shall not be surprised to find Muslim religious thought on its mystical side characterised by a subjective selectivity, an oppositional series of individual points, rarely synthesised and always resistant to analytical treatment.[53]

Gibb begins with a theory on Arab racial qualities and ends with conclusions on Muslims.

Similarly, in his 1946 *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, the Austrian orientalist Gustave van Grunebaum critiqued Islamic historical writing and its inability to produce historiographic theories. He writes:

> Development still escapes the Muslim writer, a fault not of the genre but of his whole outlook on his human surroundings that would atomize the world and then view each atom as a stable monad, shifting only in its relation to its fellow-monads but unalterable in substance and even in form.[54]

In his discussion of Arabic poetry, Grunebaum attributed its lack of "individualized portraits" that present "the totality of man" to a characteristic "Arab atomizing outlook on people and things."[55] In regards to the discipline of history, however, the atomistic quality is generalized to the category of "Muslim writer" which included in the examples he used Arabs, such as al-Masʿudi (893-956), as well as Persians, such as Ibn Miskawayh (932-1030).

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[53] H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1947), 66.
[54] Gustave E. (Gustave Edmund) Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 284.
[55] Von Grunebaum, 266.

As a racial theory, the notion of the atomistic Arab mind reveals more about its articulator than the object of his study. It rests on a deterministic racial paradigm that contradicts itself both through its constant slippage between the categories of "Arabic," "Persian," and "Islamic" and its paradoxical findings. In its diverse iterations, the theory provides coherence to opposing subjective views that are united in producing pejorative analyses of Islamic culture. Despite the subjective and contradictory nature of its conclusions, the theory still resonates in contemporary works.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, we read how certain post-*Naksa* Arab thinkers critiqued the "discontinuous" Arab time echoing as such orientalist conclusions on the subject. The negative interpretation of Arabic and Islamic notions of time derives for this very paradigm of the atomistic mind that is unable to grasp abstract wholes (such as homogenous linear time). Despite his stated effort to avoid racial theories and his often ardent critique of orientalism, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's work is not immune to these long-established discursive patterns. His arguments, in fact, offer us the most lucid expression of the convergence of these two trends: the post-*Naksa* critique of Arab time and the scholarly tradition of studying Islamic knowledge traditions through the theory of the atomistic mind.

Returning to al-Jabri's analysis of the formation of "Arab reason," he begins his study with the question of language. Much like Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (1905-1993) before him, he engages the Arabic language as the first agent in the making of Arab reason.[56] Al-Jabri departs from a key statement that "the Bedouin is the maker of the Arab world."[57] The age of the codification of Arabic Islamic sciences, al-Jabri observes, began during the reign of the Abbasid

[56] See Mahmoud, *Tajdid al-Fikr al-ʿArabi*.
[57] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 75.

caliph al-Mansur in the second half of the eighth century. It was inaugurated with the grammatical study of the Arabic language.[58] Urban grammarians such as al-Khalil al-Farahidi (d. 169/786) and Sibawayh (d. 179/796) modeled their grammar on the language of Arab Bedouins, which, in its proximity to Quranic speech, represented the archetypal Arabic. What these scholars canonized, from the rules of derivation based on the root system to tense construction which depends on verbal moods, reflected the static monolingual world of the Bedouins that lacks urban fluidity. The Arabic language, al-Jabri argues, is marked by the eloquence of its signifier and the poverty of its signified. In the Arabic Bedouin world of origin, the linguistic sign precedes and dominates its referent. Language is then a semiotic universe that determines the conceptualization of reality rather than being determined by it.

Rhetoricity emerges as the first quality of Arab reason (*bayān*) in that it operates primarily within a semiotic universe and secondarily within a plane of ideas. That is why, he remarks, truth for Arabic speakers depends heavily on the eloquence of the sign rather than plausibility of the idea. The "musical sonority of the Arabic language" often conceals "the impoverishment of meaning."[59] In its state of diglossia which consists in the existence of a high standardized variety (*fuṣḥa*) and a multiplicity of low varieties (*dārija*), the Arabic language reflects this reality. The *fuṣḥa* shows the static life of the sign which is unaffected by time and history. The *dārija*, on the other hand, is "the revenge" of lived reality against the fixity of the sign.[60] To put al-Jabri's argument in Ferdinand de Saussure's terms, a linguistic community which privileges the synchronic system of *langue* instead of the diachronic *parole* evidently has a problem with time. Al-Jabri writes:

[58] al-Jabri, 63.
[59] al-Jabri, 91.
[60] al-Jabri, 79.

> The world in which the Arabic language was formed or at least recorded is an ahistorical sense-based world. It is the world of Arab Bedouins who experience a time extended like the desert, a time of repetition and routine, and a space without horizon, empty and calm.[61]

Al-Jabri gives us a paradoxical description of the Arabic language. He qualifies the Bedouin linguistic world as static but connects it to sense-based perception which is deeply linked to change. This paradox is solved once we know that the world of empirical perception is the unchanging desert. The importance of keeping a notion of *the sense-based* and *timeless* world of the Arabic language at the risk of paradox will become clear once the reader encounters the general conclusions of the theory of Semitic atomism in its emphasis on the inability of the mind to abstract a theoretical whole and its attachment to physical detail.

As al-Jabri observes, the linguistic world of the Arabic language provided the epistemological foundation for all Islamic sciences, chief among them Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[62] The rules of Arabic grammar became the organizational logic of further knowledge production in Islam. As al-Jabri argued, the rhetorical quality of Arab reason makes the Arabs privilege the pregiven fixed sign over the dynamic signified. This translates epistemologically in that the foundational texts become models (*shāhid*) against which all unknown (*ghāʾib*) is weighed. Analogy (*qiyās*) becomes the ideal way of knowing. Historically, it is established with

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[61] al-Jabri, 87.

[62] He mentions an insightful anecdote which illustrates how the rules internal to Arabic grammar were universalized by Arab reason to guide its epistemological ventures. The grammarian Abu Zakariyya al-Farraʾ (d. 206/822) debated, once, with the Hanafi jurist Muhammad al-Shaybani (d. 189/805). Al-Shaybani raised the issue of the legal ruling in regards to a Muslim who, having intended to perform two additional prostrations (*sujud*) in his next prayer to amend for forgetting (*saḥw*) the number of prostrations he performed in the previous one, forgets to perform the make-up prostrations. Al-Shaybani's question to the grammarian is, then, how to amend the forgotten amend? Al-Farraʾ responds that there is no obligation on such a Muslim to perform further amends than the originally intended. This is so because in Arabic grammar there is no further diminutive form to the standard diminutive. The extra two prostration is a diminutive of a prayer; no other diminutives can be derived from it. al-Jabri, 127.

al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) as a major source of the deduction of juridical principles. In poetic criticism, the perfection of similes (*tashbīh*) becomes the mark of literary excellence.

Yet, language which forms reason is formed nonetheless by an original reason. The Arabic language which would condition the rules of Islamic sciences carries, al-Jabri emphasizes, an original mental imprint. It is here in his second volume where the notion of the atomistic Arab mind is affirmed.

In his 1986 book *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Structure of Arab Reason), the Moroccan philosopher digs deeper into the internal traits of Arab reason as well as the two other modes of thought that it encountered in its historical development, i.e., the demonstrative reason (*burhān*) of the Greeks and the gnostic reason (*ʿirfān*) of the Persians. The distinction that al-Jabri established in his first volume between reason, mind, and mentality seems to collapse in this text. As he argues, the Arab original mental outlook which produced the Arabic language focuses on discrete parts (*infiṣāl*) instead of coherent totalities. Rather than direct causality which signals interconnectedness, it thinks of the relation between the entities of the world as based on transmutation (*tajwīz*), i.e., the monadic transformation of enclosed units into different states or natures. These qualities are tied to the desert experience. Al-Jabri writes:

> We refer to language not merely as a means of communication but as the transmitter of culture. The Arabic language, in this sense, is the one which was collected from [the world of] the Bedouin, the maker of the Arab world, and which constituted the main referential frame of Muslim theologians. We saw that, in numerous occasions and with every new issue, theologians would base their conceptual terminology on the statement that "the ancient Arabs said so and so." Deferring to the statements of Arab Bedouins means deferring to the [principles of the] pre-Islamic geographical, social, and cognitive world. From this perspective, we can hypothesize, as an initial step, that the principles which determine the *bayānī* worldview, i.e., the two principles of discreteness (*infiṣāl*) and transmutation (*tajwīz*), find their origin in this Bedouin world. Our aim is to prove this hypothesis. If we explore the geographical, social, and cognitive environment of the Bedouin from the vantage point of continuity and discontinuity, we find that discreteness is imprinted in all its aspects. The landscape is the desert. Sand is made of discrete independent grains, [autonomous] units like the rocks and bricks it comes to form. In

> fact, all bodies in the desert are independent units. Their relation is one of juxtaposition (*mujāwara*) rather than interpenetration (*tadākhul*). This also applies to vegetation and animal life. Plants in the desert are independent and distinct units, separated from each other and scattered. Unlike the animals of the forest whose individual existence is enmeshed with their complex habitat, animals in the desert live in an open space in which all entities stand as autonomous individuals even when in a group.[63]

Certainly, physical environment impacts ways of expressing the world. However, to make this influence an internal law of mental processes and to expand it in a way that predisposes pre-Islamic Bedouins and 20th century Arabs to think alike is, to say the least, problematic. Beyond this generalization, the issue at play for the present argument is not only the use of racial and environmental determinism, but its adoption to explain the uniqueness of cultural experience as the sign of an original lack.

Since Arab reason is marked by its atomistic worldview which focuses on discrete elements instead of totalities, its perception of time reflects these qualities in its relation to the event. For Arab reason, al-Jabri specifies, time is not an independent frame of existence—a homogenous and impersonal flow. It is relative and event-based. It is dependent on the event as a dimension of its occurrence and on human agents as a dimension of their experiences. For the Moroccan structuralist, this quality reflects a discontinuous view of time that lacks existential dynamism. Continuing the earlier quote, al-Jabri states:

> Thus, the *bayānī* perception of space and time, a perception which is perpetuated by the Arabic language, rests on discontinuity instead of continuity… The interlinking between time and the event in the *bayānī* conceptualization reflects the lack of change and motion in the desert environment. In its psychological foundation, time is the consciousness of change. Time passes quickly when we are conscious of successive changes such as when we are watching a film. It passes slowly when we face a stagnant scene such as when we are waiting for a train or the delayed commencement of a play. In the first case of dynamic change, time seems to flow outside our affect, smoothly and continuously, independent of the succession of events. We then approach it as a referential frame to make sense of events and to distinguish the before and after. In the second case of stagnation and routine, the relation between time and events is the inverse. Here, the

[63] al-Jabri, *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 1986, 241.

> unique event becomes the measure of time. It divides it into a before and an after. The temporal segment that separates two events is treated as a single homogenous temporality (*zamān wāḥid*) regardless of its length. This temporality is defined by the event. As long as there is no new event to negate its antecedent, time remains the time of the event (as in the time of [the harvesting of] dates, the time of hot weather, the Year of the Elephant, the time of Muʿawiya I). The result is that the same way events are discontinuous, time is also discontinuous.[64]

Much like Yassin al-Hafiz, Mustapha Hijazi, and Adonis, al-Jabri comes to the conclusion that the Arabic focus on the event translates into a defective discontinuous perception of time. As addressed in the first chapter, the charge of discontinuity derives from the modernist ideal of time as a singular homogenous and linear reality. In refusing to acknowledge the alternation between different *kinds* of time, the modernist position faults these organic expressions of lived temporality for not living up to the standard of a mathematical abstraction.

Through the charge of discontinuity, al-Jabri and the post-*Naksa* critics of Arabic and Islamic heterogenous time reduce the concentricity of different kinds of time into a singular plane of event-periods which give way to intervals of timeless perception. The modernist move in assessing these concepts and the cultural traditions that express them is to translate heterogeneity into discontinuity. It then draws the conclusion that these concepts reflect an existential attitude which *diminishes* and *negates* the significance of time in human existence. The modernist position insists that its *discursive ideal* of time as homogenous and linear is the objective condition of the disenchanted world. It then brings this ideal into conflict with cultural discourses of temporal heterogeneity. For al-Jabri, this very conflict is a central task of modern critical thought which labors to rid its modern subject from the cultural baggage that blocks his direct access to reality. It is here that "the weapon of reason" must be used to terminate these traditions and worldviews.

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[64] al-Jabri, 242.

Al-Jabri delves deeper into the analysis of Arabic discontinuous and circumscribed time. He presents linguistic proofs and environmental explanations. He remarks that the Arabic language affirms this sensibility of time in its vocabulary and tense-construction and reflects the Bedouin experience. Relying on the entries of words for time in Ibn Manzur's (d. 710/1311) lexicon, *Lisan al-ʿArab* (The Tongue of the Arabs), he expands his analysis:

> Although the Arabic language possesses numerous words which denote time (*zaman*), we cannot find among them an abstract concept of the temporal as an external frame independent of events. All Arabic words for time reflect an intuition that ties time to that which is timed, i.e., the event. Similarly, it ties space to space-occupying objects. Therefore, there is no difference between all Arabic words that indicate time as far as conceptualization goes. They only differ in what quantity or segment of time they invoke in linguistic usage. Thus, we read in *Lisan alʿArab*, "*Zamān* is the word used for short and long periods of time. Time is the period of [the harvesting of] dates and other fruits and it is the period of cold and heat. *Zaman* [used alternatively with *zamān*] can last anywhere from two months to six months. It can be used for one of the seasons of the year or for the duration of the rule of a man and things of that nature. The verb *azmana* in a place means to remain in a place for a period of time." True, there is the concept of *dahr* but it does not have a fixed definition except maybe when it is used to refer to extended time. In *Lisān al-ʿarab*, it is stated that "*Dahr* is equivalent to *zamān*. Arabs use it for a specific period of time or the duration of the entire living world. Arabs say, 'we dwelt in this area for a *dahr*' and 'this location cannot sustain us for a *dahr*'"…We conclude from the above discussion that time in the semantic field that the Arabic language retains to this day is fused with the event. That is to say, it is renewed with lived experience and natural phenomena rather than being the one renewing them. It is relative, sense-based, interpenetrated with the event much like space which is fused with the space-occupying object. This sense-based intuition of time, of space, and of the event, which circumscribes and personifies them, stems from the environment of the Bedouin Arabs from which their language was collected. It is the desert whose time is the periods of encampment and travel. It is renewed by new occurrences, new scenes, and new challenges. Time is the space of the event in the same way that space contains its object. Time, space, and the event are fused in the Arabic semantic field. This is reflected in the verbal form of *mafʿal* which can denote all three of them at the same time.[65]

Again, it is helpful to recall the views of Henri Bergson as a contrast with al-Jabri's assessment. For the Moroccan structuralist, the lack of a concept of time as a homogenous abstract condition explains why these different Arabic notions are in fact spatial. For Bergson, it is the opposite.

[65] al-Jabri, 188–89.

Only when we renounce the view of time as a homogenous abstract medium do we stop confusing time with space.

Setting aside the philosophical disagreement on what makes time spatial, the approach to time in postcolonial critique is also a point of divergence between al-Jabri and a number of contemporary critics who work on the Global South. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, would disagree with al-Jabri's view that the repudiation of heterogenous time is central to postcolonial critique. Al-Jabri argues that the role of critique is to effect "the rationalization of the world" which would dispel all "backwardness related to irrationality and the enchanted outlook on the world and its things."[66] Heterogenous time is squarely within this enchanted worldview. In his research on subaltern labor histories amongst Indian Muslims, Chakrabarty critiqued how historians often flatten the ecology of temporalities that exist around their subject by translating it into the time of History which is "godless, continuous and, to follow Benjamin, empty and homogenous." [67] This modern temporality is inescapable because it is enforced by "modern bureaucracies and instruments of governmentality" that depend on the "global narrative of capital."[68] For Chakrabarty, it is the task of critique to highlight the traces of temporal heterogeneity which this narrative suppresses. If a scholar has to translate subaltern histories into the time of History, these translations "must possess something of 'the uncanny' about them" and maintain the echo of the existence of "other forms of worlding."[69] Shahzad Bashir takes head on the ecology of temporalities in Islamic historical writing. Against the modern notion of Islamic time which scholars reduce to Islamic chronological history, Bashir considers the

[66] al-Jabri, *al-Turath wa-l-Hadatha*, 243.
[67] Chakrabarty, "The Time of History and the Times of Gods," 37.
[68] Chakrabarty, 48.
[69] Chakrabarty, 51.

heterogenous temporalities of Islamic texts. These temporalities are constructed through the coalescing of distinct timelines (prophetic, eschatological, dynastic, regional, social, and personal) and the synchronic articulations of time as composed of event-based, duration-based, and body-based temporalities.[70] For Bashir, the task at hand is not only the translation of the "uncanny" of this ecology into modern texts to reflect on alternative realities. This "uncanny" has a more pointed political function in his thought. As he argues, engaging the heterogeneity of Islamic time supports the political analysis of various forms of modern Muslim and Western reductionisms in relation to the construction of Muslim identity and the role of past Islamic events in the existential choices of the Muslim subject.[71] The heterogeneity of time is not an obstacle in the way of a postcolonial critique, it is the *condition* of such critique.

But what are the other forms of worlding which concepts of heterogonous and circumscribed time reveal and which can inspire contemporary critique? In his study of social life in the Moroccan city of Sefrou, Lawrence Rosen interprets a similar set of temporal concepts

[70] For the role of body-based temporalities, see Bashir's analysis of the temporal imagination of the para-historical genealogies of Sufi masters who trace back their connection to the prophet through a chain of handshakes. Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). For the analysis of Islamic temporalities. see Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014): 519–44.

[71] He writes, "Whether they are referred to as traditionalists, Islamists, moderates, or modernists, Muslim actors in the public sphere today construct and advocate the legitimacy of their positions through reference to golden ages of the past or the future, which they contrast with the situation in the present. If we interpret these actors within the single timeline that has dominated modern academic views of Islam, we turn to moments in the records of earlier Muslims to find clues for understanding the present. This perspective leads to explanatory paradigms centered on notions of positive or negative evolution, "medievalism," and so forth, which have had a nearly universal monopoly on understanding modern Muslim individuals and movements. If we break away from the myth of a single Islamic time, we can understand these Muslims as active interpreters who create new forms of Islam in conjunction with their readings of the past and the circumstances of the present." Bashir, "On Islamic Time," 544.

as expressions of the Islamic notion of reality as *ḥaqq*, a fundamentally "relational concept."[72] Rosen writes: "To speak of *ḥaqq* is, in short, to convey that sense of mutual obligation that binds men to men, and men to God. What is 'true' or 'real' is, in no small part, the web of indebtedness that links sentient beings to one another in a chain of obligations."[73] This, according to him, entails that "each unit of time is, therefore, a living instant, a moment when people, tied to one another by mutual indebtedness, affect each other's existence."[74] Homogenous, empty time is one of the pillars of anatomized individualism; heterogenous, circumscribed time is the condition of the social. To interpret this lived sense of time as defective and timeless is simply to overlook how time operates as a key dimension of an irreducibly collective experience instead as an abstraction mechanism that produces what Charles Taylor called "buffered" selves.[75]

For al-Jabri, however, the different iterations of Arab time reflect the bad habits of the atomistic mind in its obsession with detail and inability to abstract. Islamic temporalities complicate this original defect. Enchantment equals timelessness and certain Islamic traditions go as far as maintaining that time has no independent reality of its own. The task is, then, to awaken Arab reason to its discontinuous perception of the temporal order and to guard it against the traditions of enchantment which have diminished the value of time in the Islamic worldview.

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[72] Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 60–61.
[73] Rosen, 62.
[74] Rosen, 174.
[75] Taylor contrasts the modern "buffered self" to the pre-modern "porous self." The identity of the "porous self" extends over multiple layers of social, ethnic, and religious belonging. Most importantly, its porousness stems from the way in which the meaning of the self is linked to a sense of place in an overarching cosmological design. On the other hand, "For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them." Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 38.

In encountering Greek thought and Sufism through the developments of the Islamic philosophical tradition, Arab reason was introduced to contradictory notions of rational progress and timeless enchantment.

Islamic philosophy is the tradition per excellence in which the diagnosis of Arabic epistemological ventures and the effects of enchanted cosmologies come to the fore. Pre-modern Islamic sciences are diverse and al-Jabri's critique of Arab reason traces the effects of the atomistic worldview in their developments. In the history of Islamic philosophy, however, we find his most comprehensive answers to the questions of "what went wrong?" and "what must be done?" It is worthy to note that concerns of historical lag and thwarted futures motivate these inquiries. In the conclusion to his first volume, *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Formation of Arab Reason), al-Jabri asks:

> Why is it that Arabic Islamic culture failed to overcome its inaugural period and accomplish the Renaissance which took place in Europe? In other words, why did the Arab experience fail in that which the European experience accomplished with success? I mean, to secure for itself linear progress… Why is it that the epistemological tools (concepts, methods, and visions) of Arabic culture during the period of its zenith in the Medieval Age did not develop in such a way that would allow the culture to achieve a progressive intellectual and scientific renaissance similar to what took place in Europe at the beginning of the fifteenth century? Since this question can only be asked and can only be meaningful in comparison with the European Renaissance, and since the Renaissance was linked to the Greek classical tradition, which we will discuss later, we must ask our questions in this very framework, the framework of comparison with the Greek and European experiences.[76]

Ironically, al-Jabri thinks through the analogical method which he much critiqued. While Arab liberals draw on the European model in terms of their ideas, he transposes this very model on Islamic history and questions the development of Islamic learned traditions in light of the European cultural trajectory. This is why Stephen Sheehi concludes that al-Jabri's project

[76] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 335.

reflects the same "Hegelian dialectics" that operated in the liberal discourse of Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) a century before.[77] It is the Arab modernist Hegelianism in which the histories of the knowledge traditions of Islam are understood in terms of their correspondence to and relevance in the historical narrative of Europe. The history of Islamic philosophy in al-Jabri's work gives this dialectic its clearest expression.

3.6 Islamic Philosophy: The Political Encounter between Arab Reason, Greek, and Gnostic Thought

For the Moroccan thinker, the story of philosophy in Muslim lands is viewed contextually as the product of the conflict of ethnicities and internally as the conflict of modes of thought. To put his ideas in relief, it is worth considering the history of this tradition as contemporary scholarship establishes it. In so doing, my aim is not to weigh al-Jabri's views against a historical "truth." Rather, it is to highlight the ideological stakes which motivate his narrative as opposed to other scholarly narratives.

Following the onset of the Abbasid caliphate and the founding of the city of Baghdad in 762 C.E., a Graeco-Arabic translation movement began and lasted until the end of the 10th century. During this period, Graeco-Alexandrian philosophical and scientific works were first translated into Syriac and to a lesser extent Middle Persian Pahlavi and then into Arabic.[78] This formative period witnessed the spread of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts and their

[77] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 26.
[78] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 25.

acclamation in the majority of Islamic disciplines. According to Dimitri Gutas, the Abbasid translation project and the interpretive developments that followed it were a multi-ethnic Islamic enterprise and the product of patterns of knowledge circulation that predated Islam.[79]

Abu Yaʿqub al-Kindi (d. 259/873), the head of a translation circle and the teacher of Abbasid princes, is credited with producing the first Muslim works of original philosophy. Al-Kindi defended philosophy as part of the theological study into the nature of "the first cause."[80] In *On First Philosophy*, he worked on integrating Aristotelian metaphysics (except for the doctrine of the eternity of the universe) and Neoplatonic emanationist cosmology consisting of the hypostases of the One, the Intellect, and the World Soul. Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 338/950) expanded the Neoplatonic cosmology to include a series of intellects and envisioned a greater role for philosophy in the governance of a "virtuous" polity.[81] Unlike al-Kindi, who treated philosophy as a branch of religion, al-Farabi distinguished between philosophy as the unmediated access to truth and religion as the form of its mass consumption. Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), who was heavily influenced by al-Farabi, further developed the project of Islamic

[79] Numerous theories have been advanced on the Islamic interest in Greek thought in this period. Dimitri Gutas speaks of two major accounts: one that emphasizes "the scholarly zeal of a few Syriac-speaking Christians" who labored on the translations "out of altruistic motives for the improvement of society" and another that stresses "the open-mindedness of a few 'enlightened rulers.'" These accounts, as he asserts, are insufficient to explain a wide-ranging phenomenon in which, in fact, "the support [for the translation movement] cut across all lines of religious, sectarian, ethnic, tribal, and linguistic demarcation. Patrons were Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims, Sunnīs and Shīʿites, generals and civilians, merchants and landowners." Gutas, 3–5. Further, as Dimitri Gutas remarks, among the potential factors, the decision of the Abbasid rulers to sponsor translations of Greek works was meant to inscribe the Arab court into the royal culture of the Sassanids. This Persian dynasty supported the translation into Pahlavi of Greek texts which they considered to be part of the Zoroastrian canon that was dispersed after Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia. Gutas, 43.

[80] See al-Kindi, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, trans. Alfred L. Ivry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974).

[81] See al-Farabi, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, trans. Richard Walzer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

philosophy, contributing major innovative works on logic, psychology, medicine, physics, and metaphysics. Becoming the reference point for all subsequent philosophical thought in the Islamic world from Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) in the West to Mulla Sadra (d. 1049/1640) in the East, he also produced allegorical texts which, alongside his mystical-philosophical *Remarks and Admonitions*, allowed for the flourishing of Sufi philosophical trends of thought in the Muslim world.[82] Al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111), who is often blamed for the supposed demise of Islamic philosophy through his critique of Ibn Sina, inherited and developed the philosophical mystical synthesis.[83] Witnessed in the centuries after Ibn Sina is a flourishing of syncretic thought, a unique and innovative mixing of Sufi tradition with Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy alongside Islamic theology.[84] Ibn Sina's thought was influential in reconciling philosophy with religion even beyond the Muslim world. As Shams Inati remarks regarding the Latin translation of Ibn Sina, the Muslim philosopher's efforts "to synthesize Greek and Islamic thought" represented "an attempt in which the West found the seed for a synthesis between Greek philosophy and Christianity."[85] This syncretic tradition flourished, too, in Muslim Spain, exemplified by such thinkers as Ibn Tufayl (d. 580/1185) and Ibn ʿArabi (d. 637/1240). The highly influential Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198) distanced himself from this trend and emphasized the

[82] Ibn Sina, *Remarks and Admonitions*, trans. Shams Constantine Inati (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984).
[83] For al-Ghazali's critique of Ibn Sina, see al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997).
For an example of al-Ghazali's later philosophical mystical works, see al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998).
[84] For analysis of the "Avicennian turn" of Sunni theology that began even before al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111) through the work of his teacher al-Juwayni (d. 477/1085) and other theologians of al-Juwayni's time such as the "Maturidite" al-Bazdawi (492/1099), see Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65–100.
[85] Shams Constantine Inati, "Ibn Sina," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 451.

need to return to the pure Aristotle. He contributed important commentaries on Aristotle and innovative works on Islamic law. Beyond Ibn Rushd's censure, the syncretic fusion of mystical, theological, and philosophical works continued to prosper in the Muslim world well into the modern period.

In examining this long history, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri focuses on ethnic struggle and political ideology. As he describes it, the Arabic-Graeco translation movement was a "progressive" project espoused by the Arab state.[86] Arab rulers promoted Greek rational thought (*burhān*) to open new epistemological horizons for Arab reason (*bayān*). On the other hand, the Persian aristocracy reintroduced its Gnostic reason (*ʾirfān*) through the trojan horse of Sufism and Shiʿism to undermine this progressive project. The development of philosophical Sufism, as it is established by the Persian pioneers Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali, represent the subversion of an original Graeco-Arabic endeavor. In *Nahnu wa-l-Turath* (Us and Heritage), al-Jabri writes:

> The translation movement, as it occurred in the first Abbasid period and especially under the reign of al-Maʾmun, was not an "innocent" endeavor or a "neutral" cultural project mandated by progress. On the opposite, it was a crucial element in the general strategy adopted by the new state, that of the Abbasids, to face the opposition forces led by Persian aristocracy who shifted to the ideological plane [of the struggle] after failing in the political and social ones. Persian aristocracy, which embraced Shiʿism in its revolt against the Umayyads, realized that authority in Arabic Islamic society is, in the first place, a question of ideology. Ideology, i.e. the Islamic religion, produces material force: it mitigates tribal conflicts, represses class tensions or channels them toward the outside in the form of conquest. Therefore, Persian aristocracy attempted to engage in a power struggle against the core of the Arab state, i.e. its ideology, using its religious cultural heritage, which is built on Gnosticism. That is to say, it is built on the belief in the presence of another mode of knowing besides reason which is *ʿirfān* (gnostic reason) or divine inspiration that is not interrupted by the end of prophecy. It is the concept of continuous revelation which leaves no room for reason or the religious text.[87]

[86] al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath*, 36.
[87] al-Jabri, 86.

While Greek thought was an arsenal of "new weapons" employed by the Abbasid state in its ideological battle with its Persian populace, philosophical Sufism represents the triumph of the latter group, the revival of their pre-Islamic heritage, and the distortion of a once promising Graeco-Arabic project.[88] This very fusion of Arabic rhetorical reason (*bayān*) and the gnostic thought (*ʿirfān*) of the Persians constitutes the epistemological unconscious of the "dead" Arabic cultural time.

Regarding the various schools of Islamic philosophy, al-Jabri distinguishes between two significant moments beyond the foundational period. There is first the subversive moment of Ibn Sina which consolidated in Islamic philosophy "a lethal obscurantist irrationalism" which is ideologically motivated as a counter "Persian nationalist project."[89] There is secondly the corrective moment of Ibn Rushd who attacked the Neoplatonic distortions of the Aristotelian tradition and emphasized religion and philosophy as parallel distinct paths.[90] Al-Jabri writes:

> Whoever lived, or lives, the moment of Ibn Sina after the moment of Ibn Rushd lives intellectually outside of history. In fact, after Ibn Rushd, we, the Arabs, have been living outside of history in cultural stagnation and decay. For we have clung to the moment of Ibn Sina after al-Ghazali had brought it into mainstream Islam while the Europeans lived the history from which we exited: they adopted Ibn Rushd, lived his moment, and still do. What remains of our philosophical *turāth*, that is to say what can live with us our current age, *can only be* of the order of Ibn Rushd. Let us consider in a few points what remains of Ibn Rushd's thought which can serve our contemporary intellectual life. In our opinion, what allowed Ibn Rushd's thought to enter history is its rupture with Ibn Sina's Eastern philosophy which was adapted in different ways by al-Ghazali and al-Suhrawardi. Sufism remained opposed by Muslim scholars and jurists who insisted on the original form of Islam, i.e., its Arab form. They considered Sufism foreign stock brought in by the Persians which is incompatible with Islam, a religion based on simple and natural belief. Ibn Sina rebuilt the pagan Hermetic metaphysics of emanation and gave it an Islamic garb. Al-Ghazali inherited this metaphysics and presented it [in mainstream Sunni Islam] as an alternative to Aristotelian philosophy. Since al-Ghazali embraced Ashʿarism, he was successful in spreading Ibn Sina's Eastern philosophy under

[88] al-Jabri, 36.
[89] al-Jabri, 39.
[90] al-Jabri, 42.

> the name of Sunni Sufism, an oxymoron since there was never any Sufism in the *sunna* (custom) of the Prophet and he never was a Sufi. The Prophet lived a normal life experiencing all its licit and legitimate dimensions. His legitimacy, upon which Islam was based, was never obscurantist and otherworldly, but was realist and rationalist. Quranic speech is a rational discourse and not a discourse of Gnosticism, Sufism, and Illuminationism. Ibn Rushd marked a rupture with Ibn Sina's thought. Let us adopt, for lack of a better term, this rupture. Let us establish a radical and final break with Ibn Sina's "Eastern" spirit. Let us wage a decisive war against it.[91]

It is important to notice how history functions in al-Jabri's thought as a single universal reality largely shaped by the European precedent with no consideration for parallel histories or historical difference. To escape its "dead cultural time," Arab reason must break with the "Eastern spirit" of Ibn Sina and reclaim the moment of Ibn Rushd from Europe. The Latin translations of the rationalist Ibn Rushd were influential to the European Renaissance. Consequently, what is relevant in the Islamic philosophical *turāth* can only be of the order of Ibn Rushd especially in his attacks on Neoplatonic Aristotelianism which constitute the backbone of philosophical Sufism. Philosophy in Muslim lands died out with the death of Ibn Rushd. The philosophical gestations in the centuries after and until the modern period are unworthy of the name "philosophy."

Al-Jabri's reading of this history affirms a traditional Western narrative which views philosophy in the Muslim world as a short-lived experience of importation that died out in a few centuries because of cultural incompatibility.[92] Islamic philosophy, as it should have been, ended

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[91] al-Jabri, 50.

[92] The classical narrative in Western scholarship on Islamic philosophy follows the transmission of classical Greek heritage into the Islamic sphere in the ninth century and dates the demise of this tradition to the twelfth century under the attacks of theology. This narrative, which runs from Ernest Renan (d. 1892) to Leo Strauss (d. 1973), is best exemplified by the British philosopher Bertrand Russel's entry on Islamic philosophy in his *The History of Western Philosophy*. The Islamic philosophical tradition is treated as a short transitional phase in the history of a Western phenomenon functioning merely as a "transmitter" and being "not important as an original thought." Philosophy begins through translations and original composition with al-Kindi (d. 873), reaches its zenith with Ibn Sina (d. 1037), and ends with, but also returns to Europe

with Ibn Rushd in the twelfth century. Mohammad Azadpur objects to al-Jabri's "modernist" reading of this history. Against the view that Persian Gnosticism terminated philosophy in Muslim lands, he writes, "The flowering of philosophy in the Safavid dynasty and its cultivation in the Shi'i seminaries to this day testify to the problematic nature of al-Jabri's account of the nature of philosophy and its history in the Islamic world."[93] Al-Jabri's disregard for the continued life of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic theories in both Sunni and Shi'i traditions points to the limitations of al-Jabri's perspective. As Wael Hallaq and Mohammad Azadpur both argue, al-Jabri transposes a modern notion of philosophy as the building of theoretical rational systems (i.e., philosophy as discourse) to traditions in which philosophy, to use Pierre Hadot's term, was a "way of life," the cultivation of knowledge as conducive to ethical habitus, and the attainment of wisdom as a form of spiritual care for the self.[94] As such, the further developments of these philosophical ways of living for which we have textual evidence that present evolving concepts but also inform of models of ethical practice in traditions such as Sunni Sufism and Shi'ism become anathema for the modernist perspective of our rationalist scholar.

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through the Latin translations of, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). Bertrand Russell, "Mohammedan Culture and Philosophy," in *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 419–28. The consensus in contemporary scholarship is on the falsity of this narrative and its ideological motivations. For a survey of Islamic philosophical works from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, see Robert Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (ca. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 47 (2004): 149–91.

[93] Mohammad Azadpur, *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 16.

[94] Wael Hallaq remarks on the erudition of al-Jabri's project but emphasizes that, "complexity and sophistication are hardly sufficient conditions for, or true measures of, either qualitative innovation or sagacious insightfulness and independence of mind. For Jābrī's project remains confined to a venture whose desideratum is to privilege reason—a modern, instrumentalist, and Eurocentric conception of rationality—over all other epistemic components and dimensions of intellectual heritage." Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity*, 18. See also Azadpur, *Reason Unbound*, 15–16.

Moving from history to structure, al-Jabri then argues that the atomistic Arab reason was corrected by its exposure to the Greek (but also universal) rational thought for a short period only to be derailed by its local context. It was undermined through its fusion with the gnostic mode of thought and its enchanted worldview. But what are the specific qualities of this mode of thought which have caused Arab reason to lose the sense of its historicity and progress?

3.7 Sufism, Broken Time, and the Future of Arab Thought

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri explores the history and structures of Gnostic thought (*ʿirfān*) to determine the ways in which it hampered the progress of Arabic Islamic culture. It is here that the discourse of being and time is reintroduced forcefully. Al-Jabri explores the origins of its main vehicle, i.e., Sufism, focusing on the ethics and ontological principles of this tradition. In its worldview and practice, Sufism represents the main expression of "unreason" in Islam. Modern Arab thought can secure its modernity only after achieving a terminal break with this central tradition of pre-modern enchantment and its timeless ontology.

As we read in al-Jabri's project, Sufism and its philosophical offshoots are fundamentally a non-Arab form of religiosity and worldview. Along with Shiʾism, it is characteristic of an Eastern Persian Islam with roots stretching from Hellenic Egypt to Sassanian times. Gnostic thought (*ʿirfān*), which underlies this tradition, stems from diverse sources that include the Corpus Hermeticum and the Zoroastrian tradition.[95] This mode of thought is based on intuition (*ḥads*), an experiential form of knowledge that removes the distinction between subject and

[95] al-Jabri, *Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 207.

object. It is also a non-theoretical form of knowing dependent on achieving a "habitus" of spiritual training that leads to the "unveiling" of the noumena.[96]

According to al-Jabri, while Gnostic thought was advancing in the Arabic sphere through the early developments of Shiʿism and Sunni Sufism, it was also taking root in Islamic philosophy through the expansion of the Neoplatonic base of this tradition and its eclipsing of Aristotelian concepts. Ibn Sina's "Eastern philosophy," which he develops later in his life, breaks with the philosophical focus on the intellect and its theoretical bliss and establishes a comprehensive discourse on the soul and its salvation through knowledge and spiritual practice.[97] Since al-Farabi, Arabic philosophy has been interested in the question of cultivating the rational soul within an emanationist cosmology. The non-rational aspect of Ibn Sina's discourse, for al-Jabri, sets in with the shift from knowledge as the cultivation of the rational soul to reach immaterial rational bliss to knowledge as the tool of spiritual education of the soul to achieve a mystical reunion with the Intellect. The modernist notion of philosophy as rational theoretical discourse assigns then no value to the development of philosophy as a mode of generating practical ethics. It views these developments as distortions of a purely mental science. Since it inherits Ibn Sina's ideas but also the ideas of Neoplatonic groups such as the Ikhwan al-Safaʾ (The Brethren of Purity), philosophical Sufism, for al-Jabri, expands the "Gnostic mode of thought" and popularizes it in Muslim societies. It mainstreams the "irrational" tradition of the

[96] Henry Corbin once told Seyyed Hossein Nasr that the Islamic equivalent of Heideggerian phenomenological "disclosure" of the being of existents is the concept of *kashf al-maḥjūb*, "the unveiling of the hidden" which is the title of one of the earliest Sufi works. Corbin's early career interest in phenomenology, having been the first translator into French of Heidegger, gave way to a lifelong commitment to the study of Islamic philosophy, Shi'ism, and Sufism which constitute, for him, different strands of a "prophetic philosophy." See, Azadpur, *Reason Unbound*, 35.

[97] al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath*, 150–66.

moral education of the soul and produces skewed understandings of the nature of knowledge, being, and time.

In *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Structure of Arab Reason), al-Jabri analyzes the Sufi view of time and its existential affect. Sufi concepts aggravate the Arab discontinuous, event-based, and spatial sense time in further adding new layers to the heterogeneity of the temporal. Al-Jabri first notes the absence of a notion of an absolute serial time in Sufism. Quoting the ideas of al-Hujwiri (d. 471/1079), he writes:

> "There is no difference between the absence of mind (*ghayba*) in space and in time." This expression captures the ʿ*irfānī* Sufi vision. I mean its treatment of time single handedly constitutes and reflects its worldview. The ʿ*ārif* (the Sufi) does not acknowledge time as an external frame for events or a duration of conscious states, a duration that is continuous which disallows a regressive march or a forward jump. Rather for him, time is like space. He can move in any direction he wishes, forward and backward. He can be present in it or absent.[98]

In Shiʿi Gnosticism, al-Jabri maintains, time is circular. It connects the two cycles of the period of the presence of the Imam and the time of his seclusion (*ghayba*). The awaited re-appearance of the Imam achieves a circular return to the beginning of eschatological time.[99] In Sufi ontology, on the other hand, time is the eternal present in which creation and redemption are affirmed at every moment of time.

Much like the Arabic event-based temporality, Sufi time is neither homogeneous nor impersonal. It rests on the present moment which is at the center of multiple layers of time that connect the change-based duration of the universe to God's eternal now. This eternal present, then, fetters consciousness to an immediacy of existence, disallowing the sense of accumulative progress. Al-Jabri continues the earlier quote:

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[98] al-Jabri, *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi*, 1986, 352–53.
[99] a l-Jabri, 317–43.

> In fact, the term *zamān* (impersonal time) is rarely used in Sufi discourse. It is rather the term *waqt* (the present moment) which dominates. They define it as "that which prevails over the human being" and "your state in the time of the present state which has no attachment to your past or future" … It is clear that the notion of *waqt* for the Sufis rests on two elements: first, the rupture with the past and the future, and the preoccupation with the present state (*ḥāl*) which absorbs the arrow of time (*khaṭ al-zamān*) and substitutes the succession of moments in one moment that extends without a beginning or end. From this perspective, Sufi *waqt* is a negation of both natural and psychological time. Secondly, it is characterized by the loss of free choice and the expression of an overpowering sense of predestination in which the "seeker" loses control over ability and action, motion and rest, which all become of the divine.[100]

Sufi time is an expanding vertical present. As al-Jabri interprets this tradition, Sufi time is the "negation" and "loss" of the temporally conscious self. Time in Sufism is then an "ontologically broken time" (*zamān munkasir*) shot through with moments of the messianic.[101]

Focusing on the Andalusian Ibn ʿArabi which he describes as "the peak of Gnosticism in Islam," al-Jabri argues that the Sufi discourse on time affects a negation of the value of the temporal in human existence.[102] Quoting Ibn ʿArabi, he writes:

> "The secret of life flows in the multiple worlds," and "the *ʿārif* has an effect in the divine and earthly realms in the measure of the spirit that he obtains from divine effusion." Can we after this, look for a space for time in this spiritual gnostic worldview? We have seen how al-Hujwiri, speaking for "Sunni" Sufis, has stated "There is no difference between the absence of mind (*ghayba*) in space and in time." And here is Ibn ʿArabi asserting in the name of gnostic Sufis that there is no difference between the effect the friend of God (*walī*) in both the divine world and the earthly world. The friend of God influences both realms with he receives from the heavenly assembly while he is living in this world. In reality, *time has no significance in this worldview* which allows the *ʿārif* to annul all the boundaries and separations between earth and heaven, between past, present, and future. This is clearly asserted by Ibn ʿArabi who states, "People have disagreed on the meaning and referent of the term 'time' (*zamān*). The philosophers use it to denote many things; the majority of them regard it as an imagined duration which is divided by the motion of the celestial spheres. The theologians use it to denote something different, namely, comparing two occurrences through asking 'when?' The Arabs use it to mean the [alteration of] night and day... Nighttime and daytime are the two parts of the day. The great [cosmic] movement made this entity [that is the day] manifest. However, in actual existence, only the moving entity exists – and nothing else. Movement, itself, is not time.

[100] al-Jabri, 353.
[101] al-Jabri, 345.
[102] al-Jabri, 296.

> Time, thus, is an imagined entity with no reality of its own. If this is established, [we say] the measured cognized day is what is expressed as existent time. Through it, the weeks, the months, the years, and the extended durations manifest themselves…" It is obvious that Ibn ʿArabi is inspired by the Arab *bayānī* worldview which conflates time with that which is timed. However, Ibn ʿArabi also expands time by expanding that which is timed in the Gnostic vision. That is why the measure of the 'day' and all segments of time depend on the estimation of what is attributed to it. Time has no fixed reality or independent existence. [103]

Sufi discourse then articulates the notion of time only to negate its objective reality and diminish its value in ontology. This sense of the temporal stems from a pessimistic outlook on life and produces escapist ethics.

The heterogeneity of time in Sufism fundamentally expresses an individual desire to escape the social world. Al-Jabri acknowledges that the Sufi discourse on time is an existential discourse. It is however of the alienated passive variety, instead of the modern heroic one. Al-Jabri writes:

> *ʿIrfān*, like we said, is partially an attitude to the world. It is a psychological, intellectual, and existential attitude. In fact, it is a comprehensive stance on the world that includes [the notions of] life, human behavior, and destiny. The general attributes of this stance include self-isolation, escape from the world, and the lamentation of the condition of the human being living within it. This attitude includes the tendency to aggrandize the self and the individual experience, i.e., the self of the *ʿārif*. This discourse departs from a state of anxiety and disappointment in the world in which the *ʿārif* finds himself. In this world, he lives as a soul imprisoned in a body and an individuality constrained by society which only increases his torment. He feels surrounded and enslaved. The world manifests as a place of evil. His central problem becomes then the problem of evil: why does it exist in the world? Why does it prevail? Where does it come from? From the consciousness of this 'condition,' the Gnostic position begins. From its refusal, it departs. First, the *ʿārif* laments this condition. Then, he expresses his aversion and enmity to it. Then he protests and rebels against it. The *ʿārif* rejects this condition as an external reality and an internal state. That is to say, he refuses that this condition is part of the terms of life and rejects his own reality as an [individual] existent limited by these terms. Thus, his sense of alienation is doubled: he feels that he is a stranger in a profoundly alienating world.[104]

The existential outlook of Sufism is then one of pure escapism.

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[103] al-Jabri, 368.
[104] al-Jabri, 255.

Alienation and the imaginary of multiple time cycles translates into an individualistic ethic of withdrawal into the self and renunciation of the group. The theories on the self which pervade the moral psychology of Sufism do not reflect, for the Moroccan philosopher, a pedagogy of constructive moral education. They rather signal the estrangement of the self from the world. Al-Jabri asserts:

> Salvation and redemption begin then with the knowledge of the self, a knowledge that projects self not as belonging to the world but as a case of existence that is superior to the world and of a different nature. If one gains knowledge of the self, if one collects it from the fragments of matter and delivers it from its prison house, then one grasps the eternal heavenly origin from which it sprouted. The more one gains insight into this origin, the more one yearns for it. Until there comes a moment one feels at a "distance of two bows lengths, or nearer." There comes a moment when the lover and the Beloved are united, the moment of self-annihilation where the *ʿārif* is fused with his origin.[105]

As al-Jabri elaborates, this imaginary of time expresses the desire for the emancipation of the individual self in disregard for the state of the collective. Social existence is perpetual torment and the best the *ʿārif* can do is to opt for a final retreat from the social.

As elucidated earlier, knowledge in the Sufi tradition is primarily an ethical experience carried out through spiritual exercises instead of the product of rational deduction and deliberation. For al-Jabri, this type of knowledge is the result of the delusions of an individuality that retreats from the world of history and society into the seclusion of dreamful states. Engaging the thought of Michel Foucault and his late lectures on the relation between truth veridiction and subject formation in Hellenistic thought, the next chapter will dispute al-Jabri's assessment of the existential and social consequences of the Sufi view of time and practice of care for the present moment. For the time being, this chapter will continue to follow al-Jabri's arguments to their natural conclusions. For al-Jabri then, the difficulties that Arab reason naturally experiences with

[105] al-Jabri, 257–58.

grasping the continuous flow of time and the proper conditions of historical and social progress are further complicated by the timelessness and subjectivism of the Sufi worldview.

Ontologically broken and fettered to the timeless present, Sufi time conveys a nihilistic attitude which is hopeless about the world and hostile to the collective. The effects of this imaginary of time in pre-modern Islamic discourse lie then in the propagation of irrational, passive, and self-centered ethics. Most importantly, for al-Jabri's argument on Arab reason, Sufi discourse diminishes of the meaning and value of the temporal in Arabic Islamic culture.

Arab reason, which is limited by its atomistic worldview that privileges the part (the event) over the whole (time), is further fettered to the present by a timeless and escapist spirituality. In its privileging of the inner temporalities of the self, Sufi sensibility produces a nihilist discourse on time and existence, a discourse that denies time a substantive reality and defines being as radical alienation. This discourse trains the individual to seek in reclusive imagination what he cannot achieve in social being. Modern Arabic thought, then, would do well to reject this tradition, to dismiss its enchanted temporalities, and denounce its escapist ethics. Modern Arabic thought and cultural production require the disavowal of the "Gnostic discourse" of the late Ibn Sina, of al-Ghazali, and of Ibn ʿArabi to find its contemporary vitality.

To go back to a key quote mentioned earlier, al-Jabri pleads with modern Arab thinkers, religious reformers, and secular philosophers to "establish a radical and final break with Ibn Sina's 'Eastern' spirit. Let us wage a decisive war against it."[106] Rationality is the weapon which will undo the harms of enchanted worldviews and expose their dysfunctional notions of time and being. Arab reason on its own count suffers its slavish focus on the event. Aristotelian thought put it on a course of historical progress which was thwarted by the return of Gnostic spirituality.

[106] al-Jabri, *Nahnu wa-l-Turath*, 50.

In traditions such as Sufism, time not only loses its homogeneity and dynamic nature but also loses its meaning as the condition of constructive individual and social being.

Conclusion

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's intellectual project reflects an erudite scholarship on Islamic intellectual traditions. His normative commitments and ideological agenda, however, produce a strict binary between the rational elements of the Islamic philosophical heritage that are useful to the modernity of Arab thought and the non-rational remainders of heritage. This binary leads to a reductive diagnosis of the status of modern Arabic culture which he considers to be a failed project. As such, al-Jabri's discourse condenses different elements of post-*Naksa* thought in its culturalist explanations of the political and economic crises of the postcolonial Arab world.

Al-Jabri's analysis of the epistemological structures of Islamic learned traditions is influenced by theories of racial determinism and ethnocentrism. He identifies the Sufi intellectual tradition as the cultural other of Arab reason which must be disavowed by contemporary Arab thinkers. His assessment rests on a value system that operates under what Charles Taylor calls "the acultural account of modernity."[107] This account universalizes the experience of the Enlightenment which becomes the blueprint for the "culture-neutral" progress of world cultures towards a disenchanted reality in which all aspects of life become rationalized and all "myth" is destroyed. In terms of pre-modern philosophical discourse, this value-system assigns little significance to the moral, existential, and aesthetic dimensions of concepts that do not conform to the modernist understanding of philosophy as rational discourse. The next chapter of this dissertation explores alternative dimensions of Sufi time that al-Jabri's reading

[107] See Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," 1999.

marginalizes. It puts forward arguments that refute al-Jabri's conclusion on the existential meaning of this imaginary of time. The final chapter of this dissertation will then consider alternative Arab discoursing with heterogeneity of time in Sufism. These projects locate important tools for the critique of the violent rationalities of capitalist modernity in what Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri identifies as the irrational sensibilities of Sufism.

Chapter 4: The Imaginary of Time in Sufism

Post-*Naksa* Arab thinkers of different dyes critiqued the Arab "discontinuous" sense of time. Some among them spoke of the effects of Islamic enchanted temporalities on the Arab sense of historicity and progress. These motifs echoed in works of cultural self-critique. They also developed into scholarly discourses in works of *turāth* (pre-modern Islamic cultural heritage). *Turāth*, which has been a constitutive element of Arab modernity became a diagnostic site for the analysis of the transhistorical ills of Arabic Islamic culture.

In many respects, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri epitomizes the trends of post-*Naksa* paradigm of Arab thought in his crisis-driven questioning of the self and grandiose theory of the internal defects of the Arabic and Islamic worldview. As explored in the previous chapter, al-Jabri's multi-volume *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi* (The Critique of Arab Reason) deploys the image of an atomistic Arab reason whose sense of historicity and progress has been severely distorted by the tradition of gnostic enchantment. Philosophical Sufism, being the fruit of the decadence of a once prominent Graeco Arabic project, reflects the harmful effects of these distortions in its ontological concepts. This tradition denies the objective reality of time and diminishes its meaning in an ontology deprived of change. This moral imaginary of time produces no positive contributions to the Arabic Islamic worldview as it stems from an ethos of alienated seclusion and promotes the rejection of the world of history and society.

This chapter presents an alternative reading of Sufi time. It argues that in Sufism, time is viewed as an internal component of the human moral experience which unfolds in an ontology that is marked by perpetual newness and change. Drawing on the later writings of Michel Foucault and his analysis of the status of knowledge in Hellenic schools of thought, I argue that the Sufi concept of minding the present moment represents a moral technology of the self that

while initially presenting a self-centered notion of care ultimately produces an ethic of moral sociability. The value of this discourse to modern Arabic thought cannot be grasped through the misleading rational-irrational binary. The original aesthetic and moral philosophy of this tradition escapes the modernist focus on logical constructs and rational theoretical discourse.

The chapter first explores the general attitude to the question of time and temporal being in Sufi thought and poetry. Then, it focuses on the concept of the present moment (*al-waqt*) as it is articulated in Sufi texts. In exploring this concept, this chapter pays attention to its aesthetics and ethics. The Sufi discourse on time rests on a number of Arabic concepts. In order to capture its nuances, it is imperative to establish the semantic field of interrelated temporal notions such as *al-dahr* and *al-zamān* as they are conveyed in classical Arabic poetry, Islamic theology, and Islamic philosophy. The Sufi perception of time represents a unique and consistent stance, and as Gerhard Böwering remarks, a holistic synthesis of multiple Islamic temporal concepts.[1] The contribution of this synthesis, as this chapter argues, lies in redefining time from an external condition of perpetual decay to an internal structure of the moral self. Since poetry is a central genre in both Sufi thought and pre-modern Arabic writing, this chapter starts with poetry and ends with prose.

4.1 Why Poetry?

In this chapter, I rely on poetic texts by the Andalusian Sufi Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi (d. 637/1240). The choice of poetry as the primary material of analysis is not an arbitrary one.

[1] Böwering asserts, "The world of Islam advanced a great variety of theories explaining time, and Muslim mysticism in particular blended seemingly contradictory conceptions of the temporal into an integrated understanding of human experience." Gerhard Böwering, "Ideas of Time in Persian Sufism," *Iran* 30 (1992): 77.

Poetry is central to the expression of both Arabic cultural standards and Islamic knowledge more broadly. Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) remarked that poetry is "the archive of [Arabs'] sciences and their history, the evidence of what they considered right or wrong, and the principal basis of reference for most of their sciences and wisdom."[2] His statement can be asserted with equal force regarding other Muslim cultural contexts, Persian being another compelling example.

Beyond the question of cultural expression, poetry is fundamental to knowledge construction in pre-modern Islam. As an example, Frantz Rosenthal argued that the original meaning of the word *shāʿir* (poet) in pre-Islamic Arabia meant the "one who knows" because knowledge was conceived of primarily as a semiotic process of recognizing signs (geographical, social, metaphysical) in the pursuit of truth.[3] This, he maintains, explains the derivation of *ʿilm* (knowledge) from *ʿalāma* (sign) as well as the derivation of *jahl* (ignorance) from *jāla* (to wander in circles). This original emphasis on the importance of the poetic sign for knowledge construction continued as the Islamic polity expanded and included other knowledge traditions. In their adaptation of Greek thought, Muslim philosophers differed from the Greek masters who considered poetry to be a lower imitation of truth whose harms outweigh its benefits. In their treatment of the Aristotelian corpus, both al-Farabi (d. 350/961) and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), following the Alexandrian commentary tradition, included Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as part of the *Organon*, the collection of Aristotle's works on logic.[4] They further argued that poetry has its unique contribution to the apprehension of truth through what they termed the

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[2] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 374.
[3] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant; the Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 12.
[4] Ibn Sina, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle: A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text*, trans. Ismail M. Dahiyat (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 3.

"poetic syllogism." This syllogism works through *takhyīl* or the "make-believe acknowledgment of the truth of the proposition" that is "emotive in character."[5] In Sufism, the tie between poetry and knowledge is even more emphasized.

In the history of Sufi discourse, poetry manifests as the communicative medium of ineffable experience. Dennis McAuley remarked that for Ibn ʿArabi, poetry is the innate tongue of the experience of *ilhām* (inspiration) without the mediation of the deliberating faculty.[6] Even more compellingly for Ibn ʿArabi, it is not sufficient to say that poetry imitates the world. It is the world which is created and structured in the form of poetry. He asserts:

> God Almighty made existence like a verse of poetry in its structure and its order…He made it rest on two [types of] *sabab*, resting on two [types of] *watad*: a *sabab khafīf*, which is the world of spirits, and a *sabab thaqīl*, which is the world of bodies; a *watad majmūʿ*, which is the state of structure and creation, and a *watad mafrūq*, which is the state of the dissolution of the parts. All created things revolve around these realities. All of the world is endowed with rhythm, fastened by rhyme, on the Straight Path.[7]

Claude Addas highlights the difference Ibn ʿArabi draws between poetry and prose: while prose is limited to the sober imagination of the senses, poetry is able to access, through the chain of symbolism, the world of *al-barzakh*: the liminal space of archetypal forms.[8] Following Ibn ʿArabi's own thought, poetry is the most appropriate entry into the range of nuances that are attached to the view of time in Sufism.

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[5] Lara Harb, "Wonder in Aristotelian Arabic Poetics," in *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 81.
[6] Denis E. McAuley, *Ibn `Arabi's Mystical Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 59.
[7] McAuley, 44–45; Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, ed. Ahmad Shamsaddin, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 413–14.
[8] Claude Addas, "L'œuvre poétique d'Ibn 'Arabî et sa réception," *Studia Islamica*, no. 91 (2000): 35.

4.2 Redeeming Time in Islamic Thought: The Example of Ibn ʿArabi

Scholars of Islamic mysticism note that Ibn ʿArabi is one of the most prolific and systematic thinkers of pre-modern Islam.[9] To his followers, he is *al-sheikh al-akbar* (the Grand Sheikh), an ocean of divine wisdom. To his detractors, he is *al-sheikh al-akfar* (the most disbelieving Sheikh), the paragon of subversive religious thought.[10] To both, he is a man of intellectual originality, creative imagination, and poetic genius.[11] Ibn ʿArabi's ideas were disseminated in four continents owing to an impressive repertoire of treatises, epistles, and poems that were popularized by his students and commented upon by generations of scholars.[12]

Ibn ʿArabi was born in Murcia, a town in the South East of the Iberian Peninsula, in 560/1165 AD. His father was a military official serving in the army of the local ruler Ibn Mardanish before joining the conquering forces of the Almohads. The family then relocated to

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[9] Chittick writes, "Probably no one has ever read everything Ibn ʿArabi wrote, and few specialists would even claim to have read the whole *Futuhat*." William C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 1.
Furthermore, Annemarie Schimmel describes Ibn ʿArabi as "more of a genius of systematization than an enraptured mystic, [a fact that] proved helpful for the generations to come, who found, thanks to him a comprehensive system at their disposal." Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 263.

[10] See the dedicated chapter entitled "*al-Mukaffirun l-ibn ʿArabi*" (Those Who Declare Ibn Arabi A Disbeliever) in the Shafiʿi jurist and theologian Burhan al-Din al-Biqaʿi's (d. 1480) refutation of Ibn ʿArabi and Ibn al-Farid's (d. 1234) doctrines. Burhan al-Din al-Biqaʾi, "al-Mukaffirun l-ibn ʿArabi," in *Masraʿ al-Tasawwuf*, ed. ʿAbderrahman al-Wakil (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1980), 150–74.

[11] In *Siyar Aʿlam al-Nubalaʾ*, the hadith scholar and historian Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348) coveys the sense of ambivalence regarding Ibn 'Arabi's legacy. He states in his biographical entry on the Sufi master, "One of his lowliest compositions is the *Fuṣūṣ*. If it does not contain blasphemy, then there is none in the entire world. We seek forgiveness and salvation from God and He is our refuge… I reported on him in *al-Tarikh al-kabir*. *He is in possession of sublime poetry, expansive knowledge, and brilliant intellect.* There is no doubt that many of his statements could be interpreted, with the exception of *al-Fusus*." al-Dhahabi, *Siyar Aʿlam al-Nubalaʾ*, ed. Bashshar ʿAwwad Maʿruf, vol. 23 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1996), 48–49.

[12] Denis E. McAuley notes that Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), for example, "has been the subject of some 150 commentaries." McAuley, *Ibn `Arabi's Mystical Poetics*, 1.

Seville when Ibn ʿArabi was eight years of age.[13] In Seville, he received a home education and pursued a self-initiated spiritual path. He gained such fame for his knowledge and spiritual prowess that at age fifteen the chief judge and Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) requested council with him and inquired of his "*fatḥ* (illumination)."[14] Ibn ʿArabi remained for the next twenty years between Andalusia and the Maghreb following a number of Sufi masters. The Almerian Sufi School of Abu l-ʿAbbas Ibn al-ʿArif was most formative for his thought.[15] This school is linked to the teachings of Ibn Masarra al-Jabali (d. 319/931) which are based, as Henry Corbin maintains, on the doctrines of pseudo-Empedocles.[16] Around the year 1200, Ibn ʿArabi set out for pilgrimage, visiting Cairo, al-Quds, Medina, Mecca, and settling later in Damascus.[17] After performing pilgrimage, Ibn ʿArabi embarked on the task of writing what would become his magnum opus, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations), completed in 1231.[18] In this work, he synthesized trends of mystical thought existing in his time in addition to producing his own original contributions.

Adopting a Neoplatonic philosophy that is anchored in Quranic exegesis, Ibn ʿArabi believed that the Divine names actualize in their effusion (which is based on reflection in the

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[13] Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabi* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999), 34–35.
[14] Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 34.
[15] Addas, 52–52.
[16] Regarding the teachings of pseudo-Empedocles, Corbin writes, "The doctrines attributed to him are principally concerned with the following themes: the pre-eminence and esotericism of philosophy and psychology, leading to the encounter with the *ruhaniyah*, the spiritual person or reality of the hidden being; the absolute simplicity, ineffability and mobile immobility of the first Being; the theory of Emanation; the categories of soul; individual souls as emanations of the Soul of the world; their pre-existence and redemption. The whole doctrine is enormously rich in both Gnostic and neo-Platonic terms." Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 223.
[17] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 196–97.
[18] Addas, 206.

way of a mirror image) the being of the universe and allow divine self-disclosure in endless and non-repeated forms.[19] In this sense, and as Annemarie Schimmel remarked, his view cannot be unproblematically described as pantheistic, the transcendence of God is maintained "across categories, including substance."[20] The endless self-disclosure of the Divine entails that the "gods of belief" are fixed and, therefore, limited articulations of the vision of the endlessly disclosing forms.[21] While developing a line of thinking that emphasizes the unity of truth and its phenomenal manyness, Ibn ʿArabi held firmly to the key Islamic precepts of the transcendence of the divine and the sacred unifying nature of the Shariah (Islamic law). As Gregory Lipton reminds us, these components of Ibn ʿArabi's thought root his system in the Islamic worldview and problematize modern attempts to interpret his pluralist ethos against the grain of its Islamic background.[22]

Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysics, then, does not admit a fixed state of continuity between God and the universe. Instead, both the self-disclosures of God and the being of the universe are in a constant flux of newness by virtue of their relation based on mutual reflection. Time is defined as an internal condition of this reality. It is "an estimated relation" (*nisba mawhūma*), a dialectic between renewed existence (*wujūd*) and human perception.[23] The fact that time is the product of

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[19] See William C. Chittick, "Self-Disclosure," in *The Self-Disclosure of God : Principles of Ibn Al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 52–57.
[20] She explains further that for Ibn ʿArabi, "God is above all qualities—they are neither He nor other than He—and He manifests himself only by means of the names, not by His essence. On the plane of essence, He is inconceivable (transcending concepts) and non-experiential (transcending even non-rational cognition). That means that in their actual existence the creatures are not identical with God, but only reflections of His attributes." Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 267–68.
[21] See Henry Corbin, "The 'God Created in the Faiths,'" in *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 195–200.
[22] See Gregory A. Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[23] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, ed. Ahmad Shamsaddin, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 439.

the estimative faculty (*wahm*) does not, as Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri maintained, detract from its value in human life. It rather amplifies it by asserting time as a key aspect of the inner reality of the self.

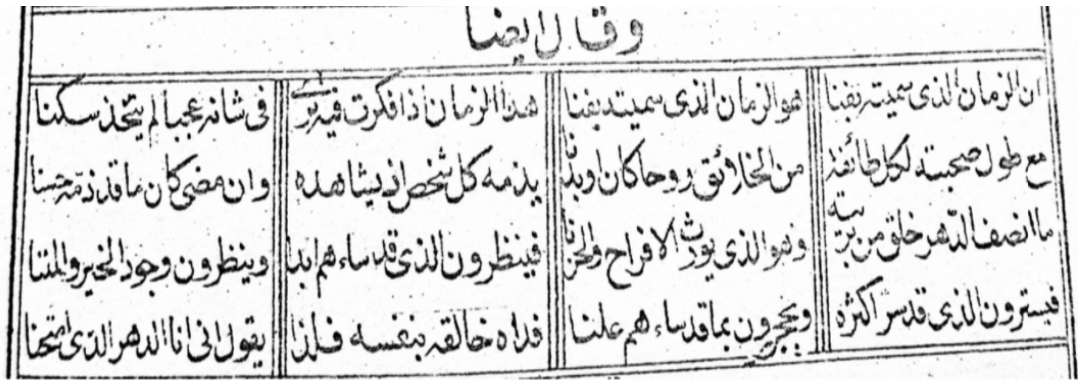
Ibn ʿArabi's ideas were systematically expounded in prose and poetry. Of his prose works, *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) and *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations) stand as most canonical. His poetic repertoire, on the other hand, includes his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (The Interpreter of Desires),[24] a collection of lyrical love poems, and his *Diwan*[25] which is the poetic counterpart of his magnum opus *al-Futuhat*.

Ibn ʿArabi's divan includes four types of poetic genres.[26] It is composed of *qaṣīda* texts of various lengths (classical odes), *qiṭʿa* texts (short poems or monothematic fragments of a *qaṣīda*), *mafārid* texts (defined by Claude Addas as "isolated verses to which Ibn ʿArabi often makes recourse in his prose works"[27]), and *muwashaḥāt* texts (Andalusian stanzaic poems). There are a number of poems in the divan that address the common attitude towards time in Arabic poetic discourse and articulate the Sufi worldview. My analysis in this chapter focuses on a poem entitled "*inna-l-zamana ʾalladhi sammaytahu bi fana* (Time That You Name

[24] *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* was composed "at Mecca, during the months of Rajab, Shaʿbān and Ramaḍān in the year 611 [1214 CE]." It was inspired by Nizam, the daughter of a scholar from Isfahan whom Ibn ʿArabi met during his pilgrimage. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 210.
[25] Ibn ʿArabi's *Divan* was composed around 634/1237. As Osman Yahya remarks, it was originally composed as a successive six volumes during Ibn ʿArabi's stay at Damascus. The modern version was first published in Cairo in 1270/1853. Osman Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Damas: Institut français de Damas, 1964), 191.
[26] The 1996 Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya edition edited by Ahmad Hasan Basaj is based on the 1855 Būlāq (Cairo) edition that includes more than eight hundred poems of different genres and lengths. See Gerald Elmore, "The Bulaq Diwan of Ibn Al-'Arabi: Addenda To a Tentative Description," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 29, no. 3 (January 1, 1998): 136.
[27] Claude Addas, "A Propos du Diwan al-Ma'arif d'Ibn 'Arabi," *Studia Islamica*, no. 81 (1995): 189.

Annihilation)."[28] This poem belongs to the *qitʿa* genre as it comprises only eight lines and deals with a consistent theme. It is a *nūniyya* (ending rhymed in the letter nūn) and its meter is *al-basīṭ* (the outspread), an iambic meter of solemn but loose cadence suited for a meditative mood.[29]

4.3 The Poem: "Time That You Name Annihilation"


وقال ايضا

ان الزمان الذى سميته بفنا ... هو الزمان الذى سميته بفنا ... هذا الزمان اذا فكرت فيه ترى ... فى شانه عجبا لم يتخذ سكنا

مع طول صحبته لكل طائفة ... من الخلائق روحا كان او بدنا ... يذمه كل شخص اذ يشاهده ... وان مضى كان ما قد ذمه حسنا

ما انصف الدهر خلق من بريته ... وهو الذى يورث الافراح والحزنا ... فينظرون الذى قد ساءهم ابدا ... وينظرون وجود الخير والمننا

فيسترون الذى قد سر اكثره ... ويجهرون بما قد ساءهم علنا ... فداه خالقه بنفسه فلذا ... يقول انى انا الدهر الذى امتحنا

Figure 1: Poem from the *Bulaq Diwan of Ibn al-ʿArabi*

إِنَّ الزَمانَ الذِي سَمَّيتَهُ بِفَنَا ... هُوَ الزَمَانُ الذِي سَمَّيتَهُ بِفَنَا
هَذَا الزَمَانُ إِذَا فَكَّرتَ فِيهِ تَرَى ... فِي شَأنِهِ عَجَبَا لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ سَكَنَا
مَعَ طُولِ صُحْبَتِهِ لِكُلِّ طائِفَةٍ ... مِنَ الخَلَائِق، رُوحًا كَانَ أو بَدَنَا
يَذُمُّهُ كُلُّ شَخْصٍ إذا يُشاهِدُهُ ... وَإِنْ مَضَى كَانَ مَا قَد ذَمَّه حَسَنَا
مَا أَنْصَفَ الدَهْرَ خَلْقٌ مِنْ بَرِيَّتِهِ ... وَهُوَ الذِي يُورِثُ الأَفْرَاحَ والحَزَنَا
فَيَنْظُرُونَ الذي قَد ساءَهُم أَبَدَا ... وَيَنْظُرُونَ وُجودَ الخَيْرِ والمِنَنَا
فَيَسْتُرُونَ الذِي قَد سَرَّ أَكْثَرُهُ ... وَيَجْهَرُونَ بِمَا قَدْ ساءَهُمْ عَلَنَا
فَدَاهُ خَالِقُهُ بِنَفْسِهِ فَلِذا ... إِنِّي أَنَا الدَهْرُ الذِي اِمْتَحَنَا يَقولُ

1. Time (*zamān*) that you name annihilation
   He is Time that you name annihilation[30]

[28] Ibn ʿArabi, *Diwan Ibn ʿArabi*, ed. Ahmed Hassan Basaj (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 204.
[29] Nigel Fabb and Morris Halle, *Meter in Poetry: A New Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 196–99.
[30] The translation of mystical verse is generally a difficult task. Sufi poetry, in particular, invests in the grammatical qualities of the Arabic language as part of its esoteric discourse. Specifically, the implied vowel system, the attached pronouns and their referents, and the prepositional verbs often produce different possibilities of translation. The first verse of the poem is a case in point. The unvoweled verb *samma* (to name or call) corresponds to three subjects (I, you masculine and you feminine). Also, *huwwa* in the second hemistich can be translated as either the verb "to be" or as third person pronoun. Therefore, an interpretive translation that uses the overarching

2. Were you to contemplate Time, you would marvel
in its nature never-resting wonder

3. Despite its long friendship with all species of creation
—be it a state of the soul, or the body—

4. All curse it upon its witnessing
When it passes, the once-scorned become beautiful

5. All its creatures give naught its due
yet Time (*dahr*) it is who bequeaths joy and sorrow

6. Eternally, they lay their eyes on that which pains
They lay their eyes on goodness

7. They veil the times of bliss
And bemoan the times of pain and sadness

8. Its Creator sacrificed Himself for its sake
Thus saying, "I am Time (*dahr*) in whose test you partake."

This poem addresses a general attitude toward time in classical Arabic poetry. This attitude is attached to the notion of *dahr* and its corrosive effects (verses four, five, six and seven). The poem responds to this general attitude by emphasizing the dependent relation between time, subjectivity, and divinity. This response is informed by definitions of time in Islamic philosophy (verse three), the hadith tradition (verse eight), and, most importantly, the distinct Sufi outlook on the primacy of ever-renewed existence (verses one and two). If God is the principle of time, then the unfolding temporality and its renewed moral demands are the principles of the self.

meaning of the poem to help in deciphering difficult constructions is needed. My translation of this poem follows this approach.

4.4 *Dahr*, *Dahriyya*, and the Tyranny of Time

The term *dahr* is introduced only in the second half of the poem. It is, however, the gravitational pole of the cultural discourse to which the poet objects. In *Lisan al-ʿArab*, the lexicographer Ibn Manzur (d. 711/1312) defines *dahr* as endless expansive duration which is culturally perceived to be the source of existential predicaments.[31] Ibn Manzur mentions two objectionable worldviews derived from this concept of time: one largely pre-Islamic which approaches *dahr* as a quasi-deity of vicissitude and one that extends into the post-Islamic period which emphasizes the eternality of matter (*dahriyya*, i.e., the materialists).[32]

Regarding the *dahriyya*, Ignaz Goldziher and Amélie Goichon noted that this term came to designate in classical Islamic heresiography "materialistic opinions of various kinds" that range from belief in primal and eternal atoms to planet worship.[33] There is, however, an affinity between the pre-Islamic notion of *dahr* and materialist views recorded in the later Islamic periods. The historian al-Shahrastani (d. 548/ 1153) refers to *muʿaṭṭilat al-ʿArab* (the Arab deniers) as various pre-Islamic groups that denied creation and revealed religion and believed

[31] Ibn Manzur writes, "*Al-dahr* is the extended duration. It was said: *al-dahr* is a thousand years… It was the habit of the Arabs to decry *al-dahr* and curse it when calamities befell them such as death or old age. So they say, 'They were inflicted with the predicaments of *al-dahr.'*" Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, ed. ʿAbdallah ʿAli al-Kabir, Muhammad Ahmad Hasaballah, and Hashem Muhammad al-Shadhli (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1981), 1439.

[32] In *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error), al-Ghazali classifies the *dahriyya* as one of three groups of philosophers in addition to *al-ṭabīʿiyyūn* (the naturalists) and *al-ilāhiyyūn* (the deists). He describes them as, "A group of ancient philosophers who denied the existence of the Creator, the Maintainer, the All-Knowledgeable and the Omnipotent, and claimed that the world has always existed by itself without a maker: the animal from the seed, and the seed from the animal. Thus it was and thus it will always be." al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, ed. Jamil Saliba (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1967), 76.

[33] Ignác Goldziher and Amélie Marie Goichon, "Dahriyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2012.

dahr to be the sole principle of life and decay.[34] Quran 45:24 addresses the pre-Islamic belief, "They say, 'It is only our worldly life. We die and live and nothing destroys us except time (*dahr*).' And of that they have no knowledge; they are only assuming." In his exegesis of this verse, Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) mentions the belief in *dahr* as endless circular time that consists of cycles of thirty-six thousand years in which the whole cosmos is reset.[35] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's (d. 606/1209) exegesis notes that the believers in *dahr* consider the movement of the planets and its effects on the elements to be the cause of life and death.[36] The recorded views of the *dahriyya* are developments to notions of time that existed in pre-Islamic Arabia as well as Persian and Greek cultures.

In the various *dahriyya* positions recorded in classical Islamic texts, *dahr* is perceived to be the endless space occupied by the living world.[37] It is also the force that produces life and causes death. As the impersonal deity of fate, it echoes the notion of *zurvān* in heterodox Zoroastrian texts denoting infinite time as the highest creative power that begets the two deities of Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord) and Ahriman (the Evil Spirit).[38] *Dahr* also shares in the quality

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[34] al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa-l-Nihal*, ed. Amir Ali Mhanna and Ali Hassan Faour, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Maʿrifa, 1993), 572.

[35] He states, "This view is maintained by Arab polytheists and theists (*al-falāsifa al-ilāhiyyūna minhum*) who disbelieve in the final judgment. They deny creation and resurrection. It is also maintained by cyclical materialists (*falāsifa dahriyya dawriyya*) who deny the [existence of the] Creator. They believe that in every thirty six thousand years, all in existence returns to its beginning." Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qurʾan al-ʿAzim* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2000), 1699.

[36] He explains, "'And nothing destroys us except time' means that the generation of individuals occurs due to the movement of the celestial spheres which causes the mixing of elements. If these interactions occur in a certain order, life emerges. If it is a different order, death occurs. The cause of life and death is the effects of the elements and the movement of the celestial spheres." al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghiyab*, vol. 27 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 270–71.

[37] See al-Baydawi's definition in Goldziher and Goichon, "Dahriyya."

[38] Mary Boyce, "Some Reflections on Zurvanism," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 19, no. 2 (1957): 304–16.

of Kronos, the Greek god of time who devours his offspring.[39] In addition to these cosmological understandings that resonate across cultures, classical Arabic poetry emphasizes time as a destructive power responsible for all human predicaments.[40]

Ibn ʿArabi's poem opens with a comment on this very perception, i.e., the idea of time as a corrosive force leading to annihilation. Verse four of the poem refers to the common poetic habit of scorning time (*dhamm al-dahr*) while preparing for the counter celebratory affirmation of temporal being. The motif of scorning time is imprinted in the epithets used to refer to *dahr* in classical Arabic poetry. In his book *Kitab al-Azmina wa-l-Amakin* (The Book of Time Periods and Places), the philologist al-Marzuqi (d. 421/1030) lists a number of poetic synonyms for *dahr* that include *al-ʾabaḍḍ* (a rope that ties animals), *al-manūn* (death, and also the act of cutting), *al-ʿajīs* (the prison and the suffocating grip), *al-mukhabbil* (the corruptor), and *al-ḥawb* (the great sin).[41] In Arabic poetry, resistance against this oppressive power is often accomplished in two ways: poetic defiance through hedonistic self-affirmation and the eternalization of key events in tribal history.[42]

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[39] See Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 37.

[40] See Franz Rosenthal's analysis of the Islamic poetics of lamenting *dahr* which he identifies as the Islamic equivalent of the Greek deity Aion, the unbounded time which encircles the universe. Franz Rosenthal, *Sweeter than Hope: Complaint and Hope in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).

[41] al-Marzuqi, "Min Asmaʾ al-Dahr wa Aqtaʿihi," in *Kitab al-Azmina wa-l-Amakin*, ed. Khalil Al-Mansur (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 215–20.

[42] Poetic self-affirmation often stages the transition (*takhalluṣ*) from the discourse of scorning time. It includes the themes of indifference toward death, the glorification of one's carnal ventures, and the commitment to the ethical code of *muruwwa* (the Arabic tribal code which stresses generosity, loyalty and military prowess). Examples abound in classical Arabic poetry of variations on these themes. In pre-Islamic odes, Tarafa Ibn al-ʿAbd best articulates this motif: "I see Death chooses the generous folk, and takes for his own / the most prized belonging of the parsimonious skinflint; / I see life a treasure diminishing every night, / and all that the time (*al-dahr*) diminishes ceases at last" (87). In his ode, ʿAntara Ibn Shaddad condenses the themes of the counter poetic affirmation of the hedonistic, the ethical, and the heroic ventures "And

Gerhard Böwering argues that the structure of the pre-Islamic Arabic view of time includes on the one hand the notion of time as a duration of perpetual erasure and, on the other hand, the "punctuating" moments of the days of tribal war (*ayyām al-ʿarab*).[43] The "days of the Arabs," as they are called, are celebrated in Arabic cultural memory not only as exceptional political events but as didactic moral narratives preserved in literary compendia such as Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's (d. 328/940) *al-ʿIqd al-Farid* (The Unique Necklace) and Isfahani's (d. 356/ 967) *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs).[44] Commemoration through the literary space resists the erasure of *al-dahr* and turn these events into important terms in the cultural language. Even in the fifteenth century, the Mamluk secretary of the chancery al-Qalqashandi (d. 821/1418) lists knowledge of these pre-Islamic days as one of the prerequisites for an erudite scholar and writer of the chancery.[45]

The poetic space resists the ever-obliterating beat of *dahr* but does not dispute its reality. Temporal being, which is poetically affirmed as perpetual movement into degeneration, is approached with defiance and grief. This ethos is one of the key reasons that made historical

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whenever I have drunk, recklessly I squander / my substance, while my honour is abounding, unimpaired, / and whenever I have sobered up, I diminish not my bounty, / my qualities and my nobility being as you have known them. And many the good wife's spouse I have left on the floor / the blood whistling from his ribs like a harelip hissing." A. J. Arberry, trans., *The Seven Odes; The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 181.

[43] Gerhard Böwering, "The Concept of Time in Islam," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141, no. 1 (1997): 57.

[44] For an impressive collection of "*ayyām al-ʿarab*" tales that are based on the above-mentioned sources, see Muhammad Ahmed Jadalmawla, Ali Muhammad Bjaoui, and Muhammad Abul Fadl Ibrahim, *Ayyam al-ʿArab fi al-Jahiliyya* (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1942).

[45] He affirms, "The writer [in the chancery] needs knowledge of the days of the Arabs, the names of these days, the triumphant and defeated tribes in these days, the [battles of] poetry that took place between them, the name of a famed warrior or a given king… If the writer has no knowledge of these events and their circumstances, he equally has no knowledge on how to respond to similar events [occurring in his time] nor how to answer when he is asked about them." al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-Aʿsha fi Sinaʿat al-inshaʾ*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1922), 390.

writing particularly significant in Islam. In his magnum opus *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (The Complete History) the historian Ibn al-Athir al-Jazri (d. 1233) argues that awareness of the destructive movement of time and the ensuing moral education is what makes history a coveted subject of intellectual pursuit.[46] Poetry and history reflect then the same attitude of viewing time as the enemy.

The Sufi poet, on the other hand, offers a more comprehensive redemption of time. Time is not merely an external force of degeneration. It is also an internal state of the self and an intuition of the perpetual newness of existence. In the previous chapter, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri dismissed this discourse as an irrational expression of "broken time" that stems from an alienated affect that produces ethics of escapism. My counter reading aims to prove that his position fails to engage seriously with the moral universe that supplies coherence to the Sufi imaginary of time and which informs its social ethic.

4.5 Time as Internal to the Soul

Ibn ʿArabi's poem presents a vision of time as an internal component of the sacred and the self. The first verse in Ibn ʿArabi's poem reflects this discursive shift. Ibn ʿArabi opens the poem

[46] In the introduction, Ibn al-Athir distinguishes between worldly and otherworldly benefits of the study of history. The worldly benefits include the cultivation of reason through identification with narratives of the past and instructing rulers on the dependency between justice and prosperity. For the otherworldly benefits, he affirms specifically the ability of the study of history to reveal the fundamental law of the corrosive movement of Time and privilege the divine temporality of permanence. He writes, "As for the otherworldly benefits, if the discerning rational person ponders histories, and realizes the vicissitude of *al-dunya,* witnesses the calamities it inflicts on its dwellers, how it pillages their souls and possessions, how it destroys their riffraff and leaders, and how it spares neither their glorified ones nor the base… He desires an abode that transcends these traits, whose dwellers have been protected against such deficiencies." Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, ed. Abulfida Abdallah Qadi, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), 10.

with the declaration, "Time that you name annihilation / He is time that you name annihilation." Time is no longer an external power but is rather identified with divine. The repetition of the term *fanāʾ* evokes both the poetic theme of corrosive time and the annihilation of the ego-self in Sufi thought. In Sufism, *fanā'* refers to the passing away of the sense of the ego-self into the Divine and the moral perfection of selfhood through this experience.[47] The doctrine of *fanāʾ* is attributed in its earliest articulation to the mystic Abu Saʿid al-Kharraz of Baghdad (d. 286/899).[48] As Andrew Wilcox remarks, what is unique about this Islamic notion is that it implies divine immanence while emphasizing categorical divine transcendence. This makes *fanāʾ* different from the Christian notion of a mystical union with the Divine based on the "incarnation of the essence of God in the human (*ḥulūl*)."[49] Its emphasis on the moral perfection of the self through the concomitant notion of *baqāʾ* (remaining) distinguishes it also from the Buddhist concept of *nirvana* as it does not advocate for the "mere cessation of individual experience."[50] In the *Futuḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi lists seven degrees of the experience of *fanā.ʾ* These range from passing away from wrongful acts (*an tafnā ʿan al-mukhālafāt*)[51] to realizing the dependence between the renewing of existence, the presence of the moral subject (the pole in the technical terms of Sufism, *al-quṭb*) and the subsistence of the cosmos (*shuhūd ẓuhūr al-ʾālam ʿan al-ḥaqq li ʿayni hādha al-shakhṣ lī*

[47] Focusing on Abul Qassim Junayd of Baghdad (d. 298/910), A. J. Arberry links the notion of *fanāʾ* to Quran 55:26-27, "Everything upon it is perishing (*fānī*) except the face of your God with majesty and honor." As Junayd explains it, *fanāʾ* entails both the passing away of ego-centered attributes and the remaining (*baqāʾ*) of individuality in a perfected moral state. A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 58.
[48] Andrew Wilcox, "The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fana' and Baqa' in Early Sufism," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 97.
[49] See Wilcox, 96.
[50] Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 310.
[51] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, ed. Ahmad Shamsaddin, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya, 2006), 212.

dhāti-l-ḥaqqi wa nafsihi).[52] It is however the fourth definition of *fanāʾ* that is of direct relevance to my inquiry. In chapter 220 of the *Futuḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabi writes:

> As for the fourth type of *fanāʾ,* it denotes the passing away from the self. The realization of this type of *fanāʾ* occurs when you obtain knowledge that your self is composed of that which is dense and that which is light (*min laṭīfin wa kathīf*), that every one of your [former] selves has a distinct reality and quality, that the light [dimension] of your Self takes on different forms *with the passing of the moments* under different states (*anna laṭifataka mutanawwiʿat al-ṣuwar maʿa al-ānāti fī kulli ḥāl*) while your outer frame is constant, fixed upon one form despite the alternating accidents (*wa in ikhtalafat ʿalayhi al-aʿrāḍ*).[53]

As this passage affirms, time and change are part of the life of the inner self while the outer self appears to be constant as it navigates a seemingly objective time. Time is an internal movement in which the form of self is constantly changing while holistically enduring. Rather than being the external law of the degeneration of a static self, time is the inner coherence of the self as it lives through different states and forms.

To go back to our poem, the third verse evokes the philosophical discussion on the nature of time. As reflected in his prose works, Ibn ʿArabi is familiar with various positions on time in Islamic philosophy and theology. The second hemistich of line three raises the philosophical issue of whether time is a state of the body or of the soul. While this poem settles the question through the implications of the first verse, i.e., the involvement of time in the soul's experience of *fanāʾ*, Ibn ʿArabi's *Futuhat* offers clearer answers. In chapter 59 of the *Futuhat*, he writes:

> People have disagreed on the meaning and referent of the term time (*zamān*). The philosophers use it to denote many things. The majority of them regard it as an imagined duration which is divided by the motions of the celestial spheres. The theologians use it to denote something different, namely, comparing two occurrences through asking "when?" The Arabs use it to mean the [alteration of] night and day—this being our examined subject in this chapter. Nighttime and daytime are the two parts of the day. From sunrise until sunset, it is called daytime, and from sunset to sunrise, it is the nighttime. This divided entity is called a day. The great [cosmic] movement made this

[52] Ibn ʿArabi, 4:215.
[53] Ibn ʿArabi, 4:213. Emphasis Added.

> entity manifest. However, in actual existence, only the moving entity exists – and nothing else. Movement, itself, is not time. Time, thus, is an imagined entity with no [independent] reality of its own.[54]

In the previous chapter, we read this quote with accompanying comments by Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri. Al-Jabri uses this quote to emphasize the unreality of time in Sufism and therefore its devaluation. Yet, in translating this quote with an understanding of the view of time in Sufism, one must add in brackets the term "independent" to the last sentence. Ibn ʿArabi negates a *particular* understanding of the reality of time, i.e., the notion that it is an impersonal flow and an external force of decay. In emphasizing the dependence of time on the estimative faculty, he, in fact, amplifies the significance of the temporal as a key aspect of the way in which the self relate to the world. In the poetic preface to this very definition of time, Ibn ʿArabi likens the power of time to that of nature and maintains that the association of time with the divine makes it "glorified in our hearts."[55]

The glorification of time is echoed in the last verse of the poem which invokes the hadith tradition ("Its Creator sacrificed Himself for its sake / Thus saying, 'I am Time (*dahr*) in whose test you partake'"). In a hadith mentioned in both the compilations of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Curse not *al-dahr*, for God is *al-dahr*."[56] Ibn ʿArabi makes repeated mention of this hadith in a number of poems and prose texts. He specifies that time in all its cultural varieties, i.e., as *dahr* and *zamān*, stands for the Divine.[57] Time is then doubly identified as part of the inner self and of the Divine reality. It is not a detached absolute frame that contains existence but is an ontological and moral link between the self and the cosmos. Ibn

[54] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, 2006, 1:440.
[55] Ibn ʿArabi, 1:438.
[56] Ibn Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim* (Riyadh: Dar Tība, 2006), 1069.
[57] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, ed. Ahmad Shamsaddin, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 390.

ʿArabi draws on a number of other sources which contribute to this understanding of the meaning of time.

Ibn ʿArabi makes a cursory mention of the views of time in Islamic philosophy and theology. He states, "The philosophers use it to denote many things; the majority of them regard it as an imagined duration which is divided by the motions of the celestial spheres."[58] Ibn ʿArabi's own view on the dependence of time on the estimative faculty echoes prominent positions in the Islamic philosophical tradition which are inspired by Aristotelian thought. This goes to problematize al-Jabri's artificial division that places philosophical Sufism as the radical other of the peripatetic tradition in Islam. While certainly the two discourses are distinct in their terms, they undeniably influenced each other and crosspollinated.

Regarding the notion of time, Aristotle's idealist view was influential to the Muslim philosophers. Plato acknowledged the objective and substantial existence of time albeit as a lower copy of eternity, a "moving image" created by the Demiurge to follow a circular motion.[59] Plotinus shared the substantive view of time but argued that it is produced by the movement of the life of the World Soul rather than being created by the One.[60] For Aristotle, time is neither motion nor change though it is dependent on both of them. Time, as he defines it, is the "number

[58] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, 2006, 1:440.
[59] He asserts, "Time, then, came to be together with the heavens so that just as they were together, they might also be undone together, should there ever be an undoing of them. And it came to be after the model of that which is sempiternal, so that it might be as much like its model." Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 24.
[60] Plotinus affirms, "In the same way Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moving with a motion which is not that which exists There, but like it, and intending to be an image of it, first of all put itself into time, which it made instead of eternity." Plotinus, Enneads III: 7, 339.

of motion in respect to a before and an after."[61] For him, the existence of time requires the existence of a counting faculty and a perceiving subject. He takes the relation between events, being premised on perceptions of precedence and antecedence, to be time. Regarding this position, Philip Turetzky writes:

> Time is what is counted in change, but, Aristotle maintains, nothing could be counted if there were no one to do the counting. In this way time requires the soul. Time would not exist without the soul. Movement and its before and after would exist, but they would not be numbered or counted. Note that this does not make time subjective. That a soul must exist for time to exist does not make time's existence dependent on any beliefs or mental states the soul may actually have. The connection entails only the objective requirement that something exist with the capacity to count for anything to be countable.[62]

Time has no independent substantial existence. It is a perception applied to existent motion and change. As Ursula Coope remarks, time for Aristotle is fundamentally a type of ordering that is universal in quality and dependent on renewed perception of external objective change.[63] A good number of Muslim philosophers adopted the Aristotelian position with an additional Platonic emphasis on linking the motion numbered by time to that of the celestial spheres.[64]

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[61] Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 72.
[62] Philip Turetzky, *Time* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 22.
[63] She writes, "I have already argued that the word 'number', as it occurs in [Aristotle's] definition of time, has a special sense. To define time as something countable is to say that it is essentially ordered, rather than that it is essentially a kind of quantity. From this, it follows that the claim that time is a number of change is quite distinct from the claim that it is a measure of change. Counting the before and after in time is a way of ordering changes; it is not in itself a way of finding out how much change has passed." Ursula Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV.10-14* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 99–100.
[64] Andreas Lammer argues that the harmonization between Aristotle and Plato on the question of time comes into the Arabic tradition through the translation of *Maqalat al-Iskandar al-Afrudisi fi AL-Zaman*, a treatise on time by the Peripatetic commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias who engaged in this line of thought. See Andreas Lammer, "Time and Mind-Dependence in Sayf al-Din al-Amidi's 'Abkar al-Afkar,'" in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's "Metaphysics,"* ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci, Scientia Graeco-Arabica (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 108.

Al-Kindi (d. 252/866) follows Aristotle's position emphasizing the dependent existence of time as the number of cosmic motion. He writes:

> Time is the time, i.e., duration, of the body of the universe. If time is finite, then the being of (this) body is finite, since time is not an (independent) existent. Nor is there any body without time, as time is but the number of motion, i.e., it is a duration counted by motion. If there is motion, there is time; and if there were not motion, there would not be time. [65]

His definition, while largely Aristotelian, invokes the platonic connection between time and the motion of the body of the universe.

Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) developed Aristotle's view further by making a distinction between two types of existence: extramental (*fī al-ʿayān)* and mental (*fī al-taṣawwur*).[66] For Ibn Sina, time has two types of existence: one strictly imagined which is the moment of the now and one concrete which is the continuous flow as the magnitude (*miqdār*) of never-ending circular motion. Ibn Sina affirms:

> So if there is no motion, there is no time. Because time, as we said, is a certain magnitude—namely, something continuous that parallels motions and distances—it inevitably has a division that is the product of the estimative faculty, which is called the present instant.[67]

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[65] al-Kindi, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, trans. Alfred L. Ivry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), 70.

[66] Regarding this division, Andreas Lammer remarks, "thus, when a Greek commentator asserts that it is unquestionable that time is not non-existent, he commits himself to the view that time does exist and that there is no need for a separate argument to demonstrate its existence. In contrast, when a philosopher in the Avicennian tradition claims that it is unquestionable that time is not non-existent, he may merely affirm that time exists at least as something in the mind and so, he may *still* require an argument that demonstrates the existence of time as something in the concrete reality. Lammer, "Time and Mind-Dependence in Sayf al-Din al-Amidi's 'Abkar al-Afkar,'" 105.

[67] Ibn Sina, *The Physics of The Healing: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Jon McGinnis (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 236.

Ibn Sina's position complicates the role of perception in the making of time. He makes the division of time into the now dependent on the estimative faculty while time as a continuous duration is dependent on the existence of concrete continuous motion.

In their epistles, the Ikhwan al-Safaʾ (the Brethren of Purity) define time as the form of the celestial motion that is imprinted on the soul through repetitive perception. They state:

> And know that from the eternal succession of night and day around the earth, the form of time comes to be produced in the soul of he who attentively examines it, just as the form of number comes to be produced in it [i.e., the soul] from the repetition of the one. [68]

Their view subscribes to the idealist position on time with an additional emphasis on its key significance to the self and the religious experience. Commenting on their notion of time, Ian Richard Netton writes:

> [The Brethren of Purity] saw time, for example, as much more than just an Aristotelian measurement of movement. It had both a psychological and eschatological aspect: psychological because it was a pure form born of the mind, and eschatological because time, like the world itself, was an object of creation. The day which heralded the end of the world would also herald the end of time.[69]

Ibn ʿArabi's views on the dependence of time on the soul are informed in large part by the various idealist positions advocated by the Muslim philosophers. The Aristotelianism of al-Kindi and Ibn Sina and the Neoplatonism of the Ikhwan al-Safaʾ informed his view of time as a relation and the product of the estimative faculty. These philosophical positions surface in the

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[68] Ikhwan al-Safa', *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15-21*, trans. Carmela Baffioni (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125.
[69] Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity, Ikhwan al-Safa'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 27.

thinking of Ibn ʿArabi even, as Franz Rosenthal remarked, in his consideration of practical matters like prayer time and pilgrimage.[70]

Ibn ʿArabi's position then is at the heart of the Islamic synthesis between Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and pre-Islamic Arabic concepts. Another key source of influence for his position is the cosmological arguments of Islamic theology (*kalām*). For Ibn ʿArabi, time originates in the soul as the flow of perception. It however has a unique ontological coordinate which is the present moment of ontology. The second verse of the poem ("Were you to contemplate Time, you would marvel / in its nature never-resting wonder") invokes the important Islamic idea of renewed existence (*al-wujūd al-mutajaddid*). As is implied in the verse, in contemplating temporal existence one acknowledges that no two moments of existence are the same. For Ibn ʿArabi and for generations of Sufis after him, all of existence (*wujūd*) is recreated anew at every moment. The present moment (*al-waqt*) emerges then as the fluid pulsation of a state of being premised on perpetual becoming.

4.6 Time and Renewed Existence (*al-wujūd al-mutajaddid*)

In Islamic theology (*kalām*), as Ibn ʿArabi notes in his definition, time is the perceived duration between occurrences which are compared to each other.[71] A majority of the Muslim

[70] See Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Arabi between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism': 'Sufism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other' [fa-inna at-taṣawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni]," *Oriens* 31 (1988): 28–29.

[71] In his *Kashshāf*, the Indian scholar and lexicologist al-Tahanawi (d. 1158/1745) gives this definition of the position of Ashʿarite theologians on the question of time: "The Ashʿarites defined [time] as a renewed known occurrence measured against an unknown one in order to clarify it. For example, when it is said, "I come to you at sunrise," sunrise is the known [occurrence] and the coming is the imagined (*mawhūm*). Time is not fixed. One thing could be the time of another thing for some people and for others it is the opposite case." al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf Istilahat al-Funun*, ed. Rafiq al-Ajam and Ali Dahrouj, vol. 1 (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan Nashirun, 1996), 910.

theologians (*mutakallimūn*) advocated that all existents are composed of indivisible minimal parts which they called *jawhar* or *juz.ʾ* [72] Time is also the perceived relation between occurrences (*ḥādith*). While classical orientalist scholarship has generally interpreted this view to imply a "discontinuous" perception of time,[73] in his authoritative work *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, Alnoor Dhanani warns us that "there is no direct evidence to support or deny the claim that the *mutakallimūn* believed in discrete time."[74] In their writings, Muslim theologians focused on the occurrence as the ontological lynchpin that reveals the dependent nature of temporality.

Muslim theologians of different schools focused on the occurrence which is connected to space and human actors. Their view rejects any absolutist notion of time. Mohamed Basil Altaie writes, "Mutakallimūn considered space and time always to be co-existing and that neither space nor time can exist independently. On the other hand, both space and time were considered to be a property of the physical world that would not exist in the absence of bodies."[75] The continuity of time derives from the continuity of action and perception. As al-Ashʿari asserts, "Some of [the *mutakallimūn*] said: time is the division between actions, it is the interval (*madā*) between two actions." [76]

In certain strands of Islamic theology such as the view of the Muʿtazilite Ibrahim al-Nazzam (d. 230/845) and later al-Ashʿari (d. 324/936) and al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111), the notion of the minimal part of time was channeled to establish an occasionalist position that primarily

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[72] Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazili Cosmology* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1994).
[73] See, for instance, Massignon, "Time in Islamic Thought," 108.
[74] Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 131.
[75] Mohamed Basil Altaie, "Time in Islamic Kalam," in *Christian and Islamic Philosophies of Time*, ed. Sotiris Mitralexis and Marcin Podbielski (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2018), 126.
[76] al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin wa Ikhttilaf al-Musallin*, ed. Mohammed Muhyiddin Abdelhamid, vol. 2 (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1990), 130.

stresses divine agency as the true cause behind all acts while advocating other agents as only secondary causes.[77] This philosophical view has a long history that stretches from al-Ashʿari to René Descartes who affirmed God as the mediator between mind and body.[78] In its reception in Sufi thought, occasionalism is channeled towards an emphasis on the permeation of creative divine energy in the universe and the perpetual newness of the world.

Drawing then on the philosophical notions of time as a product of the estimative faculty and on the theological occasionalist view which stresses the renewability of the world, Ibn ʿArabi celebrates time as internal to the unfolding of the self in the way of a perpetual becoming. This law makes the present moment (*waqt*) a concept of utmost significance. The reality of time is then the present moment, and every moment is different. This position is of key significance to the view of existence (*wujūd*) in Sufism. Existence is forever unique because it is new at each moment. For Ibn ʿArabi, the law of permanent newness applies to the self-disclosures of the Real and to the state of the cosmos. God reveals Himself and as such the cosmos in endless non-repeated forms. As William Chittick puts it succinctly:

> It is axiomatic for Ibn ʿArabi (and for most of Islamic theology as well) that God never repeats himself in His creative activity, because He is absolutely One. At each moment the One discloses itself to each individual in the universe, and each disclosure of the One is one and unique. Every creature undergoes constant change and flux as the moments of self-disclosure follow one upon another. We are no different from any other creature in this respect, so we are endlessly changing and forever new.[79]

Timelessness is often linked to the lack of a concept of change in a temporal construct. This is not the case in Sufi discourse. Only a modernist perspective driven by the discursive ideal of

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[77] Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 43.
[78] Ulrich Rudolph, "Occasionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 347–48.
[79] William C. Chittick, "The View from Nowhere: Ibn al-ʿArabī on the Soul's Temporal Unfolding," in *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 5.

time as homogenous and absolute would perceive this ontology as timeless and stagnant. The Sufi ontological views are premised on perpetual change in the temporal being of the self and the world. This view of *wujūd* permeates the corpus of philosophical Sufism. In addition to Ibn ʿArabi, it finds its highest articulation in the thought of Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640), the most prominent philosopher of Safavid Persia who engaged the thought of Ibn ʿArabi, the philosophical tradition of Ibn Sina, and the theosophy of Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234) to produce a powerful account of existence.

In *al-Hikma al-Mutaʿaliya fi al-Asfar al-ʿAqliyya al-Arbaʿa* (The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Journeys of the Intellect), Mulla Sadra builds on Ibn ʿArabi's views of existence and advances the concept of trans-substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*) that further develops this existential view.[80] Mulla Sadra distinguishes between the concept of existence (*mafhūm al-wujūd)* and its concrete reality (*ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*). He argues that conceptualization is an abstracting process that deceptively prioritizes essence and presents existence as an accidental quality to things that exist.[81] Ibn Sina inherited the duality between essence and existence which in its Hellenic context was hierarchical with existence posited as an accidental quality to permanent essences. Through the classification of the two types of existence (i.e., mental and extra-mental), Ibn Sina, however, did not admit a strict priority for essence over existence since

[80] For reference to Ibn ʿArabi in regards to notion of *wujūd* and the teaching of Ibn ʿArabi's student Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, see Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Hikma al-Mutaʿaliya fi al-Asfar al-ʿAqliyya al-Arbaʿa*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981), 333–38.
[81] Mulla Sadra writes, "The reality of existence (*wujūd*) cannot be grasped mentally. All that is imprinted on the soul (*nafs*) and which presents to it universality is not the reality of existence. It is rather one of [existence's] aspects, considerations, and signs." Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Hikma al-Mutʿaliya fi al-Asfar al-ʿAqliyya al-Arbaʿa*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981), 37–38.

even when not materialized, essence still had a mental type of existence.[82] Going further than Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra was categorical in affirming existence as that which intensifies into a form or essence, thus reversing the Hellenic duality.

For Mulla Sadra, existence is primary (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) as that which brings about essence in actual existence and not prior to it.[83] It is also gradational (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) since it is based on a hierarchy of emanation.[84] Existence is a fundamental unity but it unfolds through a multiplicity of modalities that vary in degrees of existential intensity from the material to the intellective. Every existent is an "act of existence and not an object that exists;"[85] knowledge, itself, is defined by him as a mode of existence (*naḥwa wujūd al-shayʾ*).[86]

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[82] In both later Islamic philosophy and early Western scholarship, Ibn Sina was understood as upholding a strict Aristotelian position of existence as an accident of essence that is posterior to it. In Western scholarship, A. M. Goichon is an example of this initial reception of Ibn Sina, while Fazlur Rahman is a prominent case of the revisionary argument which he presented in his 1958 article entitled "Essence and Existence in Ibn Sina." For an account of this scholarly debate as well as the new consensus which follows Rahman's argument, see Parviz Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 3 (1972): 425–35.

[83] He writes, "Essence is in a sense united with existence in concrete reality. If reason unbinds them into two separate entities, it judges that one of them is prior to the other in reality—that being existence. For existence has the principality to be the original reality and essence is unified with it, predicated upon it." al-Shirāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutʿāliya fī al-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*, 1981, 1:56.

[84] Mullā Ṣadra affirms, "Existents cannot be except in their degree of existence, the condition of their actuality and manifestation. For everything has a unique mode of existence (*naḥwan khāṣṣan min al-wujūd*), a specific degree of being with its accompaniments and requirements of appropriate attributes, times, and place which it does not transgress."al-Shirāzī, 1:355.

[85] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Mulla Sadra: His Teachings," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Leaman and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 1144–45. He further explains this point, "When we say that a horse exists, following common sense we think that the horse is a reality to which existence is added. In reality, however, what we are perceiving is a particular act of *wujūd* which through the very fact that it is manifested is limited to a particular form which we perceive as horse. For those who have realized the truth, the fact that a horse exists becomes transformed into the reality that the act of being has manifested itself in a particular form which we call horse." Nasr, 1147.

[86] al-Shirāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutʿāliya fī al-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*, 1981, 1:116.

Trans-substantial motion refers, then, to the underlying ontological reality of perpetual transformation that brings all in existence into its fold including the essence and substance of existents. Mulla Sadra explains:

> Since, as you know, the reality of matter (*al-huyūlā*) is its potentiality and preparedness and the reality of its natural form (*al-ṣūra al-ṭabīʿiyya*) is renewed existence (*al-ḥuḍūth al-tajaddudī*), it will become absolutely apparent to you that, at every moment, matter possesses another form in preparation and that every form takes on new matter in actualization… Each of them is renewed and maintained by virtue of the other (*fa li-kullun min humā tajaddudun wa dawāmun bi-l-okhrā*).[87]

Before Mulla Sadra, Muslim philosophers, following Aristotle, admitted motion in the four *accidental* categories of quantity, quality, situation, and place.[88] The internal substance of existent entities remains fixed while they undergo phenomenal motion. For Mulla Sadra, motion, and by extension temporal existence which is the measure of motion, is not simply an external condition that influences existent entities. It is primarily an unfolding from within as the actualization of being in the form of perpetual becoming. No permanent essence gives a fixed form to an aggregation of matter which, then, experiences motion from without. Rather, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr puts it, Mulla Sadra believed that the combination of matter and form perpetually "becomes matter for a new form."[89] The soul, then, as Mulla Sadra maintained, is a fluid *barzakh* (isthmus) moving across different degrees of existence towards spiritual perfection which represents the intensification of *wujūd* in the self.[90]

Defining time as an external frame of existence is then the product of failure to understand this reality of *wujūd*. Mulla Sadra asserts:

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[87] Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, *al-Hikma al-Mutʿaliya fi al-Asfar al-ʿAqliyya al-Arbaʿa*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981), 63.
[88] Nasr, "Mulla Sadra: His Teachings," 1148.
[89] Nasr, 1149.
[90] See Maria Massi Dakake, "The Soul as Barzakh: Substantial Motion and Mulla Sadra's Theory of Human Becoming," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 1 (January 2004): 107–30.

> [Time] is the measure of nature (*miqdār al-ṭabīʿa*) in regards to its internal renewal. We have intimated that time, the same as the mathematical body, is not an accident of existence. Rather, the existence of the measure is the same as the existence of that which is measured, primarily and essentially. Maintaining, through a fashion of analysis, that time is an accident of existence is similar to maintaining that existence is an accident of essence.[91]

Time is the condition of the internal motion of constant renewal of the self and of the world. The fluid moment (*al-ʾān al-sayyāl*) is a key element of this process. Mulla Sadra distinguishes between the static moment which is defined, in the Avicennian fashion, as a mental division and the fluid moment of existence. He defines the latter by stating that, "Time has a fluid entity (*shayʾun sayyāl*) that actualizes it through its flow which we call the fluid moment."[92] As in Ibn ʿArabi, every present moment is a fluid moment that includes a fresh experience of *wujūd*. This understanding of being and time informs the worldview of philosophical Sufism. It is this understanding which makes Ibn ʿArabi declare that one is ruled by her moment (*bī ḥukm al-waqt*).[93] The sensibility that echoes in the Sufi philosophical corpus approaches existence as dynamic process of moral self-perfection. Time is then a celebrated condition of this process.

Returning to Ibn ʿArabi's poem, this sensibility entails that one does not need to lament the passing of time, to curse *al-dahr* as the law of degeneration. This is so because nothing is fundamentally lost to *al-dahr* as all of existence is perpetually renewed, producing uniqueness at every moment.

In his poetics of time, Ibn ʿArabi's draws on a number of philosophical and theological sources that share an emphasis on the idealist and dependent reality of time. His discourse, however, possesses the additional quality of a celebratory meditation on this reality. Sufi

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[91] al-Shirazi, *al-Hikma al-Mutʿaliya fi al-Asfar al-ʿAqliyya al-Arbaʿa*, 3:147.
[92] al-Shirazi, 3:147.
[93] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, 4:251.

discourse advocates time as a heterogenous relational construct that links the states of the soul to the ontological renewability of the world. The concept of the present moment (*al-waqt*) takes on, then, a key significance. Sufi manuals and lexicons provide different definitions of the present moment. These definitions share a focus on the fundamental unity between temporality and selfhood and an ethic of self-care that is particularly attuned to the fact of time.

4.7 The Present Moment: Its Aesthetics and Ethics

In addition to voluminous philosophical works, the Sufi library comprises a large number of lexicons, collections of maxims, biographies, and student manuals that describe the tenets of the Sufi path. These works, which proliferated since the tenth century, were important in disseminating the concepts of Sufism, guiding new seekers, and defending against detractors. Historically, Sufism developed from an early phase in the eighth and ninth centuries of individual models of ascetic life, epitomized by figures such as Ibrahim Ibn al-Adham (d. 160/777), Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 184/801), and Bayazid al-Bistami (d. 261/874), to a self-conscious socio-religious trend in the tenth and eleventh centuries as evidenced by the compendiums produced in that period.[94] By defining its central themes, scholars such as Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021), Abu Nuʿaym al-Isfahani (d. 430/1038), and Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 464/1072) established Sufism as a scholarly tradition within Islam.[95] The institutionalization of Sufism came later with the endorsement of authoritative figures such as al-Ghazali (d. 504/1111).[96] Since the twelfth century, Sufism spread into the majority of Islamic

[94] See Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 20–25.
[95] See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Specialized Sufi Literature," in *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 83–113.
[96] See al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*.

social and scholarly classes. This took place, as Marshall Hodgson remarked, owing in large part to the community-building nature of its *dhikr* ritual (group recital sessions) which constantly drew new members and curious spectators as well as its educational model which emphasized loyalty to the group.[97]

The Sufi library stands firmly on a foundation of hadith and Quranic exegetical works with ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021)'s *Haqaʾiq al-Tafsir* (The True Realities of Commentary) being the earliest extant Sufi exegesis.[98] With respect to its doctrinal literature, the period between the late tenth century and the early twelfth century witnessed the production of key treatises on Sufi concepts. Scholars dubbed this period "the systematization period" of Sufi moral teaching.[99]

Beginning with this period, the treatises provide us with a generally homogenous understanding of the notion of *waqt* which emphasizes its personal and transformative qualities. In Sufi diction, *waqt* refers to the present temporality in a general sense as well as the ecstatic moment of spiritual unveiling. It has been given multiple translations in scholarship. Louis Massignon translates *waqt* as "the instant."[100] Franz Rosenthal calls it "the now."[101] Gerhard Böwering uses the translations of "the moment" and "the time of the present state."[102] Michael

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[97] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 213.
[98] Alexander D. Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 70–71.
[99] Saeko Yazaki, "Morality in Early Sufi Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 77.
[100] Massignon, "Time in Islamic Thought," 110–11.
[101] Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Arabi between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism': 'Sufism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other' [fa-inna at-taṣawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni]," 29.
[102] Gerhard Böwering, "Ibn ʿArabi's Concept of Time," *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook*, no. 3 (2012): 114.

Sells in his comparative study of Ibn ʿArabi and Meister Eckhart refers to *waqt* as "the eternal now."[103] The broad meaning of *waqt* in Sufi manuals denotes the present state. It is also used by Sufis to refer to the ecstatic moment, a transformative event that brings the eternal in contact with the temporal. I translate *waqt* uniformly as "the present moment" with an emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the temporal experience.

As the next chapters demonstrates, the Sufi moment serves well as a notion of the kairotic (an opportune and transformative temporality) for the alternative Arabic intellectual projects that diverge from al-Jabri's reading. Against his interpretation of *waqt* as the temporality of stagnation, retreat into the self, and the negation of the social, these postcolonial ethicist, Marxist, and literary voices capitalize on the existential prowess of *waqt* and the heterogeneity of time that it occasions in their projects of critique. This section of the present chapter aims then to establish the semantic web of the pre-modern concept, accounting for possible cultural parallels, investigating its aesthetic articulations and ethical propositions and reflecting on the processes of subject formation that it occasions.

4.8 *Waqt* and its Cross-Cultural Antecedents

In the Arabic and the larger Islamic cultural context, Sufism, then, presents through the notion of *waqt* a novel and consistent discourse on temporality. The Sufi focus on the present moment is not without predecessors and parallels in other cultural traditions. *Waqt* is the Sufi variant of an existential and moral attitude to time that, like a running thread, unites a number of classical moral philosophies from Buddhism to Greek thought. The present moment in Buddhism

[103] Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 104.

calls for the persistent awareness of one's being in the world and actions to counterbalance the tormenting distractions of the fragmented world created in the mind. This doctrine is captured in the Pali word *sāti* (translated as mindfulness) which originally meant remembrance of the action and situation in which one is presently engaged.[104] While its modern secularized reception in the West only focuses on its psychological therapeutic value, this concept originally included a number of ethical propositions including ascetic restraint.[105] These ideas are, certainly, present in the historical background of the Sufi library.[106] The Malamati ascetics of Eastern Iran, as Mostafa Vaziri remarked, were clearly influenced by Buddhism. They located in the story of the ascetic Ibrahim Ibn al-Adham (d. 161/778) "a parallel portrayal of Buddha's legend, a prince who had become an ascetic mendicant," and were inspired in their practices by Buddhist models, such as in the use of the rosary and the shaving of the head.[107] Whether the similarity in teachings came through direct influence or parallel developments of ascetic traditions, Sufism

[104] John Peacock, "Sati or Mindfulness? Bridging the Divide," in *After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation*, ed. Manu Bazzano (2014: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014), 6.

[105] In an insightful article, Tim Lomas critiques the "decontextualized" and "secularized" reception of the Buddhist notion of the present moment in the West which is rendered into a purely psychological precept divorced from its religious and moral content. Focusing on the Theravada tradition of Buddhism which began around the first century BCE, he remarks that, in original Buddhist texts derived from the Pali canon, mindfulness of the present moment includes the key sub-concepts of "*sati* (awareness of the present moment), *appamada* (awareness suffused with an ethos of ethical care) and *sampajañña* (awareness suffused with a sense of spiritual progress). Tim Lomas, "Recontextualizing Mindfulness: Theravada Buddhist Perspectives on the Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Awareness.," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 9, no. 2 (2017): 210.

[106] As early as the eleventh century, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 442/1050) remarked on the similarities between certain Sufi notions, such the doctrine of *fanā'*, and the doctrines on the life of the soul in Bhagavad Gita. al-Biruni, *Fi Tahqiq ma li-l-Hind* (Hyderabad, India: Matba′at Majlis Da′irat al-Ma′arif, 1958), 66.

[107] Mostafa Vaziri, *Buddhism in Iran: An Anthropological Approach to Traces and Influences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 143.

shares with Buddhism a number of principles that includes the attention to the present moment in meditative practices. This temporal sensibility exists in other philosophical contexts.

Echoing the Buddhist intuition, Greek Stoicism emphasized that freedom from anguish is freedom from both the past and the future. Happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the mastery of the self in the now. It is the grasping of the cosmos as a determined web of causes and effects that construct the present moment, the control of passions, and the persistent cultivation of altruistic virtues.[108] In addition to Stoicism, Greek Epicureanism, advocating attitude premised on the cultivation of happiness, preached a mode of life based on allegiance to the present moment. While the two Greek schools differed on how the moment should be lived, they agreed on its fundamental import. Hadot writes:

> It is quite remarkable that the two schools of Stoicism and Epicureanism, in other respects so opposed, should both place the concentration of consciousness upon the present moment at the very center of their way of life. The difference between the two attitudes consists only in the fact that the Epicurean enjoys the present moment, whereas the Stoics wills it intensely; for the one, it is a pleasure; for the other, a duty.[109]

Sufism presents through *waqt* a synthesis of the experiences of pleasure and duty. The moment of the now is to be approached as that which has primacy and control over the self (i.e., a duty). The ecstatic descriptions of the moment, on the other hand, convey the sense of the attainment of

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[108] The Stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonius (d. 180) writes, "Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and feeling of affection, and freedom, and justice, and to give thyself relief from all other thoughts. And thou wilt give thyself relief, if thou doest every act of thy life as if it were the last, laying aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason, and all hypocrisy, and self-love, and discontent with the portion which has been given to thee. Thou seest how few the things are, which if a man lays hold of, he is able to live a life which flows in quiet, and is like the existence of the gods; for the gods on their part will require nothing more from him who observes these things." Marcus Aurelius Antonius, *Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, trans. George Long (London; New York: Cassell and Company, LTD., 1908), 82.
[109] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (New York: Blackwell, 1995), 230.

happiness through spiritual unveiling. The Sufi imaginary of time grants a special place to the symbolism of the present moment.

4.9 The Aesthetics of Sufi *Waqt*

The articulations of the concept of *waqt* in Sufi literature represent a distinguished aesthetic and philosophical contribution to the writings on time in Islam. It reflects an attempt to define the nature of the moment and to describe its affective experience. "Aesthetic" is an apt descriptor of the type of definitions of *waqt* provided in Sufi texts as it invokes a judgement based on taste and direct personal contact with the object of perception. This form of judgement has been codified as *dhawq* (taste).[110] The modern definitions given to the aesthetic experience in art can be applied word for word to the notion of *dhawq*. Regarding the aesthetic experience, Jerrold Levinson writes:

> Aesthetics conceived as the study of certain distinctive experiences or states of mind, whether attitudes, perceptions, emotions, or acts of attention, similarly requires some conception of when a state of mind or mental activity is an aesthetic one. Among the marks that have been proposed as distinguishing aesthetic states of mind from others are: disinterestedness, or detachment from desires, needs and practical concerns; non-instrumentality, or being undertaken or sustained for their own sake; contemplative or absorbed character, with consequent effacement of the subject.[111]

The Sufi definitions of *waqt* reflect the experiential and intimate knowledge of aesthetic judgement. *Waqt* is not a theoretical concept to be rationalized but an existential experience to be conveyed in poetic language. If one is translating the value of these pre-modern ideals into a modern secular context, the existential and psychological benefits of "minding" the moment of

[110] See Fazlur Rahman, "Dhawḳ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2012.
[111] Jerrold Levinson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

the now are clear. But what *is* the value of the ecstatic moment? To express the relevance of this type of experience and its temporality within the very modernist secular framework which often suspects its enchanted quality, I will make recourse to the psychologist Abraham Maslow's concept of "peak experience."

Reflecting on the educational value of spiritual traditions, Maslow used the notion of "peak experience" to refer to ego-transcending moments of self-actualization which lie at the core of the metaphysical experience in both its religious and artistic forms.[112] The peak experience, which Maslow also called "the mystic experience" and, after Freud, "the oceanic feeling" has many properties. These include that the "universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole," that consciousness becomes concentrated in a "non-evaluating, non-comparing, or non-judging cognition" and ultimately becomes "ego-transcending."[113] Whether religious or artistic, these experiences, as he argued in regards to post-Enlightenment societies, must be analyzed as a natural fact of human consciousness. Such ego-transcending experiences are antidotes to the modern plight of meaningless existence. Maslow writes,

> What is the practical upshot for education of all these considerations?... As a matter of fact, it is possible that precisely these ultimate values are and should be the far goals of all education, as they are and should be the far goals of psychotherapy, of child care, of marriage, of the family, of work, and perhaps of all other social institutions… Any philosophy that permits facts to become amoral, totally separated from values, makes possible in theory at least Nazi physician 'experimenting' in the concentration camps.[114]

The moments of spiritual and artistic epiphanies are life-changing. They constitute kairotic time in which subjectivity is fused with temporality in a substantive movement of change. The notion of peak experience, that Maslow identified, conforms to the range of descriptions given to the

[112] Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).
[113] Maslow, 59–62.
[114] Maslow, 57–58.

ecstatic *waqt* in the Sufi corpus. It is the moment of ego-transcendence which reveals a unifying meaning and order in the cosmos.

In *Kitab al-Lumaʿ fi al-Tasawwuf* (The Book of Light Flashes), Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 378/988) gives these mentions of *waqt*:

> ʿAmru Ibn Uthman al-Makki, may God's mercy be upon him, was once asked about Sufism. He replied: [Sufism] is to be at every present moment [present] for that which is appropriate for the moment.[115]
>
> The present moment is that which is between the past and the future. Al-Junayd, may God's mercy be upon him, said: "The present moment is precious; if it passes, it cannot be grasped." He means your breath and your present moment, which is between a past breath and a future breath. If it passes empty of the mention of God, most exalted, you cannot ever recapture it.[116]
>
> The statement that my present moment is eternal (*musarmad*) means that the state (*ḥāl*) between the speaker and God does not change in all his moments. It is an ecstatic speech that reports on the quality of the speaker's secret not his attributes. For attributes are prone to change… Shibli once recited: "My present moment was eternalized in You—it is eternal / You erase me of myself, I become abstracted." The meaning of the saying "my ocean is without a shore" is close to that of the eternal moment.[117]

As al-Sarraj reports, the present moment links the self to existence in an ontological and moral sense. The self experiences the now of its being in the world and in connection with the ever present being of God. In the ecstatic moment of spiritual unveiling, the present moment becomes an expansive duration. It takes on its unmistakable Sufi quality. It becomes "the eternal now" as Michael Sells translated it, a permanent state of awareness of the integral totality of existence and the effusions of the Divine.

In *Kitab al-Taʿarruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf* (The Book of Acquaintance with the Path of the Sufis), Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 380/990) writes:

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[115] al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *al-Lumaʿ fi al-Tasawwuf*, ed. Abdelhalim Mahmud (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1960), 45.
[116] al-Sarraj al-Tusi, 418.
[117] al-Sarraj al-Tusi, 441–42.

> Al-Junayd once said, "Sufism is caring for the moments." He added, "It is to know your limit, to acknowledge none but your God, to compare [yourself] to none but your present moment."[118]
>
> A group of [Sufis] expressed the annihilation of the ego (*fanāʾ*) by saying it takes one away from one's outward appearance (*rasm*) and all other appearances, so one endures in one's present moment without a remaining of which one has knowledge, without an annihilation of which one has feeling, and without a [fixed] moment on which to stand.[119]

In agreement with al-Sarraj's views, the definitions presented in al-Kalabadhi's text stress the centrality of the present moment to the devotional practices of Sufism. Being in the moment entails also acknowledging one's temporality without comparison with other people's temporalities.

In Sufi symbology, the image of the cutting sword is often employed to highlight the transformative nature of *waqt*. Al-Qushayri writes:

> It is said that the sword is soft to the touch while its edge is sharp to the cutting. The one who treats it carefully is safe and the one who treats it roughly is struck. Such is also the moment: whoever submits to its rule is safe, whoever opposes it falls asunder.[120]

The moment has a "cutting" effect as it severs the distractions of non-existent temporalities. It also denotes a cutting edge in relation to the Sufi view of the perpetual moral evolution of the self that is premised on the renewed attention to the demands of the present. If that practice is neglected, one is severed from the moment. In a third level of meaning, the analogy of the sword applies to the experience of *kashf* (spiritual unveiling) as a unique event that requires a certain etiquette, i.e. the soft touching of the sword, which often in Sufi texts stresses acceptance and secrecy.

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[118] al-Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Taʿarruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1994), 62.
[119] al-Kalabadhi, 96.
[120] al-Qushayri, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Mahmoud ʿAbd al-Halim (Cairo: Mu'assasat Dar al-Sha'b, 1989), 131.

In the *Futuhat,* Ibn ʿArabi affirms the previous definitions of *waqt.* Further, he adds new connotations that are in accordance with his metaphysics which links the non-repeated self-disclosures of God to the renewed being of the universe. His writing on *waqt* in this section speaks of the present moment as denoting the desire of the universe to be refashioned anew. He states:

> It has been said that the present moment is all that rules you, and this all pivots upon Him being the Ruler. The basis of the present moment in Divinity is His description of Himself Exalted that "every day He is upon some task."[121] The moment is that upon which He is in the root. It manifests in the branch which is the universe. Thereby, the labour of the Real manifests in the entities of potential things. *In reality,* the present moment is that upon which you are. That upon which you are is the essence of your preparedness. The [Divine] labour, upon which He is, manifests in you in accordance with your preparedness. Divine labour is original. The preparedness of potential things, by virtue of their potentiality, makes the Divine labour in them creative. *The root of the present moment is from the universe and not from the Real (aṣl al-waqti min al-kawni lā min al-ḥaqqi).* It is part of the decree (*taqdīr*), and the decree can only rule the created. The possessor of the present moment is the universe. So, the decree is the decree of the universe, as we established, regarding the manifestation of the Real in the entities of potential things in accordance with what they exhibit of their preparedness. He thus becomes multitudinous by [these self-disclosures] – yet He remains the One who is beyond need of both worlds. Since the taste (*dhawq*) of people in the present moment differs, their expressions about it also differs. The reality of the present moment is all that they expressed.[122]

The present moment is not only the defining quality of the Sufi as in the expression "the Sufi is the son of his moment." It is also the quality of the universe (*aṣl al-waqti min al-kawni lā min al-ḥaqqi*). It derives from the universe's desire for perpetual movement from potentiality to actuality. The rule of the moment requires full presence. The presence in the now of the consciousness of the Sufi invites, for Ibn ʿArabi, the self-disclosures of the Real. This for Ibn ʿArabi, in a Neoplatonic fashion, applies to the existence of the universe. The universe's desire

[121] Q 55:29.
[122] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, 4:251. Emphasis added.

for presence is what invites the "effusion" of existence from the Real. The present moment is, then, this unfolding desire since time, itself, is an unfolding internal to the soul.

Ibn ʿArabi often makes recourse to the *qasida* tradition and its staple themes to express the nature of this desire and link it with the present moment. In a poem entitled "*Salamun ʿala Salma*" from his collection *Turjuman al-Ashwaq* (The Interpreter of Desire), Ibn ʿArabi engages this quality within the *ghazal* mode of love elegy. Like the first poem treated in this chapter, Ibn ʿArabi first invokes the Arabic poetic attitude to *dahr* before introducing the renewability of ontological and spiritual experience through *waqt*. In the first half of the poem, he conjures the traditional image of the melancholic poet who reflects on time as perpetual loss and distancing from original bliss. The first half of the poem reads:

سَلامٌ على سَلمَى ومَن حَلَّ بِالحِمَى وَحَقَّ لِمِثْلِى، رِقَّةً، أن يُسَلِمَا
وَماذا عَلَيْها أَن تَرُدَّ تَحِيَّةً ولكن لا احْتِكامَ عَلى الدُّمى
سَروا وَظَلامُ اللَيلِ أَرْخى سُدولَهُ فَقُلتُ لَها: صَبًّا غَريبًا مُتَيَّمَا
أَحاطَتْ بِهِ الأَشواقُ صَونًا، وَأَرْصَدَت لَهُ راشِقاتُ النَّبْلِ أَيَّانَ يَمَّما

Greetings to Salma and to those who dwelled in the encampment
For greetings are becoming of the like of me, the tender lover
What harm if she responded to our greeting?
But no compulsion binds fair women
They journeyed under the curtains of night
And I said to her, "I am a lover overcome by passion, a stranger enflamed by love,
Engulfed by longings and hunted at every turn by the arrows [of *dahr*].

The *nasīb* (amatory prelude) of the poem indeed opens with the dramatization of loss and nostalgia. It presents the lover as the one who suffers the tyranny of time and separation.

After engaging a discourse that is culturally recognizable to the audience, the poem, then, shifts radically to presenting a new discourse: one that stresses the present moment as renewable unity. After conventionally evoking the theme of loss, the poem changes swiftly to noting that nothing is lost to the past. Instead, *waqt* contains and renews everything. The poem continues:

فأبدت ثناياها، وأومض بارق فلم أدر من شق الحنادس منهما

وقالت: أما يكفيه أنّى بقلبه يشاهدني في كل وقت أما؟ أما؟

She parted her lips in a smile, and lightning struck
I knew not which of the two cut through the dark.
And she said, "Is it not sufficient that I am in his heart
and that he beholds me in every moment (*waqt*). Is it not?"[123]

The image of the beloved in not located an effaced trace, gradually erased by the motion of impersonal time, and foreclosed in the ideal past of memory. Rather, it is reintroduced in the moment as renewed presence. The beloved chastises the lover not to melancholically ponder on what is lost but to give himself to the ever-new visitations of the present. The present moment is projected, then, as an ontological and affective reality demanding the full attention of the subject. Its aesthetics are premised on the priority of the ontological present over consciousness and its perpetual uniqueness. Its ethics follow suit.

4.10 The Ethical Habitus of *Waqt*

As it is articulated in Sufi texts, the notion of *waqt* entails a set of ethical propositions that have behavioral and psychological implications. On the behavioral side, it includes the precept of watching over the self (*murāqabat al-nafs*) as part of the renewed caring for the moment. Spiritual exercises are to be constantly practiced; every new exercise of *dhikr* (recitation/remembrance), *khulwa* (solitary meditation), or prayer has a unique educational potential for the self. On the psychological side, the notion of *waqt* emphasizes presence to the changes of consciousness towards the achievement of spiritual tranquility (*riḍā*). This tranquility is the product of perfecting the knowledge of the self and the renewed mastery over its inclinations in the now. In the Sufi tradition, knowledge is an experience of the care for the self.

[123] Ibn ʿArabi, *Turjuman al-Ashwaq*, ed. ʿAbdurrahman al-Mastawi (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 2005), 41–43.

This experience transforms the self which adopts qualities that make it positively contribute to the social. How is it that the retreat into the self produces an ethic of moral sociability? How does the knowledge of the realities of the self equip one with knowledge of the proper etiquette for the social world?

As explored in the previous chapter, Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri charges that knowledge in traditions of what he terms "Gnostic reason," of which Sufism is the ultimate Islamic example, devolves from the status of being a product of rational demonstration to the status of individual spiritual intuition. Instead of being the cornerstone of constructive social being, it becomes the delusion of a socially recluse subject. I have argued that Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri imposes a modern understanding of philosophy as a purely intellectual enterprise on pre-modern traditions in which philosophy was a way of life. To fully appreciate this point, and the philosophical and social values of the Sufi practice of caring for the present moment, one has to delve deeper into the distinction between the pre-modern and modern concepts of knowledge and the knowing subject that they entail.

In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, a series of lectures delivered at the College de France, Michel Foucault notes that the "Cartesian moment" and its *cogito* which ascertained knowledge as the evidence of the self, ushered in the modern age in which knowledge, on its own ground and independent of the processes of subject formation, becomes the exclusive access to truth.[124] While in classical philosophical traditions, knowledge was the condition and product of a process of "subject transfiguration," in the modern, the pre-given subject has to fulfill the formal conditions of knowledge, i.e., scientific, discursive, and professional standards, but these

[124] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, First edition (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

conditions "do not concern the subject in its own being."[125] The fruit of knowledge, then, is realized in the expansion of institutions of knowledge whose social and psychological benefits are effected in time and beyond subjectivity. In contradistinction to this modern concept, pre-modern philosophical knowledge is not exclusively or even primarily an intellectual or scientifically empirical phenomenon. Knowledge is the catalyst, the condition, and the product of a process of caring for the self. To know means and requires that one is set on a path of ethical self-cultivation through practices of self-purification, of ascetic restraint, of meditation on the spiritual and mental states of the self, and of adopting practical behavioral changes that range from dietary regiments to reconstructing one's social networks and political affiliations. In these classical traditions, truth is said to be inaccessible to the subject (such as the divine as truth or the truth of the laws of the harmony of the universe), but "such as it is, the truth can transfigure and save the subject." In the modern world, it is the opposite: truth is said to be accessible (the truth of science and the physical laws of the universe), but "such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject."[126] As Foucault puts it, the price for truth in these classical traditions is the transformation of the subject.

The care for the self, at the center of which knowledge acquisition and transmission is located, fosters a new way of being in the world and relating to others. It includes the practice of the retreat from the external world as a "technology of the self" that aims to consolidate the self's knowledge of its inner and outer realities. This practice, however, does not usher in a passive seclusion or a final break with the social. It is rather an educational stage that allows the self to master its inclinations and bad habits before a knowledge-based reinsertion of the self into the

[125] Foucault, 18.
[126] Foucault, 19.

world. For Foucault, and against the modern application of these principles, "we have the paradox of a precept of care of the self which signifies for us either egoism or withdrawal, but which for centuries was rather a positive principle that was the matrix for extremely strict moralities."[127] Mastering the self-through a fusion of knowledge and practice, as in the case of the Stoics and the Epicureans which Foucault advocates as a unique chapter in the history of the knowledge-spirituality nexus, creates an art of living that contributes positively to social morality.

For Foucault, the reconstitution of "an ethic of the self" that takes into consideration this long history of the care for the self represents the "first [and] final point of resistance to political power."[128] For the purposes of the present argument, it is illuminating to rethink the status of knowledge in Sufi thought, the practice of caring for the self through the technology of minding the present moment, and the kind of ethical outlook on the social world that it produces. Adopting this angle of vision reveals Sufi *waqt* to be the temporal frame of a "collected" self which faces the social equipped with a disciplined and positive posture instead of the escapist temporality of reclusive dreams.

In Sufi texts, knowledge and practice directly imply each other. The caring for the present moment includes minding the punctuality of prayers, supplications, and group recitations. It also transcends this initial stage towards the punctuality of minding the evolving states of the self. Listing different ascetic sects that fall short of Sufi practice, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj states:

> Another group indulges in lawful actions (*inbasaṭū fī al-mubāḥāt*) and do not heed the duty of watching over the moments. They say, "We have no specific knowledge. We eat what we find, and we sleep; that is our moment." They are mistaken, for if the moment passes, it does not return. And the moment is not that which is filled with idle laxity. The

[127] Foucault, 13.
[128] Foucault, 252.

> moment is rather what is filled with continual remembrance (*bi-dawām al-dhikr*), tied to purity, thankfulness, contentment, and patience.[129]

He writes in regard to the ethics (*adāb*) of the Sufis:

> The Sheikh, God's mercy be upon him, said, "Most of the ethics of the select of the people of religion consist in purifying the hearts, keeping the secrets, honoring bonds after vows, caring for the moment, and disregarding passing distracting thoughts and oppositions."[130]

As the quote suggests, distracting thoughts produce oppositions in the sense of that which opposes the existent present condition and undermines its priority. Once this moral education of the self, which is often described as a journey *within the self*, is realized, the Sufi adopts an attitude conducive to constructive social being.

For the Sufi, the caring for the moment is minding the present condition of the self in its changing nature as well as realizing a "transfiguration of the self" towards its perfected moral form. Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (320/938) gives a quadripartite definition of the composition of the self that includes: the inciting self (*al-nafs al-ammāra*) located in the chest (*al-ṣadr*), the inspired self (*al-nafs al-mulhama*) located in the heart (*al-qalb*), the reproachful self (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) located in the inner heart (*al-fuʾād*), and the content self (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna*) located in the innermost essence (*al-lub*).[131] The first three dimensions of the self are in constant tension. The aim of the seeker is to perfect the self through reaching the tranquility of the content self. As the early definition of *fanāʾ* given by Ibn ʿArabi suggests, the annihilation of the ego self is another description for this process. In reaching the content self, which is the fruit of this

[129] al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *al-Lumaʿ fi al-Tasawwuf*, 526.
[130] al-Sarraj al-Tusi, 195.
[131] al-Tirmidhi, *Bayan al-Farq bayn al-Sadr wa-l-Fuʾad wa-l-Lub*, ed. Youssef Walid Marʿi (Amman, Jordan: al-Markaz al-Malaki li-l-Buhuth wa-l-Dirasat al-Islamiyya, 2009), 12–17.

practice of the care for the self, the Sufi adopts an attitude to the collective marked by an ethic of the acceptance of the plurality of selves in the social world.

In his later writings, Ibn Sina describes the existential and social attitude of the *ʿārif* after the experience of ecstatic *waqt*: "these overwhelming moments (*awqāt*) that multiply if the knower persists in the spiritual exercise."[132] He states:

> The knower is bright-faced, friendly, and smiling. Due to his modesty, he honours the young as he honours the old. He is as pleased with the unclear-headed as he is with the alert. How could he not be bright-faced when he enjoys the Truth and everything other than the Truth, for he sees the Truth even in everything other than the Truth! Furthermore, how could he not treat all as equal when, to him, all are equal! They are objects of mercy, preoccupied with falsehoods.[133]

The sensibility of *waqt* involves preoccupation with the states of the self which, paradoxically, diminishes its distance from the collective through the cultivation of a better understanding of the human condition.

The care for the self in Sufism rests, then, on presence for one's states and actions. It also acknowledges a moral evolution of the self as the practice of mindfulness develops. Both the aesthetics and ethics of *waqt* are part of a holistic understanding of existence as an evolution towards moral self-perfection that ultimately produces a state of harmony with the realities of the collective.

Waqt is, then, a unifying concept for a Sufi worldview that merges aesthetic judgement (*dhawq*) and an ethical practice of the care for the self. It presents to the Sufi an open invitation to both know the self and transcend its boundaries spiritually (the ecstatic experience of *waqt*) and socially (shedding ego-centered qualities). Minding the present moment reflects the

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[132] Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Amin Razavi, eds., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 1 (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 307.
[133] Nasr and Razavi, 1:309–10.

knowledge that the self is constantly changing, that existence is permanently in flux, and that establishing a moral bond with the world begins with cultivating a moral relationship to the self.

Conclusion

Sufi thought presents a number of important premises on the questions of time and being in pre-modern Islamic thought. Time is as an internal condition of the soul. It is dependent on human perception and its moral imagination. Ibn ʿArabi, whom Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri described as the Arabic theorizer of timeless Gnosticism, views time as a relational construct that links perception, the inner life of the soul, and the renewed presentness of existence which occasions endless divine self-disclosures. In Sufism as well as in Islamic theology, existence is in a constant flux of newness and change.

This account of the nature of time and being brings Sufi discourse to an heightened focus on the present moment of *waqt* which is conveyed in its affective quality, its ecstatic potentiality, and its moral demands. In its ecstatic dimension, *waqt* stands for the moment of the transfiguration of the self and its moral utopia through the experience of the divine presence. Ecstatic *waqt* redirects and redefines the life of the Sufi. It can be then described as a kairotic temporality, an opportune and transformative time.

For postcolonial Arab thinkers and writers who draw on Sufi *turāth* in their intellectual and artistic projects, the Sufi view of time as a heterogenous reality in which the continuous social duration is punctuated by the kairotic events of *waqt* is an asset for the critique of the abstraction mechanisms and homogenizations of capitalist modernity. The previous chapter has investigated a prominent example of the opposing trend. The Moroccan structuralist Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri champions the post-*Naksa* lamentations of "Arab time" and the effects of

enchanted Islamic temporalities. Sufism contributes the lion's share to the making of a timeless and changeless Islamic ontology. This chapter demonstrated how the Sufi discourse on time not only prioritizes change. It makes this condition an internal reality of the soul. True, the focus on the present moment does not align with a notion of being as accumulative linear progress. It rather enforces the unity between the ontological, temporal, and the practice of the moral care for of the self. Ultimately, the focus on the experience of ego-transcending *waqt* produces an ethic that acknowledges and positively responds to the quality of change and multiplicity in the self and in the world.

Analyzing the Sufi discourse through its diverse pre-modern articulations reveals alternative aesthetic, existential, and moral dimensions and calls into question the modernist evaluative lens which projects it as the expression of mindless and timeless unreason. It also invites the consideration of other Arabic intellectual projects which adopt a different interpretative approach to the notion of kairotic *waqt*. How does the Sufi moment and its heterogenous time figure in projects which are not antagonistic to Sufi *turāth* and are not limited by the imaginary of linear progress? How do these concepts figure in modern projects that, while pertaining to different schools of thought, are united in drawing from *turāth* tools to critique capitalist modernity?

Chapter 5: Sufi Time Repurposed: Ethicist, Marxist, and Literary Applications

Serious philosophical and literary projects must wrestle with the questions of time and being. In capitalist modernity, time is reduced to a mathematical abstract measure. Its meaning is often limited to the notion of a homogenous medium of progress. To develop a decolonial critique of capitalist modernity, one has to take seriously heterogenous time in which continuous social duration is punctuated with the experiences of *other* kinds of time. This is so because heterogenous time reflects social and moral experiences which escape the instrumental logic of empty homogenous time and its rationalizations of life. In order not to engage in what Bonaventure De Susa Santos called "the waste of experience," postcolonial thinkers must set aside their modernist discursive ideals and consider the conceptual and aesthetic articulations of heterogenous time that exist in their cultural traditions and which express alternative social experiences. As De Susa Santos writes:

> By freeing alternative realities from their status as residuum, the sociology of absences replaces the monoculture of linear time with the ecology of temporalities. Societies are constituted of various temporalities. Many practices are disqualified, suppressed, or rendered unintelligible because they are ruled by temporalities that are not contained in the temporal canon of Western capitalist modernity. Once these temporalities are recuperated and become known, the practices and sociabilities ruled by them become intelligible and credible objects of argumentation and political debate. The expansion of the present occurs, in this case, by the relativization of linear time and the valorization of other temporalities that may articulate or conflict with it. [1]

The Arab thinkers and writers that this chapter examines invest in this very recuperation of the alternative moral and social experiences of heterogenous time. In their repurposing of the Sufi moment and its moral imagination, these thinkers are not concerned with the inadequacy of

[1] Santos, "A Critique of Lazy Reason: Against the Waste of Experience and Toward the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences," 177.

enchanted local culture but rather with the violences of the disenchanted global world of "homogenous, empty time."[2]

The post-*Naksa* paradigm of Arab thought consisted in an intense focus on cultural self-critique and the reevaluation of *turāth* (Islamic cultural heritage) within voluminous studies of the history of Islamic traditions. The culturalist problem of Arab time as a heterogenous event-based temporality surfaced in the discourse of a number of thinkers who lamented the alleged Arab inability to develop the sensibilities of historical and cultural progress. These thinkers focused on the antagonism between the secular time of history and the timeless world of religious enchantment. This dissertation approached this "problem-space" in two ways. It first surveyed the broad positions of the critique of the Arab event-based and "discontinuous" perception of time. It responded to these charges by arguing that these critiques only prove the violent hermeneutics of modernist evolutionary frameworks, the subordination of modernist thought to the discursive ideal of "homogenous, empty time," and its hostility to expressions of lived temporality. This dissertation further investigated the problem-space of Arab and Islamic temporalities through an authoritative *turāth* project. It studied how the aforementioned tendencies function in the thought of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri and the ways in which it conditions his views on the structure of Arab reason, the development of Islamic philosophy, and the effects of "Sufi unreason." The dissertation then advanced its alternative reading of the discourse of time in Sufism which al-Jabri took to be fullest expression of how enchantment undermines the time of history and society. In its concluding chapter, this dissertation corroborates its reading of the implications of the Sufi discourse on time with modern examples

[2] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.

of how heterogenous temporalities allow for critical interventions into the homogenized time of secular history.

This chapter studies how the notion of the Sufi kairotic moment (*waqt*) is appropriated in the works of the Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944), the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015). I first examine the approach of these intellectuals to the central questions of *turāth* and modernity. I then investigate how the discourse of heterogenous time is incorporated into their critiques of modernity and their philosophical and literary enterprises which draw from on Sufi *turāth* to develop ethical, political, and existential thought.

5.1 Modernity in the Thought of ʿAbdurrahman Taha, Hadi al-ʿAlawi, and Gamal al-Ghitani

While pertaining to different schools of thought, ʿAbdurrahman Taha, Hadi al-ʿAlawi, and Gamal al-Ghitani share a similar attitude to Sufi *turāth* and capitalist modernity. They derive tools from the former to critique the latter. It is important to sketch the general outline of their attitudes to the major categories of post-*Naksa* thought, i.e., the questions of *turāth* and modernity, before examining how the heterogenous time of Sufism is repurposed in their works. How do the categories of *turāth* and modernity function in their writing? And in what ways are their approaches different from Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's Weberian understanding of modernity as the rationalization of all aspects of life including the relation to pre-modern cultural traditions? I will begin by considering the thought of ʿAbdurrahman Taha who, in his engagement with al-Jabri's project, provides the most direct answers to these questions.

5.2 *Turāth* and Modernity in the Thought of ʿAbdurrahman Taha

Born in El-Jadida in western Morocco in 1944, ʿAbdurrahman Taha grew up in a family in which Islam and its learned traditions played a prominent role. His father was a teacher in one of the local Quranic school (*masīd* or *kuttāb*).[3] He both oversaw his son's religious education and introduced him to local Sufi figures who impressed the young Taha.[4] Taha progressed from a high school education in science in Casablanca to a university education in philosophy in Rabat.[5] His intellectual career thereafter included two major phases which are, in his words, divided by the "violent earthquake" of the 1967 War against Israel.[6] In his twenties, Taha pursued a career in poetry and was among the early members of the Moroccan Writers' Union. After the War, he turned to Islamic thought and philosophy. After finishing his doctoral studies in the Sorbonne in 1985, he continued to research and teach on logic and the philosophy of language. His first Arabic work appeared in that year.[7]

As Taha explains, the event of the *Naksa* reoriented his life and intellectual pursuits. He gave up the writing of poetry to study philosophy. In so doing, he was motivated, like the majority of Arab thinkers of the time, by a notion of an Arabic cultural failure. This notion directed him to the study of "the triumphant reason/rationality" which defeated the Arabs.[8]

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[3] Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz Khatib, eds., *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 37.
[4] See his interview with al-Jazzera (09:57), ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Taha ʿAbderrahman: al-Faylasuf al-Mujaddid* (Al-Jazeera, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MF_mN7oQ3Q.
[5] Hashas and Khatib, *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives*, 37.
[6] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *al-Hiwar Ufuqan li-l-Fikr* (Beirut: al-Shabaka al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Abhath wa-l-Nashr, 2013), 17.
[7] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *al-Mantiq wa-l-Nahw al-Suri* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 1985).
[8] Taha, *al-Hiwar Ufuqan li-l-Fikr*, 17.

Having worked on logic and the philosophy of language in Mohammed V University for the decades of 1970s and 1980s, he grew critical of the notions of local failure and the supremacy of Western modernity. This conviction reversed his intellectual trajectory. Taha writes:

> When I finished my studies of the logical and rational sciences, I became conscious of their limitations. I also became conscious that this rationality which defeated Muslims has its own limitations. It became apparent to me that we, as a Muslim nation, have the potential to develop a more robust rationality than the one that defeated us but we have not lived up to this responsibility. I was convinced that my philosophical training obligates me to seek truth beyond the limitations of reason. For logic has an end point and philosophy is endless investigation. This made me seek a new path to explore what lies beyond the limitations of logic. It was my conviction that the language of this new level of knowledge cannot be denotative (*lughat al-ʿibāra*) because denotation is the linguistic practice of this limited reason of whose constraints I became conscious. It had to be a connotative language (*lughat al-ishāra*). This language had to be both culturally authentic and eloquent in order to go beyond the boundaries of abstract rationality. This was the reason that brought me back to poetry, or at least to a poetry of a different kind than the one I practiced in my youth.[9]

The majority of Taha's publications pertain to this later phase of his career. In these works, he combines the critique of western instrumental rationality and its model of modernity with a comprehensive engagement with the *turāth* of Islamic moral literature and its applied ethics.

For the Moroccan ethicist, the task of a contemporary critique that is worthy of its name is to revise the givens of capitalist modernity and propose answers to its ethical dilemmas. His project reconstructs an Islamic theory of ethical subjectivity which is imbued with concerns of the global. ʿAbdurrahman Taha's work on Islamic ethics is at the other end of the spectrum of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's. Taha makes recourse to Islamic views on the moral education of the self (*nafs*) as an antidote to the modern narcissism of the individual. The ethics of self-restraint is highly prized in his work. Al-Jabri posits that the efforts of Muslim philosophers to popularize the Greek ethic of the stoic felicity of the individual (*sʿādat al-fard*) failed to gain

[9] Taha, 18.

popularity in the Muslim world because the world of Islam succumbed to the Persian and Gnostic (Sufi) ethic of self-denial and its enthrallment with despotic power (of the sheikh, the Imam, the Sultan, etc.).[10] Al-Jabri's arguments stem from a twentieth century critical trend that goes back to Zaki Mubarak's 1924 work *al-Akhlaq ʿind al-Ghazali* (Ethics According to al-Ghazali) in which the Egyptian scholar objected to al-Ghazali's ethical discourse that reflects, in its call for asceticism, the "ethos of the dead" and "the morality of slaves."[11] This dominant critical trend in modern Arab ethical thought makes Taha's work as unique as it is unconventional.

Taha's work on rethinking Islamic subjectivity is inspired by a number of models that include Mohammed Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and more contemporary works such as Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi's *Le personnalisme musulman*.[12] Still, while Taha shares these authors' efforts to theorize a creative, self-assertive, and socially engaged Islamic subjectivity, he does not share their views of Sufism as a tradition which is detrimental to these pursuits. Taha's project makes recourse to *sharʿī* and Sufi ethical discourses, embracing their substance but also their discursive forms. As Wael Hallaq remarks, one of the key contributions of Taha to contemporary Arab thought is to devise "a new philosophical

[10] See Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri, *al-ʿAql al-Akhlaqi al-ʿArabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 2001), 248.
[11] Zaki Mubarak, *al-Akhlaq ʿind al-Ghazali* (Cairo: Muʾassasat Hindawi, 2012), 127.
[12] See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1974). See also, Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi, *Le personnalisme musulman* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964).
See Taha's discussion of the influence of Muhammad Iqbal on his thought, ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Suʾal al-Akhlaq: Musahama fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li-l-Hadatha* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2000), 198–99.

dictionary" by recoding technical Islamic terms and bringing them to bear on modern questions.[13]

Taha's publications in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the concept of *turāth* and its place in an Arabic philosophical modernity. As explored in the second chapter of this dissertation, Taha posits *turāth* as an existential and communicative question instead of a merely discursive or dangerously political one. *Turāth* is the language of the intersubjective communicative space of Muslims (*al-majāl al-tadāwulī*). While certain Arab thinkers speak of the presence of *turāth* as the return to the past, for Taha, the engagement with *turāth* is rather an intellectual return to the present and social reality of Muslims which is no longer shaded by modernization discourse. In his view, the value of *turāth* can only be appreciated if Arab thinkers stop "severing the dimension of knowledge from the dimension of practice."[14] Critics of *turāth* or advocates of the exclusive rationalist discourses of *turāth* (of whom he singles out Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri), miss the crucial point that rationality is not a fixed theoretical system that transcends social and cultural contexts. Rather, it is "a [circumscribed] cognitive activity (*faʿāliyya idrākiyya*)" which "changes according to time and place and in relation to normative criteria."[15]

With the plurality of rationalities comes a notion of the plurality of practices of modernity. Taha distinguishes between "the spirit of modernity" (*rūḥ al-ḥadātha*) and its various applications. In adopting this distinction, he relies as much on Kantian principles as on postcolonial critique. Thinking along with Kant, Taha views the spirit of modernity as characterized by the principles of maturity (*mabdaʾ al-rushd*), of critical thought (*mabdaʾ al-*

[13] Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity*, 28.
[14] Taha, *Tajdid al-Manhaj fi Taqwim al-Turath*, 20.
[15] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Fi Usul al-Hiwar wa Tajdid ʿIlm al-Kalam* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 1987), 152.

naqd), and of universality (*mabdaʾ al-shumūl*).[16] This universal model has an inbuilt mechanism to disallow homogenization. The universality of the principles of maturity and critical thought, in fact, require that the practices of modernity must be authentic, independent, and self-critical.[17] While the spirit of modernity, as he views it, is born out of "the collective labor of human societies in their different historical stages," its application can only be cultural and diversified.[18] Taha then faults the Arab application of this spirit of modernity for denying itself the principle of maturity with its attendant quality of autonomy. As for the Western application, he faults it for denying other world cultures this possibility in putting in effect what he called a "colonial trusteeship" (*wiṣāya mustaʿmir*).[19]

ʿAbdurrahman Taha's critique of Western modernity focuses on its capitalist subordination of the human and the non-human to the materialist logic of maximum gain (*kasb al-māl bi-lā qadr*).[20] He addresses global ethical dilemmas that range from the erosion of the natural environment to the neoliberal production of radical forms of inequality under the myth of "trickle down" mechanisms of economic redistribution.[21] In his analysis, he links these modern

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[16] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Ruh al-Hadatha* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2016), 24–30. Taha's views echo Kant's answers in his article "What is the Enlightenment?" that "Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity." Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58.
[17] Taha, *Ruh al-Hadatha*, 30.
[18] Taha, 31.
[19] Taha, 68.
[20] See his remarks on the notion of maximum gain (*kasb al-māl bi-lā qadr*) and its myth of the viable trickle-down mechanisms of economic distribution (*mafʿūl al-tasāquṭ*). Taha, 79–86.
[21] See his discussion of globalism's three forms of domination which include the supremacy of the free market in the field of economics, the supremacy technology in the field of science, and the supremacy of distant networking in the field of communication. On the first form of domination, he writes, "The most distinctive rationalization act of globalism is to turn all forms

conditions to the dominance of instrumental rationality and its abstract ethics that are unable to deliver on their universal promises. He writes:

> Western modernity, i.e. the hegemonic version of modernity, with its immense accomplishments in science and technology, endowed its beneficiaries with materialist power. This made their search for more knowledge linked to their search for more materialist dominance, such that this dominance became tyranny that they inflicted on other societies, blocking their path to [their own] time of modernity. It also narrowed the concept of the sovereignty of reason to the sovereignty of a materialist outlook on human life coupled with ethics that are based on self-interest.[22]

For Taha, modern consequentialist or deontological rationalizations of ethics accomplish the typical modernist move of prioritizing theoretical ideals over lived reality. It borrows the concepts of religion, severs them from their metaphysical origin, and empties them of their substantive social histories.[23] Religion, for Taha, is the only guarantee that moral discourse translates into continuous collective practice and lived reality.[24] It is also the only ethical discourse which is honest and explicit about its metaphysical basis. While rationalized ethics stem from a secular worldview, they enact a number of implicit metaphysical ideals, such as the ability of achieving a moral relationship with the world while maintaining the supremacy of human rationality over it. As the reader of Taha intimates, the crisis of modernist ethics stem from their insistence on their universality and cultural neutrality while resting on a metaphysical foundation that is particular to modern capitalist culture.

Taha draws on Islamic *turāth* and considers diverse notions of global time, ethical time, and the temporalities of moral action and moral evolution. Sufism provides Taha with the

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of economic development into capitalist development by bringing them into free market exchange. No other terms than economic domination can describe this reality." Taha, 79.

[22] Taha, 57.

[23] See his critique of Kantian deontological ethics and his secular translations of Christian concepts, Taha, *Suʾal al-Akhlaq: Musahama fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li-l-Hadatha*, 35–40.

[24] Taha, 25.

conceptual language to think heterogenous time. Before considering the ways in which Taha accomplishes this task, I will explore the two other projects of the Marxist thinker Hadi al-ʿAlawi and the Egyptian novelist Gamal-Ghitani who share with Taha an appreciation for Sufi ethical and ontological concepts. Having introduced these three figures and examined their positions on *turāth* and modernity, the chapter will then turn to the study of their distinct and complementary reformulations of Sufi time.

5.3 Hadi al-ʿAlawi: A Marxist Take on *Turāth* and Modernity

Hadi al-ʿAlawi has also worked on Islamic ethics and Sufi concepts. The Iraqi Marxist shares with the Moroccan ethicist a belief in the modern philosophical value of these traditions. The stakes of their intellectual projects, however, are different. While Taha objects to politicized readings of *turāth* and the politicization of religious identities more broadly, the aim of al-ʿAlawi's studies of *turāth* is the political recuperation of the contributions of subaltern classes in the making of the Islamic cultural traditions. Broadly speaking, al-ʿAlawi's project belongs to what Maxime Rodinson called Arab leftist "concordat" of the post-*Naksa* period which consists in the "systematic reinterpretation" of *turāth* along Marxist ideals (see Chapter Two). While this "concordat" remained an analytical endeavor in the works of Tayyib Tizzini (1934-2019) and Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987), it took on a creative form in the work of Hadi al-ʿAlawi who, like Ali Shariati (1933-1977) or Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021), fused Islamic and Marxist ideas to produce a unique philosophical synthesis. Al-ʿAlawi considers the cultural materialist readings of *turāth* by the likes of Tizzini and Muruwwa to be significant steps to liberate *turāth* from "traditional orientalist approaches" that build doctrinal maps and focus on fixed ideas that make

up Islamic essences.[25] However, the decolonial thrust of this approach remains lacking as long as its "comparative model and implicit interlocutor is the West."[26] As he specifies, as long as Arab thinkers have not become conversant in Indian, Chinese, and African philosophies and have not engaged in dialogue with these traditions, they remain constricted by orientalist frameworks. In adopting the concepts of Sufism in conversation with the Chinese tradition of Taoism, al-ʿAlawi stayed faithful to his standards of decolonial critique, earning himself the soubriquet "the scion of the two civilizations" (*salīl al-ḥaḍārataynِ*).[27]

Hadi al-ʿAlawi was born in 1932 in the rural suburb of Karadat Maryam in the Eastern part of Baghdad. His father was a day laborer who descended from a family that, in earlier generations, produced Shi'i jurists. Al-ʿAlawi grew up in poverty with no prospect in pursuing his education beyond the secondary school. What sparked in him a lifelong interest in learning was his encounter at age fourteen with his deceased grandfather's collection of Islamic texts which had been discarded by the illiterate members of the family.[28] As he describes it, this encounter constituted "his first intellectual training."[29] Despite the lack of economic security, al-ʿAlawi persisted in his education and obtained an economics degree from the University of Baghdad in 1954. During this time, his friendship with the writer Shakir Jabir al-Bagdadi (1929-2007) was influential for his intellectual development.[30] Al-Bagdadi was among the popularizes of communist literature in Karadat Maryam and he welcomed al-ʿAlawi into his intellectual

[25] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, "al-Fikr al-ʿArabi al-Islami wa Darurat al-Tajdid al-Manhaji," *Mawaqif* 1, no. 63 (October 1, 1989): 229.
[26] al-ʿAlawi, 229.
[27] See Mohammed al-Sudairi, "Mao in the Middle East: Hadi al-'Alawi, Scion of the Two Civilizations," *Middle East Report*, no. 270 (2014): 19–20.
[28] Khalid Suleiman and Haydar Jawad, *al-Hiwar al-Akhir maʿa al-Mufakkir Hadi al-ʿAlawi: Hiwar al-Hadir wa-l-Mustaqbal* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 2015), 24.
[29] Suleiman and Jawad, 25.
[30] Suleiman and Jawad, 25.

group. Al-ʿAlawi became active in the nationalist movement and joined the Iraqi Communist Party.

Throughout the 1960s, al-ʿAlawi's publications which addressed political themes in *turāth* and his continued involvement in communist circles raised the ire of Bathist authorities.[31] Al-ʿAlawi left Iraq in 1977 when an opportunity to teach Arabic in China presented itself. He lived in China for the next five years where he worked on editing the language of Arabic translations of Chinese literature.[32] He also penned a number of influential studies on Chinese civilization, chief among them his *al-Mustatraf al-Sini* (The Book of Chinese Novelties).[33] Al-ʿAlawi remained in exile until his death، living between Beirut and Damascus and writing on Islamic and Chinese cultural heritage.

After his travels in China and in multiple Arab cities, the Iraqi Marxist developed the notion of the communalist spirit (*al-rūḥ al-mashāʿiyya*) of societies of the Global South which imposes on the postcolonial thinker the need to think a third way between colonial capitalism and top-down "translated communism" (*al-shuyūʿiyya al-mutarjama*).[34] Al-ʿAlawi writes, "Our communist experiments failed because they were one-sided in terms of their frame of reference and because they relied exclusively on translated literature."[35] *Turāth*, for al-ʿAlawi, is a

[31] Suleiman and Jawad, 41.
[32] See his inventory of Arabic manuscripts in the University of Beijing, Hadi al-ʿAlawi, "al-Makhtutat bi Jamiʿat Pikin," *Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya bi Dimashq* 2 (April 1, 1978): 474–81.
[33] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *al-Mustatraf al-Sini* (Damascus: Dar al-Madaa, 1994).
[34] See Mohammed Turki Alsudairi's excellent study of the progression of al-ʿAlawi's ideas on communism after his visit to China. Mohammed Turki Alsudairi, "Arab Encounters with Maoist China: Transnational Journeys, Diasporic Lives and Intellectual Discourses," *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (March 4, 2021): 515.
[35] Suleiman and Jawad, *al-Hiwar al-Akhir maʿa al-Mufakkir Hadi al-ʿAlawi: Hiwar al-Hadir wa-l-Mustaqbal*, 56.

necessary component of an Arab Marxist project which must base its foundation on the cultural expressions of the communalist spirit of Muslim societies instead of the ideals of vanguardist leaders who are hostile to folk traditions. Al-ʿAlawi's exposure to Maoism consolidated his conviction in the imperative of developing a distinct brand of Marxist thought for the Global South. However, and like other Arab thinkers who were influenced by the Chinese model, al-ʿAlawi's openness to *turāth* sets him apart from the Maoist model. Rula Jurdi Abisaab writes:

> Al-'Alawi, like other Maoists, turned to the Islamic traditions and questioned the assimilation of Western liberal humanism by Iraqi intellectuals, including Soviet-modeled Communists. Whereas Maoist reforms in China involved a rejection of folk religious beliefs and mythology, Arab Maoists expressed a keen interest in peasant culture and religious traditions.[36]

In al-ʿAlawi's view, folk traditions are not merely the reflection of people's oppression. In the same way that they can naturalize the subordinated status of the people, they also express in diverse forms their protests against oppressive conditions. As far as *turāth* is concerned (which transcends folk tradition into learned discourse), al-ʿAlawi would have agreed with Taha that *turāth* is a primary language in the intersubjective communicative space of Muslims. Arab Marxists cannot afford to ignore this language. Their input in the studies of *turāth* counteracts essentialist trends of the likes of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri and Mohammed Arkoun which, as al-ʿAlawi observed, study Arabic or Islamic reason trans-historically and provide unhelpful racialized conclusions.[37]

Naturally for al-ʿAlawi, an authentic modernity project must oppose the capitalist reorganization of the world. Postcolonial critics, in his view, must not be satisfied with importing

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[36] Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Hassan Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists*, First edition, Middle East Studies beyond Dominant Paradigms (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 88.
[37] al-ʿAlawi, "al-Fikr al-ʿArabi al-Islami wa Darurat al-Tajdid al-Manhaji," 240.

the philosophical terms of this opposition from established Marxist models whose worldview remains, in some important aspects, Eurocentric. The terms of opposition must be derived vertically from the relation of the postcolonial critic to his civilizational heritage and must be verified horizontally in dialogue with other traditions of the Global South. In his 1997 book *Mahatat fi al-Tarikh wa-l-Turath* (Stations in History and Cultural Heritage), al-ʿAlawi draws on and modifies the Sufi concept of the unity of being (*wiḥdat al-wujūd*) to describe the status of capitalist modernity and the impetus of oppositional agendas. As a Sufi concept, the unity of being refers to the metaphysical condition of the essential unity and phenomenal multiplicity of God and the world. In modernity, in al-ʿAlawi's reformulation, people live under the system *wiḥdat al-mawjūd* (unity of the existent). This concept expresses the domination of the world by the *de facto* system of capitalist exploitation (*al-mawjūd*). It also refers to the unity in consumerism as the *mawjūd* invokes material objects. Drawing on the insights of Husayn Muruwwa, al-ʿAlawi writes:

> All renaissance or progress must begin with *turāth* for, as the martyred scholar [Husayn Muruwwa] tells us, the past flows into the present the same way in which sap flows into a plant from its roots through its stem and to its leaves. Similarly, every society has its own kind of "sap" which flows from its inner depths and which determines its qualities and constituent elements. Those who deny this reality embrace the notion of the unity of the existent (note that it is the unity of the existent and not the unity of being). This unique existent is the West. The rest is mere shadows. They, in fact, mask this censoring [of alterity] with the discourse of the unity of the modern world, which only reflects the desire that the world fuses into the West. The true unity of the world is of the order of the unity of being (*wiḥdat al-wujūd*) and not the unity of the existent (*wiḥdat al-mawjūd*) for the world is constituted by multiplicity and diversity. There are as many differences as there are similarities. Its unity, then, is the unity of differentiated components.[38]

In thinking modernity but also other notions such as the act of revolutionary uprising and its temporality, al-ʿAlawi draws on Sufi *turāth*, adopting its concepts to his modern political

[38] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *Mahatat fi al-Tarikh wa-l-Turath* (Damascus: Dar al-Taliʿa al-Jadida, 1997), 35.

concerns. This strand of his thinking is dispersed in a number of publications that include his 1983 *al-Haraka al-Jawhariyya ʿind al-Shirazi* (On Shirazi's Trans-substantial Motion) which examines Mulla Sadra's ideas on the dependent co-development of matter and form. This al-ʿAlawi interprets as a pre-modern Islamic theory of dialectical movement of historical being.[39] It also includes his 1988 *Min Qamus al-Turath* (From the Anthology of Heritage) which studies the expressions of the communalist spirit of Muslim societies in *turāth*, and his 1995 *Shakhsiyat Ghayr Qaliqa fī al-Islam* (Non-Anxious Islamic figures) which is titled after an earlier study by ʿAbdurrahman Badawi in which the Egyptian philosopher affirmed the Sufi experience as an Islamic expression of the existential anxiety of the individual.[40] Al-ʿAlawi rejects the notion of the individualism of ascetics in Islam and provides biographical portraits of diverse Islamic figures (which include ascetics, poets, and philosophers) who were representative of social and political protest in pre-modern Islam. Al-ʿAlawi's synthesis of Marxist and Sufi ideas in conversation with Taoism is most elaborated in his 1997 publication *Madarat al-Sufiyya* (Sufi Orbits) in which he combines the study of Sufi social history and the analysis of Sufi concepts into a creative discourse that merges the philosophic and the poetic.[41] The Sufi tradition of letterism (assigning spiritual meaning to Arabic letters) informs the organization of the chapters and sections of *Madarat al-Sufiyya*. In this work, Sufism functions in the background of the text as a set of moral and metaphysical ideas that reflect the communalist spirit of Muslim societies. It also functions as a form of writing and a literary repertoire which informs the language of the text.

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[39] Hadi al-ʿAlawi, *al-Haraka al-Jawhariyya ʿind al-Shirazi* (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 1983).
[40] al-Alawi, *Min Qamus al-Turath al-Islami*; al-ʿAlawi, *Shakhsiyyat Ghayr Qaliqa fi al-Islam*. For Badawi's study, see ʿAbdurrahman Badawi, *Shakhsiyyat qaliqa fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1946).
[41] al-ʿAlawi, *Madarat al-Sufiyya*.

Being interested in aesthetics and literary criticism, al-ʿAlawi authored also a number of studies on poetry such as his *Diwan al-Wajd: Fayadat al-Hubb al-Ilahi* (The Poems of Ecstasy: The Emanation of Divine Love) in which he studies the concept of ecstatic love in Sufi poetics. Both *Diwan al-Wajd* and *Madarat al-Sufiyya* contribute to a sizeable body of publications on the philosophical and artistic uses of Sufi concepts which is authored by Arab poets and novelists of the post-*Naksa* period. One of these authors is the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015) whose literary voice draws on Sufism and Arab historical writing. Like al-ʿAlawi, al-Ghitani insisted that the postcolonial writer must be conversant in his pre-modern literary tradition and in world literatures. Among the literary traditions of the Global South that he researched, he read Chinese literature through the translations of Hadi al-ʿAlawi.[42] Al-Ghitani belongs to what critics called "the Sixties Generation" of young Egyptian writers who responded to the *Naksa* with a call for a new experimental literature that breaks with the romanticism and social realism of the periods before.[43] Gathered around the journal of *Gallery 68*, these writers advocated for a rupture with the dominant forms of modern Arabic literature.[44] As far as literary time is concerned, one of the defining features of this new literature, as the literary critic Shukri

[42] Al-Ghitani mentions both the translations of Hadi al-ʿAlawi and the Syrian ʿAbdulmuʿin al-Muwaylihi. See Hasanayn Fahmi Husayn, *ʻInaq al-Nil wa-l-Yanjatsi: Mujaz Tarikh al-Tafaʻulat al-Adabiyya bayna Misr wa-l-Sin* (Giza: Dar Sifsafa li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʼ wa-l-Dirasat, 2020), 3.

[43] In addition to al-Ghitani, the leading writers of "The Sixties Generation" include Ibrahim Aslan (1935-2012), Sonallah Ibrahim (b. 1937), Abdelhakim Qasim (1934-1990), Baha Tahir (b. 1935), and Edward al-Kharrat (1926-2015).

[44] See Elizabeth Kendell's discussion of Edward al-Kharrat's notion of the "new sensibility" that marks the literature of the writers who rallied around *Gallery 68* which is reflected, firstly, in the adoption a language of alienation; secondly, in the investment in stream of consciousness technique; thirdly, in the rediscovery of Arabic literary heritage; and fourthly in the direction to a new experimental realism that favors fragmentariness and synchrony over organic unity and diachrony. Elisabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 96–108.

Ghali puts it, is the investment in the event as an existential temporality instead of a causal link in a narrative sequence.[45] Al-Ghitani is one of the pioneers of this wave of authors who drew on Sufi time to achieve this existential interrogation of the event. Before investigating this aspect of al-Ghitani's work and examining how his literary universe synthesizes the range of nuances and interpretative potential of Sufi time which in the works of ʿAbdurrahman Taha and Hadi al-ʿAlawi is used to express the temporality of ethical and revolutionary actions, I will first consider al-Ghitani's stance on *turāth* and Arabic literary modernism.

5.4 Gamal al-Ghitani: *Turāth*, *Adab,* and Arabic Literary Modernism

There are a number of important differences between the "Sixties Generation" of Egyptian writers and the literary elite of colonial and Nasserite Egypt. While the literary avant-gardism of the previous generations of Egyptian writers consisted in looking to European literatures for inspiration, the avant-gardism of the "Sixties Generation" included both the dialogue with global postmodernism and the investment in Arabic literary heritage.[46] While the

[45] Describing the structure of time in the post-*Naksa* novel, Shukri Ghali writes, "The event in the majority of these novels, of both [the pessimist and optimist] trends, is not the occurrence which has developed in a linear fashion along with historical time. The event becomes rather a position which is profoundly rooted and vertically expanded into multiple branches. Narrative texture here corresponds to the form of a tree instead of a moving train or a flowing river." Ghali Shukri, *Siraʿ al-Ajyal fi al-Adab al-Muʿasir* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿama li-l-kitab, 1993), 287.

[46] Elisabeth Kendall writes, "Thus the sixties generation might be read as offering an amalgamation of three models of resistance in their quest to establish their own literary identity. First, a national Egyptian culture and pre-colonial literary tradition were asserted through the incorporation of myth, legend, and historical material from the distant Egyptian and Arab past (anti-colonial discourse); second, the hybrid nature of their literature contested the very basis of imperialist pretensions of cultural superiority (counter discursive practices); and third, the rejection of the literary practices of the immediate Arab past and the emergence of a new realism challenged the social, political, and literary status quo, while the creation of their own

majority of the accomplished authors of colonial and Nasserite Egypt either came from or belonged to an aristocratic class, the writers of the "Sixties Generation" came from working-class families who benefited from the socialist policies of Nasser. This explains why, in the words of Samia Mehrez, the literary establishment looked down at these young writers as "an illiterate generation."[47] Yet these authors cultivated a literary knowledge which was both cosmopolitan and deeply versed in Arabic literary heritage. The life and works of Gamal al-Ghitani best exemplify these trends.

Al-Ghitani was born in 1945 in the rural village of Jihina in Upper Egypt. His family moved to Cairo when he was six years old and settled in the working-class neighborhood of Gamaliya in Old Cairo.[48] Al-Ghitani grew up impressed by the historical architecture of Old Cairo and the popular stories about its Mamluk past.[49] He obtained a middle school degree and was unable to continue his education because of economic hardship. At age fourteen, he joined a technical school where he spent three years learning the craft of oriental carpets.[50] Completing his training in 1962, al-Ghitani worked for the next six years in designing and making carpets. During this period, he also developed a strong interest in literature. This came about through his daily encounters with booksellers in the streets of Old Cairo and most importantly through his friendship with the literary giant Naguib Mahfuz (1911-2006). The young al-Ghitani became an

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independent journal gave them a certain autonomy from the greater field of power (anti-establishment)." Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt*, 146.

[47] Samia Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), 99.

[48] Bouraoui Ajina and Ahmad al-Hadhiri, "Hiwar maʿa al-Riwaʾi Gamal al-Ghitani," *al-Hayat al-Thaqafiyya* 58 (July 1, 1990): 103.

[49] Ajina and al-Hadhiri, 103.

[50] Ajina and al-Hadhiri, 103.

apprentice of Mahfuz, attending his café gatherings, joining him regularly for walks throughout Old Cairo, and submitting to him his first literary attempts.[51] Since his early journal publications in the 1960s, al-Ghitani became visible as a leftist critic of Nasserite rule. This landed him six-months in a detention camp during Nasser's 1966 crackdown on the Egyptian left. After the *Naksa* and in 1969, al-Ghitani published his first book, a collection of short stories *Awraq Shab ʿAsha mundhu Alfi ʿAm* (The Notes of a Young Man Who Lived One Thousand Years Ago) which adopted the voice of a Mamluk historian in describing contemporary Cairo (see Chapter One).[52] His first novel *Zayni Barakat*, an allegorical tale about the postcolonial Egyptian state and its surveillance apparatus set in 16th century Mamluk Egypt, appeared first in Syria in 1971 and later in Egypt in 1974 and gained him wide recognition as a leading Egyptian writer. [53] In the meantime, al-Ghitani turned to working in journalism doing field reports during the October War of 1973 against Israel and becoming later the editor of the journal *Akhbar al-Adab*. He also continued to write novels, shorts stories, and essays on literature and Arab politics, establishing a literary repertoire that includes over forty texts. Philosophically, this repertoire is animated by the question of time and its articulations in *turāth*.

Turāth, for al-Ghitani, is not only textual traditions. It is the sum of aesthetic and philosophical experiences of a people that include, in addition to texts, architecture, music, art and oral history. While formal aspects of *turāth,* such as the cultivation of learned traditions, can be interrupted with colonial impositions, its informal aspects continue to exist in individual and

[51] Al-Ghitani's first short story entitled "*al-Ziyara*" (the visit) appeared in 1963 in the Lebanese journal *al-Adib*. See Najib Mahfuz, *Najib Mahfuz Yatadhakkar*, ed. Gamal al-Ghitani (Beirut: Dar al-Masira, 1980), 5.
[52] al-Ghitani, *Awraq Shab ʿAsha Mundhu Alf ʿAm*.
[53] Gamal al-Ghitani, *al-Zayni Barakat*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994).

social life. As far as Arabic writing is concerned, al-Ghitani acknowledges the modern rupture in Arabic literary practices. In his 1997 *Muntaha al-Talab ila Turath al-ʿArab* (The Culmination of Quest in the Heritage of the Arabs), al-Ghitani asserts:

> I grew up reading world literature. At the same time, I became gradually aware of the narrative styles, forms of storytelling, and artistic visions which we have lost and from which we have been severed. This interruption or gap began, in my estimation, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the ninetieth century, specifically with the French expedition to Egypt led by Napoleon Bonaparte. The rupture in creativity occurred within a general redirection towards European civilization that affected all domains of culture from architectural design to forms of writing.[54]

Al-Ghitani's project consists in rehabilitating forms of storytelling that have been marginalized as pre-modern folk traditions in the modern Arabic novel. These forms derive from the *sira* tradition of biographical and heroic narratives, the *khitat* tradition of recounting the history and urban experience of cities, the *ajaʿib* tradition of recounting marvels, the *tarikh* tradition of Arabic historiography, and Sufi biographical and visionary literature.

The project of restoring pre-modern Arabic narrative styles is at the center al-Ghitani's literary concerns. Thinking about *turāth*, for him, is, per force, thinking about time. Describing the causes of his direction to *turāth* in a special issue of *al-Adab*, which is devoted to studying the "new literature" of the post-*Naksa*, al-Ghitani states:

> I felt the need early on to forge a new narrative style whose components come from Arabic *turāth*. Perhaps the reason was my abiding interest in history, and my experience growing up in Old Cairo which is filled with mosques, public fountains, ancient homes; even more importantly, filled with a certain kind of relationship between people which, in its essence, belong to a bygone time. Another reason is my deep-felt sentiment about time, this inevitable power. It is my sense of time, of time's frightening becomings, of its endurance and fluidity which never stagnates, that shaped my understanding of history.[55]

[54] al-Ghitani, *Muntaha al-Talab ila Turath al-ʿArab*, 5–6.
[55] Gamal al-Ghitani, "Baʿd Mukawwinat ʿAlami al-Riwaʾi," *al-Adab* 28, no. 2 (February 1, 1980): 113.

In a sizable body of short stories, novels, and other prose works that are modeled around Islamic historical chronicles and Sufi writing, al-Ghitani reflects on the lived quality and human significance of time. This line of thinking appears in works as early as his 1970 short story "Ard Ard" (Ground Missile) which narrates the hero's traumatic obsession with the moment when an Israeli missile fell on his home and killed his entire family to his 1986 *Kitab al-Tajalliyat* (The Book of Epiphanies) in which he engages the full range of Islamic theories of time to meditate on his father's death and the passing of Nasserite anti-imperialist Egypt.[56] This coherent and developed line of thinking constitutes a defining feature of al-Ghitani's work among the rest of the authors of his generation.

In grasping the philosophical depth of al-Ghitani's literature and his ability to speak in multiple Islamic voices, the expert reader recognizes in the Egyptian writer's texts a modern iteration of the pre-modern concept of *adab* as *a type of knowledge and practice* which is conducive to "the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral refinement" of the human being.[57] His literature draws on the diverse fields of Islamic sciences cultivating through and through a humanist discourse that reflects on the existential realities of man and time.

For al-Ghitani, but also for ʿAbdurrahman Taha and Hadi al-ʿAlawi, modernity presents a set of challenges that are related to its force of homogenization. Whether in its globalization of instrumental rationality and its abstract ethics (Taha), or in the commodification of all aspects of life and the reduction of the human to *homo economicus* (al-ʿAlawi), or in the globalization of hegemonic cultural designs (al-Ghitani), modernity propagates a form of violence based on a dialectic of depersonalization and exploitation. These thinkers, then, turn to their cultural

[56] Gamal al-Ghitani, *Kitab al-Tajalliyat* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1990).
[57] See Bonebakker, "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres."

heritage for experiences and articulations of the heterogenous. Against the neutral impersonal medium of modern time which makes these forms of homogenization possible, these thinkers endorse, in their writings, the event which becomes the asynchronous conversion of multiple temporalities into the present moment that thickens time and unites it with subjectivity. The turn to the event here is far from being an expression of a discontinuous perception that diminishes the value of temporal flow. It is a recognition of time as a key component in the fabric of being and the self which cannot be reduced to a mechanistic measure of existence.

5.5 *Waqt* Repurposed: The Kairotic Moment in its Ethicist, Marxist, and Literary Applications

5.6 The Moment of the Ethical Act

The Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha established his critical project in conversation with Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's ideas. Their views are in fact in diametrical opposition. While al-Jabri takes gnostic thought (*ʿirfān*) to be, in its various traditions, the cause of the decay of philosophy in Islam and the paralysis of Islamic civilization more broadly, Taha considers the form of rationality, which is embodied in Sufi practice, to be the perfection of Islamic rationality, or what he termed "fortified reason" (*al-ʿaql al-muʾayyad*).[58] If Arabic modernity, in al-Jabri's

[58] In his book *al-ʿAmal al-Dinii wa Tajdiid al-ʿAql* (The Religious Act and the Renewal of Reason), Taha delineated between three historical forms of Islamic rationality. In the first chapter of the book, he attends to 'abstracted reason' (*al-ʿaql al-mujarrad*). Its Islamic equivalent practiced by the Aristotelian Muslim philosophers operated through *naẓar* (theoretical speculation). As an esoteric type of rationality, it linked knowledge of the divine to the felicity of the soul within the practice of the individual philosopher. For ʿAbdurrahman, the limitation of this form of rationality is its prioritization of the theoretically speculative over the existential and its lack of a societal impact. The second type represents what he calls 'grounded reason' (*al-ʾaql*

thought, needs to go through a disenchantment process that liberates Arab reason from its foundation in myth, Taha argues that disenchanted modern reason is in dire need of resuscitating its ethical and spiritual dimensions through which it can escape the status of volatility and "criterionlessness" that plagues it. These differences between the two thinkers are important. But for the purposes of the present argument, there is an important difference between ʿAbdurrahman Taha and Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri as far as the questions of history and time are concerned.

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's arguments operate within a uniform concept of secular universal history that is largely shaped by the European experience. In his thinking, modern global time is the post-Enlightenment "homogenous, empty" medium which makes possible the rationalized forms of linearity and progress (see Chapter Three).[59] As Elizabeth Ermath argued, this time of history, which has been discovered in the encounter of the Renaissance with the Classics and the development of a sense of the historical mission of the past in the making of a certain kind of future, is primarily a category of consciousness. Ermath writes:

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al-musaddad) and is deployed by Muslim jurists and theologians. As analyzed in the second chapter of the book, this form of Islamic reason operates by combining rational precepts and textual hermeneutics (*samʿ*). It engages the religious text in order to produce knowledge directed towards the public good. For Taha, this is a higher form of Islamic rationality since it turns knowledge of the religious text into a mode of social being. However, as he notes, this form of reason in its direction to the social historically ran the risk a number of moral defects stemming from the human desire for domination. The third type of reason is located within the Sufi tradition and embodies, for ʿAbdurrahman, the perfection of Islamic rationality. He calls this form of rationality 'fortified reason' (*al-ʿaql al-muʾayyad*). It approaches the religious text and its ethical regimes as a vital experience (*al-tajriba al-ḥayya*), allowing it to inhabit the subject's epistemology and ontology. It is a form of reason that is attuned to the life of the spirit. It allows the subject to become, in her social existence, a witness to the spiritual planes of being. As he argues, the history of Sufi figures grants numerous models of the unity between *ʿilm* (knowledge) and *ʿamal* (ethical practice). ʿAbdurrahman remarks that the common charge of Sufi resistance to the rational sciences in Islam must be further qualified as a resistance to the first form of abstracted reason, which does not link *naẓar* (rational speculation) to the ontological and spiritual experiences of these principles. See ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *al-ʿAmal al-Dini wa Tajdid al-ʿAql* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 1997).

[59] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.

> This flexible and composite historical medium, at once time and consciousness, literally maintains by its ceaseless relay between the past and future of events the medium of history itself as a common temporal horizon. In history this coordination is distributed over a sequence and thus depends on collected consciousness to maintain it: a more intangible feat perhaps than the visual coordinations of homogenized and neutralized space but equally powerful in extending to infinity the human capabilities it thereby inscribes.[60]

This consciousness which constitutes universal history "extends to infinity" a specific modern form of power, that of capitalism in its management of the human and non-human. In the global centers of capitalism, this consciousness takes on heroic Faustian dimensions, producing History as a triumphant teleological march. In the peripheries, it morphs into an unhappy consciousness that colors the present with the brush of historical lag and anachronism, and locks thought in the prison of culturalist explanations of the world.

Taha and al-Jabri disagree on the concept of history. The "constructedness" of historical time is naturalized in al-Jabri's thought where it becomes the default temporal horizon of reason once it is liberated from the distorting lens of religious culture. In opposition to this stance, ʿAbdurrahman Taha is explicit in viewing time and history as dependent on categories of consciousness and, as such, heterogenous realities.

Taha's thought accounts for an ecology of temporalities. First, there is modern capitalist time which transforms everything into a market and imparts to it the logic of exchange and overconsumption. Its temporality is marked by both the processes of "compression and acceleration" (*ṭay al-zamān wa-l-makān*) and the denial of finitude (*al-ikhlād fī al-arḍ*) as time becomes the life span of the illusions of limitless nature and the limitless fulfillment of human

[60] Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 29.

desire.[61] This global temporality constitutes a domain of history which is the life of the hegemonic version of modernity in its Western application. There is also an ethical time (*al-zamān al-akhlāqī*) which is, for Taha, the temporal (and historical) life of moral values and ethical practices as they are developed by every new religious message. Islam, being the youngest monotheistic religion, comes, for Taha, to reaffirm and complete a core ethical and spiritual message that has existed in Judaism and Christianity but also in non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism.[62] According to this hierarchy, the stage of the globalization of European modernity falls within the Islamic stage of ethical time, making Muslims responsible for providing ethical answers to the global dilemmas of modernity. While having its own sense of history, ethical time is a parallel concept to modern secular history. Taha writes:

> We are not unaware of stirrings and oppositions to our statement that "globalism is an Islamic reality" or the necessary claim that "modernity is an Islamic reality." These reactions result from the confusion between historical time and ethical time. Historical time is the time of events. Events cannot be repeated or reversed; only their actors are accountable for them. However, ethical time is the time of values. Values are renewed and transformed with every new religion. All the believers in a religion are accountable for its moral principles. This entails that contemporary Muslims are responsible for [the state of] globalism even if they were not its historical makers.[63]

For Taha, historical time and ethical time are related through the notion of an Islamic responsibility to rethink the global ethically.

There is a more important connection between these two levels of time in Taha's thought. A third level of time acts as a bridge between historical and ethical time. It is the existential temporality of the self in its ethical, social, and historical lives. It is here that the heterogeneity of

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[61] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Suʾal al-ʿAmal: Bahth ʿan al-Usul al-ʿIlmiyya fi al-Fikr wa-l-ʿAmal* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2012), 210–14.
[62] See Taha's discussion of the category of *kibār al-Ruḥiyyīn* (the master spiritualists) which includes Buddha, Gandhi, Ibn ʿArabi, and Omar Khayyam. In his view, these figures act as ethical models of the ethical life for humanity. Taha, 251.
[63] Taha, *Ruh al-Hadatha*, 89.

time yields its richest developments in Taha's philosophy and that Islamic notions of time, mainly Sufi *waqt*, come into play in interesting ways in his writing.

In his diverse publications, ʿAbdurrahman Taha emphasizes that the defining characteristic of the human is ethicality and not rationality.[64] While rationality in its basic form begins with rational self-interest, ethicality is a relation that binds the self to otherness. Ethical life, for Taha, is the direction to otherness and the acceptance of alterity. He remarks that the ethicality of the Muslim is primarily a sociable ethicality (*takhalluq taʿārufī*) that seeks to strengthen the bonds between disparate groups of people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. He writes, "The core reality of ethicality is that it is a relationship (*ʿalāqa*), it is a tie between the self and the other."[65] While reminiscent of Emmanuel Levinas for whom the encounter with the face of the other, in its forceful presence and irreducible unknowability, occasions the transcendence of the self which assumes an ethical responsibility towards it, the concept of alterity for Taha is not primarily premised on externality.[66] It is part of the inner life of the self because of the reality of time. Taha remarks:

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[64] He writes, "It is ethicality (*akhlāqiyya*) which constitutes the humanity of the human and not rationality as it has been maintained for a long time. Don't you see how when an act is deemed unethical it is automatically considered inhuman while an act can be considered irrational but would not be considered inhuman." Taha, *Suʾal al-ʿAmal: Bahth ʿan al-Usul al-ʿIlmiyya fi al-Fikr wa-l-ʿAmal*, 86.

[65] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *al-Haqq al-Islami fi al-Ikhtilaf al-Fikri* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2005), 22.

[66] Levinas writes, "The face with which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face. To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than the being that presents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligations and judges me. The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy. More, for my position as *1* consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for myself. The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom *1* am obligated." Emmanuel Levinas,

> Let me use an example to clarify my intentions and let us consider the reality of selfhood. There is no doubt that in terms of judgement what I hold to be myself is different than people's ideas of me. There is as such a plurality of views about myself. Now in existential terms, if I say "I am not myself," this statement is true since time penetrates my selfhood. The time of that self of mine is different than my time at this point. This means that my fixed identity does not exist. What really exists is my otherness (*ghayriyyatī*) since I am perpetually in a process of change. My identity is the sum of these changes. It is the unity and coherence of these changes.[67]

Change marks the human in Taha's thought. It pervades the self from within and is also reinforced through ethical acts which constantly transform the self. The primacy of change and alterity over the self explains why Taha views rationality as a circumscribed cognitive activity (*faʿāliyya*) instead of a fixed system of laws.[68] In his adoption of the language of Islamic moral literature, he emphasizes the significance of the heart as the symbolic and spiritual seat of intuition. In so doing, he highlights the etymology of the Arabic word for heart (*qalb*) which derives from the act of turning something upside down (*qalaba*) or to move between different states (*taqallaba*).[69]

Reflecting on notions of the other, Taha critiques the impoverishment of the modern concept of otherness as it largely denotes that which exists outside of the self and that which belongs to sentient life. This understanding entails that our ethical relation to others (animate and inanimate beings) is always performed at a certain distance that occasions the feeling of moral superiority. Instead, Taha emphasizes that our ethical rapport to otherness begins with cultivating an ethical relationship to our "selves" which is always other to us.[70] In cultivating this

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Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority (The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 215.

[67] Taha, *al-Hiwar Ufuqan li-l-Fikr*, 31.

[68] Taha, *Fi Usul al-Hiwar wa Tajdid ʿIlm al-Kalam*, 152. See also, ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *al-Lisan wa-l-Mizan aw al-Takawthur al-ʿAqli* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʻArabi, 1998), 20–21.

[69] Taha, *Suʾal al-ʿAmal: Bahth ʿan al-Usul al-ʿIlmiyya fi al-Fikr wa-l-ʿAmal*, 73.

[70] See Taha's critique of modern secular moral theories and the interlinked errors of "limiting the ethical relation to the inter-human domain" and "limiting alterity to [external] otherness." He

relationship that is premised on habituated practices and ethical habitus, we become attuned to the multiple temporalities of the self.

In Taha's thought, God creates humanity and imparts to it a *fiṭra* which stands for an ethically bound human nature.[71] It is an original memory which makes us prone to good rather than evil acts. The human being is also endowed with two dimensions of personality. There is first *nafs* (self or psyche) which, while key to human survival, is self-centered. It operates by drawing everything it encounters into a rapport of possession. *Nafs* wants everything to be its own and under its dominion.[72] There is, on the other hand, *rūḥ* (spirit) which secures the porous aspect of the self. It makes us develop an opposite condition to that of *nafs*. *Rūḥ* perpetually moves the self beyond its self-centrality and opens it to a spiritual connection with otherness beginning with the Ultimate Other, i.e., God.[73] Through both *ruḥ* and *nafs*, the self then experiences existential and temporal transcendence. It is here that the heterogeneity of time, the

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writes, "The materialist worldview constrains ethics primarily to the realm of the conduct between humans. This limitation impoverishes our ethics because the conduct of human beings affects not only other humans but also the rest of sentient and insentient beings. The human being has to then observe the ethical dimensions of his rapport to everything in existence regardless of whether it is animate or inanimate. The human being has to also observe his obligations towards his self (*nafs*). If the human being begins by cultivating an ethical relationship to his 'self,' he can then surely develop an ethical relation with other selves and things. On top of these considerations, the human being must observe his relation to his Creator, performing what he is commanded to do, for it is the essence of the good, and avoiding what he is forbidden to do, for it is the essence of evil. In maintaining an ethical relation with his Creator, he perforce entertains an ethical relationship to the rest of beings, beginning with his self." ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Buʾs al-Dahraniyya: al-Naqd al-Iʾtimani li Fasl al-Akhlaq ʿan al-Din* (Beirut: al-Shabaka al-Arabiyya li-l-Abhath wa-l-Nashr, 2014), 139.

[71] Taha writes, "Broadly speaking, *fiṭra* is a moral sentiment innate to human beings and is part of the perfection of their createdness. This sentiment is then voluntary as it is inherent to our creation. It is aesthetic as it secures the perfect nature of creation, and its practical as it is oriented to producing acts." Taha, *Suʾal al-Akhlaq: Musahama fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li-l-Hadatha*, 46.

[72] ʿAbdurrahman Taha, *Ruh al-Din: min Dhiq al-ʿIlmaniyya ila Siʿat al-Iʾtimaniyya* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2012), 93.

[73] Taha, *Suʾal al-ʿAmal: Bahth ʿan al-Usul al-ʿIlmiyya fi al-Fikr wa-l-ʿAmal*, 29.

semantics of which are sourced from Sufi concepts, becomes a central element in Taha's notion of the ethical subject.

As explored in Chapter Four, Sufi time consists in the asynchronous transposition of different times on the present moment. For Taha, the human being lives this reality whether he admits it or not. We both live through the homogenous medium of time which organizes our social lives but also through temporalities of enchantment of secular and sacred kinds. It is our duty, then, to reflect on what regime of enchantment we live under, and how to refashion our lives accordingly.

Being the sum of *nafs* and *rūḥ* and being affected by their push to transcend the boundary of the self, the human being, for Taha, lives both in a visible material realm and invisible immaterial one. This reality Taha calls in his book *Ruh al-din* (The Spirit of Religion) the doubled existence of the human being (*izdiwāj al-wujūd al-insānī*).[74] We process daily life using homogenous time. We also live in connection with a world of metaphysical realities that can be either religious spiritual or secular materialist. For Taha, the human being cannot exist without a metaphysical plane of reality which can be either of the order of religious belief or of the order of political ideology and the various forms of utopias that it promises.[75] In his writing, Taha contrasts these two metaphysical worlds, i.e., the one created by religion and the one created by political ideology.[76] The first one is the product of the reach of *rūḥ* in its desire for spiritual and ethical progression and the second is the result of the reach of *nafs* in its desire for remodeling the world after its image. That is why for Taha religious actors must not follow a political program for their actions. This would make them lose the connection with the dominion of *rūḥ*

[74] Taha, *Ruh al-Din: min Dhiq al-ʿIlmaniyya ila Siʿat al-Iʾtimaniyya*, 27–31.
[75] Taha, 42–46.
[76] Taha, 47.

and devolve into the realm of *nafs*. It is only through exemplary ethical acts that religious actors can bring about social change in tune with the realities of *rūḥ*.

The ethical act, or what Taha further elaborates into the concept of *al-ʿamal al-tazkawī* (ethical practice) which includes both acts of worship and acts of bringing about the social good, occurs within the framework of the unique moment that connects the world of *rūḥ* to the world of history and society. Drawing on the Sufi moment (*waqt*) and its relation to a unique state (*ḥāl*) of the self, Taha writes:

> The single [ethical] act is itself a plural reality. It becomes multiple actions in itself. Let us use the example of intention (*niyya*). The ethical actor does not suffice himself with one intention in the performance of one action. He rather intends many things and strives to multiply his [good] intentions. It is as if he divides the one act into a series of interdependent actions performing each one with a distinct intention. This is so because only with multiple intentions can he come close to his objective and only through these intentions can he ascend through the different levels of ethicality. The ethical act, within the framework of religion, rests on three pillars: *al-waqt*, which is the time of the occurrence of the action; *al-ḥāl* (state) which is the spiritual effect of the action; and *al-maqām* (station) which is the attachment of this effect to the self. Because he divides the single action into different levels, the ethical subject turns the single moment (*al-waqt al-wāḥid*) into a multiplicity of moments, the single state into a multiplicity of states, and the single station into a multiplicity of stations. All while recognizing that every moment, state, and station have their appropriate etiquettes.[77]

As Taha notes, the present moment when it is experienced in the frame of a socially oriented ethical act becomes multidimensional specifically because it impacts the self as well as the collective and connects their distinct worlds. The self is transformed under the effect of the ethical act in a moral progression to its life of perpetual alterity. In this sense one recognizes in Taha's thought the notion of the care for the self that animated classical philosophies, as Michel Foucault analyzed. In fostering a moral bond with ourselves and in redirecting knowledge to be fused with the realm of practice, the self leads a positive social existence in which its ethical

[77] Taha, *Suʾal al-Akhlaq: Musahama fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li-l-Hadatha*, 81–82.

contributions to the social do not constitute acts which are external to a pre-given subjectivity (for these acts would always be executed at a distance of moral superiority) but rather represent the unfolding product of a life-long process of ethical self-cultivation.

For ʿAbdurrahman Taha, the moments of ethical acts are unique and transformative. They do not however constitute a disconnected sum of momentary realities as they are synthesized in selfhood. While they are unique temporalities, their lasting effects produce a continuous history which is the coherent life of the ethical self. In *Suʾal al-Akhlaq* (The Question of Ethics), he asserts:

> The ethical life of the human being is not independent moments which are separated from each other and are ruled by distinct commands and prohibitions. It is a unity of actions that constitutes a unique history for the actor. In this sense, every ethical act becomes a *significant event* in this history. The identity of the actor is not established in a certain stage of this history. It is established in the whole of this history from his birth to his death.[78]

This view explains why Taha describes the moment of the ethical act as a multiplicity that connects different temporal domains (social historical time, ethical time, and the time of *rūḥ*) while remaining part of a fluid and coherent personal history. This connection is made possible by the voluntary nature of the ethical act which is produced by the whole of personality and in which the self opens up deliberately to its existential realities. That is why Taha insists that these types of actions cannot be enforced politically or institutionally.[79] In the words of Wael Hallaq, Taha aims at "an individuated concept of positive liberty" in which the self performs the ethicality that is innate to its nature (*fiṭra*) and resists processes of subjectification that are coming from the outside.[80] This self can influence other selves but not in the way of ideology

[78] Taha, 156. Emphasis added.
[79] Taha, 165.
[80] Hallaq notes that Taha's position "precludes the interference of an external entity that consciously, deliberately, politically, and ideologically dictates the terms of formation of

that brings other selves to assume a new worldview. It influences others by providing an exemplar of the ethical life which *awakens their innate predisposition* to ethical acts or what Taha calls, drawing on the terms of Ibn ʿArabi, spiritual provocation (*al-izʿāj al-rūḥī*).[81]

In developing his theories of ethical subjectivity, ʿAbdurrahman Taha makes recourse to notions of temporal asynchrony and its attendant differentiation between homogenized social time and individuated existential temporalities. Emphasizing the need to recognize and inhabit these temporalities through a process of ethical self-realization, Taha defines agency and change as products of deliberate, non-political, and individual praxis. The time of the ethical self is personal and metaphysical. It influences social temporalities directly through the actions of the subject and indirectly through the exemplarity of these actions. It is here that Taha's repurposing of Sufi heterogenous time differs from the likes of Hadi al-ʿAlawi who draws on the qualitative differences in Sufi time to write of revolt and uprising. While Taha views the ethical moment as an ecstatic temporality of self-transcendence, al-ʿAlawi reformulates the ecstatic moment of Sufism as the temporality of rupture in normalized historical continuums and the opening of suppressed possibilities. One can argue that while Taha's moment is Kierkegaardian, al-ʿAlawi's moment is Benjaminian. Along with Kierkegaard, Taha views the moment of the ethical act (the instant of ethical choice for Kierkegaard) as an event, an interruption of homogenous time which opens it to a multiplicity of possibilities (of possible futures) and occasions a process of self-

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subjecthood. Rather, it rests on the individual subject's initiative, which is to say that its range and depth vary from one person to another. It is the individual who is the only and final judge of whether or not to engage in the process of subjective formation, and the degree to which this engagement is to be performed. Because it is of the essence that it is a process in which *one operates on oneself*, individuated positive liberty is an autonomous and relative field of play. It is precisely here where this form of liberty distinguishes and distances itself from its ideological counterpart, which assumes the individual to operate within a collectivity of some kind." Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity*, 261.

[81] Taha, *Ruh al-Din: min Dhiq al-ʿIlmaniyya ila Siʿat al-Iʾtimaniyya*, 296.

transformation.[82] Al-ʿAlawi, along with Benjamin, sees the moment as the opening into homogenous time (the moment of recognition) of a repressed past that urges for alternative futures.[83] In rereading Sufi *turāth* and its political dimensions, al-ʿAlawi appropriates Sufi *waqt* as the event that occasions a radical shift in the homogenous history of power.

5.7 The Moment of Political Uprise

In his 1997 *Madarat al-Sufiyya* (Sufi Orbits), Hadi al-ʿAlawi retrieves and modifies the Sufi definition of the ecstatic moment (*waqt*). He highlights its eventfulness as a private experience but insists on the situatedness of such experiences in a historical continuum. He writes:

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[82] Taha writes, "Ethical practice does not remain on the same rhythm nor does it fall under the routine of social work or the tempo of mechanical actions. It is rather constantly and increasingly in transformation. The change it brings about does not remain on a fixed state. It morphs into a plurality of states with every new state improving on the older one." Taha, *Suʾal al-ʿAmal: Bahth ʿan al-Usul al-ʿIlmiyya fi al-Fikr wa-l-ʿAmal*, 163.
For Kierkegaard, the instant of ethical choice is the culmination of an anxiety that opens in time the possibility of change which redefines the past and reorients the future. As such and in its deep and lasting effects, the instant occasions a "touch" of eternity. Through the instant, the neutral passing by of time is brought into a halt as the experience of deep anxiety and a choice makes time visible and thick as the reality of multiple possibilities. In the words of David Kangas, for Kierkegaard, "The instant therefore signifies the sublation in which time as succession is held back by 'the eternal' enough so that the present may open up. The eternal sublates succession insofar as it confers presence, for 'The present is the eternal, or rather, the eternal is the present, and the present is full'… In anxiety the subject finds itself unable to remain identical to itself; the subject finds itself exposed to the excess of possibility, the excess of the future. Anxiety is a displacement of the subject from its position in being, an ungrounding." David J. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 184–85.

[83] In the words of Benjamin, "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes" Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

> *Waqt* is the instant in which the Sufi experiences, in his heart, the presence of the Divine. In a hadith it is said, "I have a moment with God in which no angel draws near nor prophet sent rival me." *Waqt* is the moment of the now. It is an articulated existent between two non-existents which are the past and the future. The past is no longer and the future is not yet to come and the Sufi is the son of his present moment. In it, the consciousness of the Sufi is focused on his present, not drawn to the past nor bent towards the future. This state, however, cannot exceed the moment for it is impossible for the human being to be severed from his past. The human being is also the son of his past, existing through the past which continues into the present. For the moments of time even if they are, as Aristotle maintained, distinct [to be counted], they are interconnected.[84]

As al-ʿAlawi notes, *waqt* is the moment of spiritual experience. As such, it is a private individual temporality. Yet, the privacy of *waqt* does not cancel out the consciousness of historical continuum. This begs the question, why does al-ʿAlawi feel the need to emphasize the relation of *waqt* to historical consciousness? The answer lies in al-ʿAlawi's interest in repurposing the heterogeneity of *waqt* to conceptualize alternative historical trajectories. In its prioritization of the social effects of the private event, al-ʿAlawi's reformulation differs from the approach of ʿAbdurrahman Taha in its prioritization of the internal life of the ethical self. The opportune and transformative moment of *waqt* (becoming Kairos) stands, in al-ʿAlawi's thought, for the interruption of a dominant historical process and the promise of alternative histories.

In the preface to *Madarat al-Sufiyya* (Sufi Orbits), Hadi al-ʿAlawi reintroduces his key distinction between the unity of the existent (*wiḥdat al-mawjūd*) and the unity of being (*wiḥdat al-wujūd*).[85] The first type of unity is modern and strictly materialist. It produces a global history which reduces the plurality of the world to a "unified world that begins in Europe and ends in North America."[86] The second type of unity is spiritual and is anchored in pre-modern religious traditions from Sufism to Taoism. It is a spiritual unity that produces and safeguards phenomenal

[84] al-ʿAlawi, *Madarat al-Sufiyya*, 207–8.
[85] al-ʿAlawi, 7.
[86] al-ʿAlawi, 7.

and historical multiplicities. Investigating the different manifestations of this second type of unity, al-ʿAlawi mines *turāth* for affirmations of the communalist spirit (*al-rūḥ al-mashāʿiyya*) of Muslim societies which finds in the history of Sufism an exemplary expression. What defines this spirit is the people's propensity to resist the control of political and economic elites and their subsistence through cooperative labor. In his works, al-ʿAlawi also focuses on how Islamic communalist discourse and certain Sufi ideas such as the unity of being have parallels in Taoism, particularly the thought of the ancient Chinese philosophers Lao-Tze and Zhuang Zhou.[87]

The aim of this line of research, for the Iraqi Marxist, is to re-educate Arab intellectuals into the experiences and aspirations of the historical societies of the Global South from which they have been shaded by cosmopolitan and modernizing discourse. Al-ʿAlawi writes:

> Our beginning starts with our history which is born between the Nile River and the Yellow River [in China]. These rivers are the longest and toughest rivers in the world and are rich in meaning and character. In defending meaning and character, we undermine the Eurocentric myth. We resist the order of wealth and its allies. We restore to our poor classes their consciousness. Ney! I should rather say the poor classes have not lost their consciousness. It is us the elite minority who read their truths in translation and take them to be pure science. We separate ourselves from the people's knowledge. We call it ignorance because of their illiteracy. Ignorance can be the lot of the illiterate and the educated alike. For illiteracy is not necessarily the equivalent of ignorance and certain types of knowledge can be the equivalent of ignorance.[88]

The advocacy of ascetic figures for the poor and their revolt against political and economic elites constitute, for al-ʿAlawi, key episodes of the unfolding of the communalist spirit in Islamic history which are beckoning for recognition by modern Arab thinkers in their imaginings of alternative futures. As he often emphasizes, the utopias of the Arab left have always rested on translated images and terms. Recognizing these historical images can help Arab Marxists construct their own versions of socialist futures.

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[87] See his entry on Chuang Tzu (another name for Zhuang Zhou) in al-ʿAlawi, 117.
[88] al-ʿAlawi, 7–8.

In his writing, al-ʿAlawi focuses on the concept of freedom in Sufism which consists in being free of possession. "He who owns nothing is owned by nothing," as the Sufi adage goes.[89] This ethical concept entails a number of secondary propositions which extend to society and politics. From Bayazid al-Bistami (d. 260/874) to ʿAbd al-Qader al-Jilani (561/1166) and ʿAbd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 827/1424), the disavowal of property fueled their protests against monied classes and political elites whose sovereignty rested on the monopoly of property. Disavowing possession is not a passive withdrawal from the social world of property. It is the invocation into the social world of a sustained critique of those who organize their being around property and monopolize it at the expense of others. In the folk stories of ascetic figures that al-ʿAlawi retrieves, these figures deliberately renounce worldly possessions but organize for the advocacy of those who have been dispossessed and deprived of a fair share of property.[90] While this later stance seems to contradict the initial principle, what resolves the contradiction is the nuance that the Sufi renunciation of property is the result of a deliberate and thus meaningful process instead of being the product of exploitation and violence. The principle of possession produces a notion of sovereignty that reduces the other to being either a means to or threat against possession.

The modern state, for al-ʿAlawi, is the ultimate intensification of this principle of sovereignty.[91] Nowhere in Islamic history can the modern state, in its ultimate management of life and monopoly of power, be found. As he remarks, the narrative of politics in Islamic history is equally shared between rulers and rebellious sects and populations. Al-ʿAlawi writes:

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[89] al-ʿAlawi, 37. See also al-ʿAlawi, 139.
[90] Al-ʿAlawi writes, "Reaching freedom through the disavowal of property achieves communalism. For as I mentioned earlier, the Sufi gives up material possession not to surrender it to those who claim it for themselves. He rather deprives them of it and makes it a communal possession." al-ʿAlawi, *Madarat al-Sufiyya*, 42.
[91] al-ʿAlawi, 36.

> The oppositional line of Sufism is preceded by [other examples in] early Islam. Opposition, in fact, is one of the grand political practices of Islam. It shares Islamic history with political authority. Putting aside the claims of orientalists and their Arabic speaking exegetes, political authority did not exclusively construct Islamic history. Political opposition makes up half or more of this history. Our records are not, as some ignorant intellectuals maintain, devoted to narrating the history of political authority, they narrates the history of political events which are acted out by the two parties of authority and opposition. When the Muslim historian writes the chronicles of a given Muslim state, he writes also the chronicle of its opponents and mutineers.[92]

Sufi protest is but one performance of an established political practice in Islam. It resonates with the social sensibilities of Muslim societies that do not sit well, according to al-ʿAlawi, with centralized political control. The Iraqi Marxist proposes that the tendency for autonomy and self-governance marks local culture in Muslim societies or what he coined, using a Syriac term as the principle of *laqāḥiyya*.[93]

In Islamic moral literature, al-ʿAlawi credits Sufis with institutionalizing a discourse that categorically separates between morality and associating with political power. This discourse is prevalent in Islamic literature from exegetical to jurisprudential works. Even in these texts, it is traced back to Sufi ascetics who remained until the modern period central symbols of resistance against the cooptations of power.[94] Al-ʿAlawi even goes so far as to add political opposition to the historical list of Sufi stations of spiritual ascent (*maqāms*). He writes, "Opposition is a station for the Sufis. The station is an abiding quality of the self which is entrenched with self-

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[92] al-ʿAlawi, 33.

[93] al-ʿAlawi, 29. See also al-ʿAlawi, 180.

[94] Al-ʿAlawi writes, "Sufis constructed an opposition complex (*ʿuqdat muʿāraḍa*) in the [Islamic] cultural milieu which made the thinker think long and hard before adopting an action that brings him into proximity with the state. This continues until today and informs the choices of intellectuals. This tension was intense in the 1950s until it was dissipated with expansion of the pressure of Western culture and the entrenchment of liberalism among the intellectual class. This took place along with the oil boom during which many thinkers were attracted to the governments of oil countries. Then, a new class of wealthy intellectuals appeared." al-ʿAlawi, *Madarat al-Sufiyya*, 35.

disciplining practices. While the state (*ḥāl*) is an accidental quality that occurs and does not last for a long time."[95] Opposition to political power is then a lifelong commitment while certain unique events occur within it to test and affirm one's commitments. Al-ʿAlawi appropriates the poetic visions of the Sufi ʿAbd al-Jabbar al-Niffari (d. 354/965), rewriting selections of his famous *al-Mawaqif wa-l-Mukhatabat* (The Book of Stations and Discourses).[96] Through these selections, he explores the ways in which the moral authority of Sufis is channeled to consolidate the resistance of society to the powers of wealth, rulers, and institutional religion. In this history, as he puts it, there is a "project that remains in the moment of waiting," beckoning for recognition.[97] Inserting his commentary in parenthesis into al-Niffari's description of *waqt*, the Iraqi Marxist writes:

> My moment has come. It is time for me to reveal my face and manifest my splendor. My light will shine on the courtyards and what lies behind them and reach gazing eyes. You will see my enemy enamored with me (for I do not respond in kind). You will see my friends ruling. I erect for them thrones and they dismiss the fire never to return. I rebuild our destroyed homes, adorned and beautified. You will see how a part of me (my justice) negates otherness. I gather people in ease. Never again would they be divided (for they will be equal in wealth) or humiliated (for they will be self-sufficient). I will bring out my treasure (to distribute it among them)."[98]

As the reader discovers in *Madarat al-Sufiyya*, the moment that lies in wait is the moment of Mansur al-Hallaj's (d. 922) revolt against Abbasid rulers that rallied the poor of Baghdad and the moment of the establishment of the Qarmatian state after their uprise which freed peasants and slaves from tutelage and heavy taxation.[99] After having restored these moments to the center of his discourse, al-ʿAlawi's book proceeds in its final section to present a manifesto that charts the

[95] al-ʿAlawi, 41.
[96] See al-ʿAlawi, 247–49.
[97] al-ʿAlawi, 133.
[98] al-ʿAlawi, 133.
[99] al-ʿAlawi, 128–32.

demands and political program of the communalist movement in Iraq.[100] The manifesto of this movement which al-ʿAlawi helped establish from exile in the late 1990s projects the image of a post-Baath Iraq in which a socialist revolution takes place and in which the state recommits itself to public housing and health services. As far as *Madarat al-Sufiyya* is concerned, and reflecting the spirit of the communalist movement, the book concludes with a plurality of voices that includes poems of accomplished writers such as Adonis as well as young Iraqi poets who belong to al-ʿAlawi's movement.[101] As the ending to his book reflects, the poetry of the moment to come must be polyphonic.

In its insistence on the unity of temporality and lived experience and its emphasis on the unique moment of convergence with eternity, Sufi time is brought in al-ʿAlawi's thought to mark a difference in the historical continuum. It is the temporality of momentous change which is brought about, not by rational calculations, but by sacrificial self-transcendence and moral prowess. This kairotic temporality is lodged within key events in the Islamic past which are often brushed aside by official histories.[102] Al-ʿAlawi's project of rereading Islamic *turāth* centers on the restoration of these images and unique moments in reimagining future possibilities.

[100] al-ʿAlawi, 259–61.
[101] al-ʿAlawi, 253–56.
[102] To quote Benjamin, "A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation a l'ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day." Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.

5.8 The Moment as a Literary Universe

Hadi al-ʿAlawi and ʿAbdurrahman Taha drew on heterogenous time and Sufi temporalties to accomplish distinct goals of conceptualizing ethical and political acts. The Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani makes recourse to a similar set of Islamic ideas on time, producing a literary synthesis of their ethical, political, and existential potential. Al-Ghitani belonged to a generation of Egyptian writers who rejected the linear forms of the romanticist and social realist literature of the first half of the twentieth century. These authors engaged in experimental writing, making use of intertextuality, narrative and temporal dissonance, and polyphony, aspects which align their work with global postmodernism. However, against postmodern discourse with its suspicion of origins and metanarratives, the writers of "the sixties generation" advocated for a new relationship to Arabic literary heritage and Islamic aesthetic.

From his 1969 debut text *Awraq Shāb ʿAsha mundhu alfi ʿAm* (The Notes of a Young Man Who Lived One Thousand Years Ago) in which he resurrects the Mamluk historian Ibn Iyes to chronicle post-*Naksa* Cairo, to his later works such as his 1986 Trilogy *Kitab al-Tajalliyat* (The Book of Revelations), al-Ghitani located in Islamic history and Islamic ideas the substance for his experimentations with narrative time. In al-Ghitani's fiction, time is visible and thick. Its heterogeneity mediates a process of working through personal and collective traumas and enables a critique of the neoliberal Egyptian state and its imaginary of linear progress.

Al-Ghitani investigated multiple experiences of time in his fiction. Since his early days as a reporter on the battle field of the Egyptian Israeli War of Attrition in the first years of the *Naksa* (1967-1970), al-Ghitani became invested in trauma and its relation to time. For example, in his 1972 short story "Ard ard*"* (Ground Missile), the Egyptian writer depicted the broken world of a teacher living in a village on the Egyptian Israeli border after the killing of his entire

family by an Israeli missile.[103] The consciousness of the protagonist becomes fixated on the exact timing of the bombing (9:30 am) and drawn to document the acts and words of people around him which occurred at that same time. The protagonist cannot fathom how the world continues to follow its normal course while staging apocalyptic moments such as his family's death. For him, time became bifurcated between indifferent social routine and a frozen moment of tragic experience. As al-Ghitani depicts, one of the immediate consequences of trauma is an amplification, by virtue of this doubling, of one's sense of time.

Freud famously spoke of the experience of trauma as a breach in conscious processes which introduce into the timeless unconscious a temporal structure of neurotic repetition.[104] As Freud observes, trauma causes a disjunction between the experiencing of the event and its understanding. The traumatized person is bound to revisit the event of the trauma "to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis."[105] Repetition then seeks to resolve a problem of understanding rather than a problem of painful experience. As Cathy Caruth points out, trauma imposes on its subject both the incomprehensibility of its moment of the breach and also the "enigma" of having survived

[103] Gamal al-Ghitani, *Ard, Ard: Majmu'a Qisasiyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1972).
[104] In *The Pleasure Principle*, Freud theorized that similar to living organisms whose surface layer acts as a protective shield against external stimuli, an "outer layer" of our conscious mind performs this function. He writes, "By its death, the outer layer has saved all the deeper ones from a similar fate unless, that is to say, stimuli reach it which are so strong that they break through the protective shield." This stimulus is the traumatic event which causes a rupture in the regular processes of the conscious mind. Freud asserts, "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli." Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 21–23.
[105] Freud, 26.

the event.[106] The core question in repetition becomes not simply how did one escape death but "what does it mean for consciousness to survive?"[107] It is through literary imagination that these kinds of questions can be worked out and Gamal al-Ghitani is one literary example of literature's ability to mend the gap between trauma, survival, and understanding.

The literary process of working through personal and political traumas includes, in al-Ghitani's case, the use of allegory and the adoption of magical realist motifs which are sourced from Sufi literature. These genres of writing produce a narrative time which is the combination of multiple kinds of temporalities. Al-Ghitani's 1976 novel *Waqaʾiʿ Harat al-Zaʿfarani* (The Zafarani Files) illustrates well this aspect of his fiction.[108] Written in the style of police reports which give the reader multiple perspectives on the events, the novel narrates how one day all the men of al-Zafarani neighborhood in Old Cairo become sexually impotent. The men seek the help of an obscure sheikh living among them only to learn that he is the one who had cursed them with impotence to punish their debauchery and corruption. As the sheik tells them, the curse can only be lifted if they change their ways of life and adopt his arbitrary rules which include for instance a new schedule for sleeping, eating, and social activities. The sheikh turns the neighborhood into an isolated island as he instructs that anyone leaving will be inflicted with more disease and anyone entering will also become impotent. The state intelligence attempt in vain to regain control of the Zafarani while its residents remain bound to their sheikh in a mix of resentment and awe. In the final section of the novel, the sheikh decides to spread his curse to the

[106] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 58.
[107] Caruth, 61.
[108] Gamal al-Ghitani, *Waqaʾiʿ Harat al-Zaʿfarani*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1985).

whole world, promising to end world misery through the global equality in sexual impotence and the serenity that it will bring to humanity. In *Waqaʾiʿ Harat al-Zaʿfarani,* the state is a major theme. It is both heavily present through its surveillance networks and militarized police and utterly absent as a meaningful force in the social lives of the characters. Corruption and epidemic are equally important motifs. In enacting these themes, the residents of al-Zafarani navigate multiple temporal worlds.

In the novel, the characters experience multiple kinds of time. There is first the localized temporality of the neighborhood after the breakout of the curse. For the characters, time in al-Zafarani becomes stagnant as isolation and the disruption of social routine make the residents experience a halting of time. This localized time is the duration of an endless stretch of waiting which is punctuated by the sheikh's instructions. Stylistically, this timeless duration is conveyed through long descriptive sequences that extend over pages without paragraph breaks. There is then a larger sociopolitical temporality "of the last quarter of the twentieth century."[109] The sheikh refers to it as "the time of running forward."[110] It is the time of foreign national security advisors, intelligence mercenaries, and workers' uprisings against multinational corporations.[111] There is finally a third level/kind of time. The sheikh progressively reveals this temporality to the characters. It is an eschatological time heralding the end of the world and promising the fulfillment of the messianic hopes of the downtrodden in a final moment of the equality of all in impotence. It is the time of "the decisive turn, the appearance of the awaited messiah after centuries of concealment behind the veil of glory."[112] The novel ends with the globalization of

[109] al-Ghitani, 193.
[110] al-Ghitani, 128.
[111] al-Ghitani, 202.
[112] al-Ghitani, 183.

this temporality. The theme of running away from the present into the timeless and the eschatological is a prominent theme in the novel. Joseph Massad remarks that the plight of the Zafarani residents and the violence of castration inflicted on them is an allegory for the dispossession of the Egyptian working class under Sadat.[113] Eschatology, in its concern for death, transcendence and redemption, serves to mediate social imaginaries which are experiencing historical rupture, i.e., the shift from socialism to neoliberalism, and its cataclysmic changes. Eschatology is but one aspect of Islamic ways of thinking time that al-Ghitani makes recourse to in order to stage a critique of the neoliberal state. Other elements are sourced from the cosmological arguments of Islamic theology and Sufism.

In the majority of al-Ghitani's novels, there is an alternation between duration-based notions of time or states of timelessness and existential notions of the eventful moment, i.e., the time of kairos. Al-Ghitani constantly puts the homogeneity of chronos to the test of kairos which interrupts it and puts it into question. In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur remarks that the opposite of chronology is not necessarily fragmented time or timelessness. He writes, "Chronology—or chronography—does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself."[114] The moment in al-Ghitani's fiction occasions the thickening of time and its transformation into temporality. There is no better text to illustrate

[113] Massad writes, al-Ghitani's "*Waqaʾiʿ Harat al-Zaʿfarani* (The Events of Zafarani Street), published in 1976, would register impotence, which is presented as tantamount to castration, as the prevailing condition in the Arab world of the 1970s. His novel expressed the despair of intellectuals of the Nasserist generation who had believed in building socialism only to be faced with the reality of repression and the national security state." Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 322.
[114] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), vols. 1, 30.

this aspect of his work than his trilogy *Kitab al-Tajalliyat* (The Book of Revelations) which was published between 1983 and 1986.[115]

Modeled around Sufi *mi'rāj* narratives, *Kitab al-Tajalliyat* recounts the visionary experiences of a narrator who is led by the Andalusian Sufi Ibn ʿArabi to relive and meditate upon historical, personal, and surreal traumas.[116] These events include the martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala, the death of the narrator's father, and the surreal return of Nasser to a Cairo which has been realigned with the capitalist block and has forfeited its advocacy for the Palestinian cause. In *Kitab al-Tajalliyat,* the meditations on the traumatic event include witnessing the event as it unfolds (for instance the martyrdom of Hussein), then travelling to a past moment in the life of the characters to reflect on the place of the future trauma in the progression of their lives (such as young Ali, Hussein's father, passing through Karbala and being overcome by an inexplicable grief).[117] The past trauma is then both the surreal present of a witness narrator and the future past of historical actors whose depiction in the text predates the event. The moment of trauma is then seen from different temporal positions. The meditation on the tragic moment includes also collapsing the three events together where the narrator's father, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Hussein switch roles and their temporalities become fused. Al-Ghitani for instance writes:

> Hussein sets out for Karbala; I see him. The heavenly assembly restores for me all the significant moments: I see him and I see after him the moment of the setting of the morning dew, the blooming of the flower, the birth of a wave from the womb of another wave, the birth of one moment from another. I see the moment vision alights on its object, the emergence of day from night, and too the emergence of a star from the depths of existence. I see the instant of weeping and I see the effects of the return of Abdel Nasser to this strange time of ours.[118]

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[115] al-Ghitani, *Kitab al-Tajalliyat*.
[116] In the first volume of the trilogy, Hussein, the prophet's grandson, accompanies the narrator in a part of his journey. In the rest of volumes, it is Ibn ʿArabi who serves as the narrator's guide.
[117] al-Ghitani, *Kitab al-Tajalliyat*, 73.
[118] al-Ghitani, 137.

In a highly poetic prose and in countless passages, the writer focuses on the enigmatic nature of the moment which is always in a state of beginning and end (the moment as a boundary between two moments). As Heidrun Friese notes, the moment is at the heart of the paradox of time in that it both disrupts the temporal flow and constitutes "the ground of the continuity of time."[119] The moment is the marker of a temporal stop, i.e., the self-enclosed nature of the moment. At the same time, it is what occasions the continuity of time, i.e., the fluid pulsating moment. In a similarly paradoxical way, these moments of tragic experience constitute a political history which manifests, on the one hand, as a collage of disparate and discontinuous episodes (the times of Hussein, Nasser, and the father) and, on the other hand, as a continuous history of injustice and the desire of the oppressed for redemption.

Throughout the *miʿrāj*, Ibn ʿArabi and other enigmatic figures urge the narrator to pay close attention to the moment of *waqt*. In one episode in which he attends a literary gathering in Morocco, he is given a note by an unknown woman who disappears after passing the message. The note reads, "Oh Gamal! Your time has come, quicken to the nowhere. Seek the states (*aḥwāl*). You will inhabit all their variations in a single moment (*waqtin wāḥid*). It is an abiding and a striving for your selfhood, and a gazing into your past. Begin! For the interval is vast, and the crossing is rocky."[120] In the traditional Sufi way, the journey begins by recognizing and inhabiting one's moment. As he is often told throughout the narrative, the present moment is the

[119] In the fuller quote, Heidrun Friese writes, "In its nullity [the moment] is that which is discontinuous in the continuity of time; and as the timeless principle of time, it is nevertheless effective 'within time'; as the sudden-discontinuous it is paradoxically the ground of the continuity of time. It occurs suddenly and immediately, and it nevertheless is that which mediates. As timeless, the moment is not, but it nevertheless is that within time which is most time's being." Heidrun Friese, ed., *The Moment: Time and Rupture in Modern Thought*, 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 3.
[120] al-Ghitani, *Kitab al-Tajalliyat*, 530.

true coordinate of being (the ontological existent between two non-existents) and the essence of change (the transience of the moment). It is both permanence in that it is being and change since it is also becoming. This is so because, as constituted in the cosmology of Muslim theologians upon which rests the Sufi view of time, the moment is the ontological coordinate of a world that endures as perpetual change.

The secret to the paradoxes of the moment, which the narrator is urged to realize throughout his journey, is the same idea that animated the thought of the likes of al-Ghazali and Ibn ʿArabi centuries ago: the world both continues and is recreated anew at every moment. Ibn Arabi tells the narrator, "Know that because the Creator is every day upon a new task (*kul yawm huwa fī shaʾn*), the world changes from one state to another with our breathing. The world does not remain in a single state. For God is endlessly creative."[121] This crucial cosmological argument of Islamic theology and Sufism helps al-Ghitani in processing trauma. These tragic events are fundamental in the history of a self that changes and endures. While past experiences entail past selves, the holistic continuity of the self lies in its duty of bearing witness and of speaking truth to power.[122] If the history of the self is a history of a collectivity, then any trauma for which the individualistic literary voice often speaks is a collective trauma. This manifests clearly when al-Ghitani fuses the figures of Nasser and his father within episodes in which they exchange roles and even bodies. The private death of the father is then immediately linked to the symbolic ending of the Nasserite socialist project.

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[121] al-Ghitani, 283.

[122] Al-Ghitani writes, "I know not of the position of the moment in the motion of the celestial spheres. Forgive me my brethren if my speech grows long and overly detailed, for I know that it is a moment that means naught to you. To me, it is a whole life, and meaning, and passion. So, bear me and blame me not. May God never inflict on you the suffering that I have endured. I claim now while the years have surrounded me and life is being rolled like a scroll that I will not forget what my eyes saw in its entirety and in its detail." al-Ghitani, 264.

In a way, al-Ghitani's literary engagement with *waqt* synthesizes the reformulations of ʿAbdurrahman Taha and Hadi al-ʿAlawi. Like Taha, al-Ghitani speaks of how the absolute newness of *waqt* makes otherness internal to the self. In every moment, we are different than our former selves and we are also the sum of this unceasing alterity. Like al-ʿAlawi, al-Ghitani insists that the self is linked, in its internal processes of self-understanding, to the collective. There is no buffered self that constitutes the fixed core of identity. At the core of identity, there is rather a defining relationship to the social and the historical. This why al-Ghitani notes that in his novels he is not interested in developing stories of protagonists but in capturing a lived reality whose articulation can only be polyphonic.[123] In his trilogy, the Egyptian writer produces on the one hand an existential reflection on the temporalities of the self and its spiritual journey and on the other hand a historical political meditation on the temporalities of the nation in its transition from socialism to neoliberalism. In so doing, he annuls the logic of linear progress by bringing the historical moments of tragic experience into the eternal now of literary imagination.

Conclusion

The heterogeneity of Sufi time is an important critical and creative asset for the likes of al-Ghitani, al-ʿAlawi, and Taha. There is no development of ethical thought, of political discourse, and of literature without a serious consideration of the question of time. In their various critiques of modernity and propositions on *turāth*, these Arab thinkers develop their projects drawing on Islamic notions of time as a multidimensional reality.

ʿAbdurrahman Taha wrote on *waqt* as the temporality of the ethical act which constitutes the most meaningful event in the life of the self. Inspired by Sufi social history, Hadi al-ʿAlawi

[123] Ajina and al-Hadhiri, "Hiwar maʿa al-Riwaʾi Gamal al-Ghitani," 111.

reformulated *waqt* as the historical moment of social protest whose recognition is key to the imagination of alternative political futures. Gamal al-Ghitani captured in his literary writing the moral, existential, and political value of *waqt* which becomes the foundation of an asynchronous literary construct in which multiple kinds of time are transposed on the moment of the now. Time in these thinkers' works is an essential ground of critique.

Pre-modern Islamic thought largely viewed time as the product of human perception, as the dimension of circumscribed events, and a relationship that binds different beings including God, humanity, and the ever renewed cosmos. In capitalist modernity, time becomes an abstraction. It orders, regiments, and maximizes efficiency. In social lives, where it escapes the iron cage of mechanistic functions, it manifests as a heterogenous mix of sacred and profane, personal and social, seasonal and regional temporalities. It unfolds as interconnected temporalities instead of the neutral and stable background of chronological sequences. Yet modernist thought remains suspicious of the lived expressions of heterogenous time. It regards these expressions as products of arrested developments and as historical anachronisms. Modernist thought is often critical of that which impedes progress. It takes the homogenization of time to be the natural result of a disenchantment of the world which can only lead to human flourishing. However, the banishment of God, of nature, and of social claims from a homogenized modern time have led to the dominance of mechanistic and exploitative forces over human life. Critical thought in general and postcolonial critique in particular cannot afford to ignore these realities. Rather than locking critical thought and its creative impulses within the modernist prison of lamenting cultural perceptions of the temporal, postcolonial thinkers and writers can turn to their cultural traditions in search of meaningful articulations of time. Through

these traditions in which time is neither homogenous nor empty, they make creative and compelling contributions to the critique of power and capital in late modernity.

Conclusion

In defining the parts of the day in his encyclopedia *Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab* (The End of Quest in the Philological Sciences), the Mamluk scholar Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri (d. 1333) notes that in the Arabic language there are several designated names for each hour of the day. For the night hours, for instance, he writes:

> The night is divided into twelve hours. These hours have names according to Arab convention. They are as follows: *al-shāhidu* (the hour of witness), then *al-ghasaqu* (the hour of dusk), then *al-ʿatmatu* (the dark hour), then *al-faḥmatu* (the bleak hour), then *al-mawhinu* (the enfeebler), then *al-qiṭʿū* (the split hour), then *al-jawshanu* (the shield), then *al-ʿabkatu* (the knot), then *al-tabāshīru* (the hour of the first light), then *al-fajru al-awwalu (the first dawn)*, then *al-fajru al-thānī (the second dawn)*, then *al-muʿtariḍu* (the intercepter).[124]

In addition to the list of names, al-Nuwayri records numerous poetic passages that describe the lover's and the traveler's perceptions of the long hours of the night. Equally, the hours of the day have their long list of names and poetic renditions that track closely the emotional experience of various parts of the day. As these lists and their poetic illustrations show, it is not sufficient to have a numerical designation for the hours. Knowledge of the mathematical divisions of the day must include also knowledge of their descriptors in the language of poetry and affect. Time, here, is both conventional and personal. It is cosmic and linguistic. The conventions of its division, which corresponds to both number and emotive states, are matters of keen interest for the encyclopedist.

In *Time in Early Modern Islam*, Stephen Blake notes that unlike the Judeo-Christian system in which prayer time was unspecified except for monks in monasteries, the importance of the five daily prayers for Muslims "created an intense interest in both the practical (timekeeping)

[124] al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab*, ed. Yahya al-Shami, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 123.

and the theoretical (astronomical/astrological) aspects of time."[125] This interest materialized in the establishment of observatories across Muslim lands whose financial support and scientific output surpassed their European counterparts until the seventeenth century.[126] It manifested socially in the development by the early thirteenth century of two time-based professions that consisted of the time keeper (*muwaqqit*) who worked as part of the staff of mosques and of the time specialist (*mīqātī*) who was adjoined to princely courts working on "astronomical time keeping."[127] Up to the seventeenth century, Blake argues, "leadership in the theory and practice of both astronomy and astrology rested in the Islamic, not in the European, world."[128]

The alleged decline of the scientific and philosophical spirit in the post-classical Muslim world is a matter of heated scholarly debate. It a commonly held paradigm that rests on sparse historical evidence (See Chapter One). What is certain, however, is that the economic ascendence of Europe in the sixteenth century following the discovery of the Americas, the triangular slave trade, and the establishment of new trade routes that bypassed Muslim empires set Europe apart, materially and technologically, from the rest of the world. These changes accelerated the decline of the old world order and the rise of Europe as a global colonial power. In the modern age of High Imperialism, colonialism, and postcolonialism, the paradigm of the endemic decline of the scientific and philosophical spirit in Islam became entrenched. For the emerging intellectuals of the nineteenth century Arab, Persian, or Turkish middle classes living under imperialist pressure or direct colonialism, the narrative of the rise of modern secular

[125] Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 176.
[126] Blake, 177.
[127] Blake, 4–5.
[128] Blake, 186.

Europe after a fierce battle against the regressive forces of religion became the prism through which Islamic history was read. George Saliba writes:

> For those who looked, from the very beginning, at Islamic civilization as a continuous unfolding of religious thought only, and at the same time held the European paradigm of the conflict between religion and science, they attributed this death of rationality in the Islamic civilization, and in this later period, to an upsurge in religious thought, which they claim came about at the expense of scientific and philosophical thought. For those people, "progress" was defined by the very victory of science over the church, just as European progress was defined. Thus every civilization had to demonstrate that it had participated in this struggle before it could participate in this "universal" linear and constant search for "progress."[129]

The narrative which links the present political and economic hardships of the Muslim world to the civilizational failure in reproducing the—now universalized—historical and cultural experiences of Europe is a powerful narrative. It continues to feed the culturalist tendencies in all sorts of philosophical, historical, and political analyses of postcolonial dependencies and struggles. In this narrative, the religious worldview of Muslims stands as the cause of the decline of the philosophical spirit in Islam and the reason for its incompatibility with global modernity and its cultural forms. A crucial element in the long list of the components of cultural incompatibility is the Islamic perception of time. Despite the well-documented rich history of thinking, theorizing, and institutionalizing time in Islam, it is common to encounter in orientalist literature and in postcolonial texts of indigenous cultural critique the notion of the Islamic lack of concern for the temporal order and the Islamic inability to grasp the reality of time and, consequently, the true meaning of history and progress.

As this dissertation analyzed in its first chapter, Arab intelligentsia partook in a wave of cultural self-critique in the aftermath of the June War of 1967 against Israel (*al-Naksa*). This

[129] George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (MIT Press, 2007), 234.

wave fostered serious and productive engagements with the political, economic, and social structures of oppression in Arabic countries. It also witnessed the perennial rise of culturalist answers to the notion of the alleged Arab Islamic cultural failure in modernity. Arab liberal thinkers, Marxists, psychoanalysts, and structuralists developed a twofold critique of Arabic Islamic time. They first charged that Islamic time is event-based and, as such, constitutes the product of a defective "discontinuous" perception of the temporal order. Secondly, they distinguished between the homogenous and progressive time of secular history and the stagnant time of religious enchantment. The latter, they objected, intrudes on the former and turns time into a heterogenous mix of profane and sacred temporalities. As such it disallows the sensibility of linear progress which is said to be key to the formation of the modern subject.

These critics, as this dissertation argued, impose a modernist *discursive ideal* of homogenous, linear, and progressive time on Arabic Islamic expressions of lived and philosophized temporalities which are per force heterogenous. Linear homogenous time is a discursive ideal because it structures a vision of life which is nowhere to be found outside the institutional sites and discourses of modernizing states and elites, of factories and markets. Beholden to postcolonial evolutionary frameworks, these critics then engage a false problem of bemoaning the cultural expressions of heterogenous time and lamenting the absence of homogenous linear time which, if given absolute control over life, secures only a mechanistic experience of the world instead of promoting any organic conditions of human flourishing. Following suit, the charge of discontinuous perception develops, then, from the stubborn refusal of modernist thought to acknowledge the human reality of inhabiting multiple temporal orders. The natural movement between different kinds of time is then interpreted as the alternation between the timely and the timeless.

The post-*Naksa* Arab discussion of the "discontinuous" Islamic perception of time further developed in studies of *turāth* (Islamic cultural heritage) in which the question of Islamic philosophy and its later developments through philosophical Sufism was raised. Chapter Two surveyed these developments. A good number of Arab critics, such as the Syrian psychoanalyst Georges Tarabichi (1939-2016) and the Egyptian literary scholar Gaber Asfour (b. 1944) viewed the contemporary Arab engagement with Islamic cultural heritage as a symptom of the Arab inability to move beyond foundational historical moments, to be liberated from cyclical cultural temporalities, and to achieve the necessary linear development of culture through which past experiences are accumulated and transcended. Others such as the Egyptian thinker ʿAbdel Wahab El-Messiri (1938-2008) and the Moroccan philosopher ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944) viewed the return of the question of *turāth* as rather the return of Arab intellectuals to the ever-flourishing and continuous language of their people which has been long shaded by modernizing discourses. Yet, among the arguments of the critical majority, the notion that the religious worldview, with its heterogenous enchanted temporalities, disallows the progress of Arabic culture became prominent.

Philosophical Sufism, as the cultural tradition per excellence which best exemplifies the subversive and heterogenous temporality of Islamic enchantment, was then drafted in different types of revisionist discourses on *turāth* and contemporary Arab thought. For critics of Arabic Islamic time, the problem of the discontinuous perception of the temporal order results directly from the enchanted worldview of Muslims in which the world of secular history is clouded by the fantasies of the otherworldly. Among the diverse Islamic traditions, Sufi thought, for these critics, offered the most lucid expression of the Islamic stagnant and timeless ontology.

For post-*Naksa* Arab thinkers and scholars of *turāth*, the Sufi philosophical tradition occupied a curious temporality in Islamic cultural history. Arab Marxists of the likes of the Syrian Tayyib Tizzini (1934-2019), the Lebanese Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987), and the Iraqi Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998) approached the Sufi tradition as the locus of subaltern and non-institutional forms of Islamic religiosity. They drew on its concepts which derive from ascetic practice and on its social history which is animated by proponents of marginal classes. For these thinkers, Sufi concepts and social experiences constitute a library of authentic resources for critiquing modern consumerist and capitalist society in the Arab world. It is a cultural memory linked to the implicit ideology of the masses which better communicates the Marxist ethic than translated and elitist literature. In this reading, philosophical Sufism represented the intellectual fruit of revolutionary ruptures in Islamic thought and its institutional history. These moments of rupture are beckoning for recognition and translational engagement by modern leftist intellectuals who have long ignored the language of the masses.

In contradistinction to this trend, Arab rationalists, working with Islamic agendas such as Hasan Hanafi (1935-2021) or secular liberal and nationalist agendas such as Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (1905-1993) and Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) identified the birth of philosophical Sufism as the moment of the decline of Islamic philosophy after its peripatetic heyday. Philosophical Sufism is the product of the decadence of Greek rationalist thought in the Muslim world. It is the philosophical expression of the Islamic "unreason" which manifests itself linguistically through a non-analytical emotive language, culturally through the dominance of poetry in Muslim art, and socially through nihilist individualist ethics. In Islamic cultural history, Sufism in both its philosophical variety and social incarnations occupies the subversive

temporality of the regressive and the timeless which impedes the development of dynamic rational epistemes.

In order to engage deeply with the arguments of these two trends of *turāth* studies and in order to unpack the operative concepts in the post-*Naksa* "problem space" of Arabic Islamic time, this dissertation proceeded in its remaining chapters to study representative figures of the above-mentioned trends through a close reading exercise. In Chapter Three, it focused on the structuralist model of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) and his reading of Islamic cultural history. This model provided an exceptionally lucid and comprehensive access to the various arguments which animated the post-*Naksa* reading of Arabic Islamic time and of the historical development and contemporary relevance of philosophical Sufism.

Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri (1935-2010) identified the problem of modernity in the Arab world as the problem of defective structures of thought and concepts of time. In his reading, the development of Islamic philosophy as an original Graeco-Arabic project brought an atomistic "Arab reason" marked by its "discontinuous" perception of time into proximity with Greek "universal reason" and its linear progressive temporality. This project was undermined by the political and ideological rebellion of non-Arab ethnicities. In resisting Arab rule, the Persian aristocracy and its intellectual class succeeded to resuscitate its pre-Islamic gnostic reason and spread it in Muslim culture under the covers of Shi'ism and Sufism. This form of reason is characterized by its insistence on spiritual rather than rational experiences, its cultivation of esoteric and allegorical relations to texts rather than literal and analytical ones, and its timeless worldview.

Beyond its foundational period, the development of Islamic philosophy is marked by two moments. On the one hand, there is the decadent moment of the Persian Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037)

who brought the original Islamic fusion of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism into new levels and inaugurated a philosophical Sufism that continued to develop after him through the original contributions of (to name an influential few) al-Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191), Ibn ʿArabi (d. 637/1240), and Mulla Sadra (d. 1049/1640). On the other hand, there is the corrective moment of the Arab Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198) who rejected these developments as distortions of peripatetic philosophy and advocated the return to pure Aristotle. In transposing this history geographically, al-Jabri distinguishes between a rationalist Muslim West against a mystical Muslim East. He also distinguishes between an internal stagnant, discontinuous, and cyclical Arab cultural time and the linear progressive global temporality of post Enlightenment culture. His final solution to the Arab predicament is to emulate European cultural history and to wage decisive battle against the enchanted worldview of "Gnostic reason." Sufi thought must be systematically repudiated, its nihilist ethics exposed, and its timeless ontology rejected. Contemporary Arab culture can accomplish the progress of thought and achieve a "true" critical outlook on the world only when it removes the veil of the mystical over the historical and stops thinking the time of society and of culture heterogeneously.

This dissertation disputed the arguments of Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri in a number of steps and through a number of counter-arguments. In Chapter Three, it tracked how an Arab ethnic chauvinism colors the outlook of al-Jabri on Islamic cultural history. It argued that the ideological narrative that al-Jabri produces which exaggerates the tensions between Arab and Persian pre-modern scholarships and set a firm barrier of difference between them flies against the bulk of historical evidence. Al-Jabri's analysis of "Arab reason" and "Arab time" is further inflicted by the orientalist paradigm of the "atomistic Semitic mind" which has long been

deployed to explain the particularities of Muslim thought and art through the lens of inferiority and deficiency.

Chapter Four performed a close reading of Sufi philosophical and lay texts to contest a major argument in al-Jabri's reading of *turāth*, i.e., the Islamic deficient sense of time. Al-Jabri focused on time in Sufism which is denied objective existence. He draws on this discourse to demonstrate the ways in which mystical thought deeply impairs reason by removing the element of time from its ontology. Against the grain of this reading, I argued that the Sufi denial of the independence of time does not signify timelessness. On the opposite, it inaugurates a philosophy of time which defines it as an inner component of the human moral experience. In this view, time is the internal condition of a permanent state of spiritual flux linked to ontological change through the perception of a forever new moment of the present. In light of Michel Foucault's analysis of the relation between truth veridiction and subject formation in classical philosophical traditions, I demonstrated that the Sufi view of time translates into a practice of caring for the self through minding its present moment (*waqt*). Against Mohammed ʿAbed al-Jabri's reading that the focus on the present moment reflects an ethic of passive seclusion into the psychological temporality of the self which terminates its constructive social being in the world, I have argued that the notion of minding the present moment is a moral technology of the self. In being conducive to the mastery of the self's bad inclinations, this technology reaffirms the social presence of the Sufi, which becomes mediated through the understanding of and compassion with the reality of the multiplicity of ways of being in the world.

The heterogeneity of time in Sufism, which includes, on the one hand, the sense of a social and cosmological duration based on perpetual flux and the renewability of the world, and on the other hand, the experience of the unique moments of ecstatic rupture, resists the

neutralization of time as an empty and uniform medium. Heterogeneity then makes time thick and visible. The chapter demonstrated also how this understanding of time translates into an ethic of self-care directed to servicing the social.

Chapter Five performed a different kind of intervention against the culturalist critique of Islamic forms of heterogenous time which al-Jabri epitomized. After providing my own reading of the value of the pre-modern Sufi view of time, its contemporary relevance to postcolonial Arab thought had to be demonstrated through the illustrative example of other Arab thinkers and their alternative proposals on and instrumentalizations of Sufi time. This final chapter then focused on the incorporation of the Sufi view of time, which posits time as an internal structure of consciousness and as a heterogenous reality, in the works of the Moroccan ethicist ʿAbdurrahman Taha (b. 1944), the Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-ʿAlawi (1933-1998), and the Egyptian novelist Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2015).

This final chapter surveyed the positions of these three thinkers on the question of *turāth* and Arab cultural modernity and their diverse rewritings of Sufi time. Against the imperative of catching up with post-Enlightenment global culture that inspired the set of thinkers addressed at the beginning of this dissertation, these thinkers held that Arab cultural modernity can only be the product of an indigenous and innovative dialogue between, on the one hand, the demands of contemporaneity (understood, contra al-Jabri, as the necessity to develop a local critique of the violences of the global rather than the typical demand of rectifying endemic failures) and on the other hand the cultural and philosophical experiences of Muslims. As far as the question of Islamic time is concerned, these thinkers directed their critical gazes to the violences of modernity's empty progressive time and drew on Sufi writings on the present moment as a kairotic temporality of the ethical act, of the political choice, and of the literary working out of

trauma. In their writings, the kairotic framework unites time and subjectivity in inspiring ethico-political commitment and affecting personal and social change. Heterogenous time, for these thinkers, signified a human time which is resistant to the abstractions of mechanistic processes of regimentation, production, and consumption.

As this foray into alternative readings demonstrates, Sufi temporalities, being a variation of an Islamic moral discourse on time that is found in Islamic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), offers no explanation to contemporary Arab intellectuals on why their early modern and modern histories have been inflicted with the ruptures and violences of imperialism, colonialism, and the nation-state. Rather, the encounter with this Islamic instantiation of heterogenous time inspires these thinkers to rethink temporality in developing their critiques of global capitalist modernity. Beyond critique, these concepts offer powerful insights into historical imaginaries and forms of worlding which are not ruled by the logic of linear accumulation and the obsession of chimeric progress.

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