

3.3 Toward an emancipation from hegemonic constructions: The critique of orthodoxy, Arab nationalism, and Euro-modernism

This chapter addresses Arkoun's critique of the hegemonic discourse²⁶³ that constructs the thought through notions of religious orthodoxy, nationalist political ideologies, and Euromodernism. According to Arkoun, texts and discourses are politically constructed and, thus, instruments of power. For Arkoun, hegemonic discourse manifests itself in religion as an influential factor in the formation of orthodoxy. Arkoun draws attention to how religious texts – of the Qur'an and Tradition – have been hegemonically interpreted and manipulated by official religious scholars to protect political interests. According to Arkoun, hegemonic discourse manifests itself not only in religious discourse but also in the political discourse of Arab nationalism, both Islamist and modernizing. Thus, Islamist Arab nationalism in most Muslim countries calls for the eradication of the cultural traditions and religious beliefs of minorities, and in order to unite Arab Muslim countries, Islam must be propagated as the religion of the nation, Arabic as its language, and Arab as the ethnic group of the nation.

The hegemonic discourse is also evident in Arkoun's critique of modernist Arab nationalist and Euro-modernity discourses. Arkoun opposes a secularism that establishes itself as a coercive regime which eliminates the fundamental right to religious freedom. Arkoun emphasizes a humanistic secularism in which people are free to express their religious beliefs. He believes that in secular societies, everyone should respect the differences of others, in a climate of democracy and tolerance. In addition, Arkoun speaks about capitalist modernity, which he believes manipulates the world economic system by placing powerless countries under the control and exploitation of powerful countries. Arkoun considers that modernity in most Muslim countries is limited to consumption, subordinating itself to the scientific and economic development of developed countries instead of participating in transcultural

263 Arkoun uses the concept of hegemony, attributed to various discourses (religious, nationalist, Western), to explain that a thought becomes hegemonic when it is not subjected to critical evaluation. A thought acquires hegemony when it is characterized by a structured and rigorous discourse that manipulates thought and is led by official and authoritarian representatives. Massimo Campanini has examined the philosophy of Muslim scholars who seek to liberate Islamic thought from "hegemonic ideologies of politics." Campanini draws on Arkoun's critique of hegemonic discourse. He asserts that "a change in [thought] requires a change in socio-political and ideological relations in society, as Antonio Gramsci argued." Following Gramsci, Arkoun calls Islamic thought hegemonic because it is based on a set of hegemonic discourses created by religious orthodoxy and nationalist political ideologies that manipulate Islamic thought. See: Massimo Campanini (2009) "Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Political Hegemony: Reformation of Islamic Thought" in *The Muslim World* Hartford Seminar (pp. 124–133); published by Blackwell.

scientific exchange and economic development through trade fairs. While criticizing the concept of capitalist modernity, Arkoun invokes the concept of intellectual modernity, which is the result of intellectual research and the participation of Arab intellectuals in humanism and critical thinking discourse.

This chapter is divided into two sections to illustrate how hegemonic discourse shapes orthodoxy, Arab-nationalism, and Euro-modernism. The first section explains what the hegemonic discourse and orthodoxy are. This is to illustrate how hegemonic discourse manipulates religion by creating orthodoxy. Arkoun deconstructs the hegemonic discourse to show how religious texts are under the control of official religious scholars to protect political ideologies and interests. Through his critical examination of hegemonic discourse, Arkoun seeks to liberate religious discourse from orthodoxy and, thus, from official control. The second section examines how hegemonic discourse determines nationalist discourse in most post-colonial Muslim countries. The aim is to highlight Arkoun's critique of both Islamist and modernist nationalist discourses involved in the creation of a closed identity, cultural closure, and religious dogmatism. The chapter ends with an exposition of Arkoun's concepts of humanistic secularity and intellectual modernity, which he advocates for Muslim societies and European countries as basic principles of Enlightenment philosophy to create notions of religious tolerance and pluralistic democracy.

The hegemonic discourse as an influential factor in the formation of orthodoxy within the Qur'an

The first focus here is to show how hegemonic discourse creates orthodoxy with religious discourse. The second focus is on the two levels of orthodoxy that make Islam a hegemonic discourse manipulated by official religious scholars for political purposes.

In this sense, orthodoxy is shaped in two stages: The first stage is that of the Qur'anic fact; the revelation – as mentioned in chapter 3.2 – is oral. This is the transmission of the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammed in the form of speech. Orthodoxy manipulates the revelation by not making it open to different horizons of interpretation and knowledge. Thus, the revelation, or the Qur'anic fact, is systematized and does not logically distinguish between the mythical and the rational. The second stage is that of Islamic fact. It means the collection and canonization of revelation in a Qur'anic book, the *Muṣṭafā*. Orthodoxy here used the revelation as a pretext for the socio-political context that developed as a power. Some aspects of Islamic fact are selectively used for power purposes. Orthodoxy is established by official religious scholars who are employed by political power to protect their political au-

thority. Here the revelation is no longer open, but narrowed to the Arabic-language understandings that orthodoxy constructs.²⁶⁴

In this context, I introduce what Arkoun means by hegemonic discourse to understand its impact on the creation of orthodoxy in Islam. In his article entitled “From Inter-Religious Dialogue to the Recognition of the Religious Phenomenon” (1998 a), Arkoun presents the concept of hegemonic discourse as follows:

What I mean by [hegemonic reason]²⁶⁵ is that all exercise of reason aims at attaining a procedural and cognitive sovereignty able to resist all denials and make itself indispensable for all time to every human intelligence. This quest for a durable and inescapable cognitive validity which applies to everyone is psychologically legitimate: it conveys at once the desire for eternity, the nostalgia of being, and the desire to know, which haunt every human being; but it becomes hegemonic when reason imposes through political, economic and social constraints cognitive systems beyond the reach of free criticism.²⁶⁶

In other words, hegemonic discourse constructs a valuable discourse about Islam that is inviolable and valid for all times and places. Arkoun sees that hegemonic discourse becomes a threat when it is used as an instrument of power to manipulate human reason. One could argue that hegemonic discourse manipulates Islam through the creation of orthodoxy. In this sense, orthodoxy prohibits other understandings and interpretations about religion and forces individuals to think the same without subjecting religious discourse to critical examination. In this context, Arkoun introduces the concept of orthodoxy as follows:

Orthodoxy refers to two values. For the believers, it is the authentic expression of the religion as it has been taught by the pious ancestors; the “orthodox” literature describes opposing groups as “sects.” For the historian, orthodoxy refers to the ideological use of religion by the competing groups in the same political space, like the Sunnis who supported the caliphate – legitimized afterwards by the jurists – and who called themselves “the followers of the tradition and the united community.”²⁶⁷

Arkoun uses the term orthodoxy to refer to the official religion established by the majority of official religious scholars – ‘ulamā – to protect political power. He

264 Hashas 2015.

265 In this study, I prefer to use the term “hegemonic discourse” because hegemony is installed in various forms of discourse – religious discourse, nationalist discourse, and Western discourse – and not just Islamic reason as hegemonic reason.

266 Arkoun 1998 a: 126.

267 Arkoun 2003: 22.

claims, according to Pierre Bourdieu, that orthodoxy systems are based on mutual exclusions, manifested, for example, in the contradictions between orthodoxy and heresy.²⁶⁸ I refer to Bourdieu to show that orthodoxy means straightforward thinking to which one should adhere, in contrast to heterodoxy, which means the creation of various critical approaches to thinking. In Bourdieu's terms:

Orthodoxy, straight, or rather *straightened* opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice – *hairesis*, heresy – made possible by the existence of competing possibles and to the explicit critique of the sum total of the alternatives not chosen that the established order implies. It is defined as a system of euphemisms, of acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies.²⁶⁹

Focusing on Islam, one can understand that opinions and interpretations that lead to a different understanding of religious texts are considered heresy, i.e., a deviation from orthodoxy, from the usual approach to understanding Islamic religious texts. As mentioned earlier, Arkoun recognizes two stages in the emergence of orthodoxy in Islam – particularly in the Qur'an: The stage of Qur'anic fact and the stage of Islamic fact.

Arkoun declares: "At the stage of the 'Qur'anic fact,' God presents Himself to man in a discourse articulated in the Arabic language."²⁷⁰ Hence the Qur'anic fact refers the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad in the form of speech. Regarding the second stage of the Islamic fact, Arkoun clarifies, "the 'Islamic fact' retains and exploits this dimension of the 'Qur'anic fact' as an area of sanctification, of spiritualization, transcendentalization, ontologization, mythologization, ideologization through all the doctrinal schemes, all the legalistic, ethical, and cultural codes, all the systems of legitimization put in place by the *ulamā*".²⁷¹ To put it simply, the Islamic fact is the use of the Qur'an by official religious scholars as a sacred phenomenon to manipulate the legal and ethical systems. In this way, the Qur'an becomes a powerful and hegemonic discourse that manipulates humanity and establishes a monolithic understanding of Islamic law without allowing for open interpretation. Indeed, as Arkoun affirms, "it is to the 'Islamic fact' that the development and historical action of what is called Muslim law should be linked, especially the aspect that is applied as positive law (*fiqh*)."²⁷² Arkoun believes that the Qur'an

268 Schönberger 2010: 7; cf. Günther 2004b: 60.

269 Bourdieu 1977- 2005: 169.

270 Arkoun 2002 a: 262.

271 Arkoun 2002 a: 262.

272 Arkoun 2002 a: 262.

can be interpreted to produce a just Islamic law that promotes human dignity and rights. Consequently, the Qur'an survives the canon of orthodoxy and official control because of its openness to interpretation.

In the same line of thought, Günther clarifies the concepts of Qur'anic fact and Islamic fact to show how they determine the framework of the Qur'an and how they promote orthodoxy in Islam. She asserts:

Qur'anic and *Islamic fact/event* allow a differentiation between a linguistic event and the consolidation of the new religion, that is, between the period of revelation shaped by the Qur'anic or prophetic discourse which ended with death of Muhammad in 632, and the fixation of revelation as a written document resulting in a determination of the reading which is supposed to have been effected from 661 on. Thus these concepts describe the historical process of the coming into being of a new religion, effected and supported by social, political, and cultural actors. Furthermore, the concept of the *Islamic fact/event* takes into account that Islam, as a system of belief, has been used for ideological and political purposes in order to legitimize and maintain power.²⁷³

In her understanding of Arkoun's concepts of Qur'anic fact and Islamic fact, Günther notes that the Qur'an is manipulated by orthodoxy in order to protect ideologies and preserve political interests. The Qur'an becomes a hegemonic text so that it cannot be interpreted differently outside the canon of orthodoxy. Günther understands Arkoun's view that the Qur'an is subject to fixed and monolithic interpretations, making it an established, powerful text used to manipulate individuals in support of political actors, similar to John Armajani, who states that "Arkoun understands the initial revelation of the Qur'an and its subsequent interpretations as existing along a continuum; the interpretations of the Qur'an throughout Islamic history are related to peoples' perceptions of the importance of the book, and individuals who have held power throughout much of Islamic history have utilized their interpretations of the Qur'an to their own advantages."²⁷⁴

Arkoun, thus, understands that the Qur'an is manipulated within the framework of orthodoxy. Historically, the Qur'an has been used by orthodox scholars as an instrument of political power and ideology to protect political interests. Indeed, a major criticism of Arkoun's is directed at the political powers that use the Qur'an to protect their political goals and manipulate and control their populations. "Though his focus was Islamic history of ideas, he also gave space to comparative theology, violence and religion, power and hegemony, which are issues that intertwine in making the current Arab world bloody and chaotic. His overall work does not point a (bad)

273 Günther 2004 a: 143.

274 Armajani 2004: 116.

finger to the divine *per se*, but to corrupt power that hides behind orthodoxy.”²⁷⁵ Arkoun’s project critically engages the Islamist and political ideologies that use religious discourse to secure their extremist and fundamentalist view of Islam. His critique of hegemonic discourse remains compelling in that it establishes a renewed interpretation of Islam that grants Muslim individuals greater rights and freedom. Arkoun makes it clear that the hegemonic discourse is developed not only in the field of religion through the creation of orthodoxy, but also in most nationalist political ideologies that have emerged in the post-colonial era in several Muslim countries.

The hegemonic discourse as an influential factor in the formation of the nationalist discourse in most Muslim countries – The Maghreb

This section examines how nationalist discourse creates internal hegemony in most Muslim countries. Arkoun’s work facilitates the redirection of postcolonial debates of the 1950s on Arabo-Islamic reason driven by nationalist and Pan-Arabist political preoccupations.²⁷⁶ As part of his critique of the nationalist discourses that emerged in most Muslim countries after independence, one can argue that Arkoun intends the nationalist movement of the Maghreb²⁷⁷ countries in his critique of nationalist discourse.

Historically, the Mediterranean as a unified geo-cultural and mental space has played a marginal role in the Arab-Muslim countries of the eastern and southern regions of the Mediterranean. The intellectual history of these countries was dominated during the second half of the twentieth century by Pan-Arabism and by Islamic perceptions of a cultural and political identity that left little room for the Maghrebian/Mediterranean countries. In general, the idea of a Mediterranean region was common among Arab and Muslim intellectuals with Francophone backgrounds, including Arkoun himself. Arkoun’s perception of the Mediterranean was more sophisticated and comprehensive. The most important difference lay in the fact that his views about the Mediterranean were not embedded in national theory, but in the post-national context; Algerian nationalism did not play a significant role, but Islam as part of the Mediterranean identity did.²⁷⁸ Put simply, by criticizing the hegemonic nationalist discourse that developed in most Muslim countries after independence, Arkoun aims to show that Maghrebian countries have also suffered from nationalism, which may not be accounted for in Arabo-Muslim intellectual history. Thus, he challenges the idea of Arab nationalism, which is restricted to the

²⁷⁵ Hashas 2015.

²⁷⁶ Yacoubi 2020: 114.

²⁷⁷ The term “Maghreb” is used here to refer to the western Mediterranean region of coastal North Africa in general, and to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia in particular.

²⁷⁸ Abu-Uksa 2011: 178.

well-known nationalist movements in the Arab-Muslim countries of the eastern and southern region of the Mediterranean.

In addition, Arkoun argued in his dissertation (1970) and in *Humanisme et Islam Combat et Proposition* (2008) that the Mediterranean culture of Islam had already experienced humanism in the ninth and tenth centuries. This contradicted the thesis of Jacob Burckhardt, who attributed humanism exclusively to the Renaissance in Western Europe. For Arkoun, religions around the Mediterranean in the tenth century shared a religious humanism that was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. In the contemporary context, Arkoun uses this historical assertion to argue that Islam does not fundamentally reject philosophy and free thought, but rather shares European modernism – while he retains a critique of the concept of Euro-modernism.²⁷⁹ In this sense, Arkoun sees in the Mediterranean “the epitome of human pluralism and interaction throughout the centuries.”²⁸⁰

According to Arkoun, the Western Mediterranean region of the Maghreb cannot be subjected to the nationalist and conformist discourse on religion and identity, because nationalism excludes the culture of diversity that characterizes the Maghrebian peoples and civilizations that have populated the Maghreb and shaped its cultural, ethnic and religious pluralism. Arkoun directs his criticism at the conservative and positivist nationalist discourses that are interchangeably involved in the construction of hegemony in most Muslim countries – the Maghreb – through the establishment of religious fundamentalism, closed identities, and intellectual closure. Beyond Arkoun’s critique of the discourse of political hegemony, he calls for the creation of a democratic and humanistic ethic that includes respect for different religious beliefs, respect for human dignity and rights.

In his book entitled *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (1994), Arkoun defines the notion of nationalism as “the historical and semantic deterioration of a symbolic universe into a collection of signals operating in contemporary societies”.²⁸¹ Simply put, nationalism is identification with one’s nation and support of its interests. Arkoun explores the concept of nationalism as an important political event in the postcolonial history of most Muslim countries. For Arkoun, nationalism promised the suppression of religious and cultural pluralism. Arkoun argues for religious and cultural pluralism rather than identification with only one religion or culture. In doing so, he explores the following question: “Which culture has been supported, chosen and imposed by all the post-colonial states since the 1950s? Is it the emancipating, liberating, liberal, pluralist modern culture, or its antithesis, the ideological, restrictive, alienating, oppressive culture?”²⁸²

279 Abu- Uksa 2011: 178.

280 Hashas 2015.

281 Arkoun 1994: 28.

282 Arkoun 2002 a: 303.

According to Arkoun there are two systems of nationalism: the “so-called national or religious identities” and “those of the already well-established modern democratic regimes.”²⁸³ I commence by examining the first model of the conservative nationalist discourse, as Arkoun defines “the so-called Islamic regimes or rather regimes which claim Islam to be the official religion of the state.”²⁸⁴

The nationalist conservative discourse: The foundation of closed Islamists identities

Arkoun is critical of the nationalist conservative discourse that supports the idea of “national identities” and ‘collective identities’ as a springboard for seizing political power.”²⁸⁵ This nationalist conservative discourse fosters “the monolithic closed image of fundamentalist Islam [which] has led to the marginalization, and eventually the elimination, of other cultures, which have been rejected and ignored both by the state policy of education and the powerful political movements of Islamisation of the surviving remnants of idolatry and ‘savage’ cultures.”²⁸⁶ Consequently, the intellectual implications of fundamentalists and Islamists politic imply that “liberal philosophy and political institutions are rejected and maintained in the domain of the unthinkable, in order to avoid the dissolution of Islamic belief”.²⁸⁷

One could understand that Arkoun means by the concept of liberal philosophy the ideas of freedom of thought, including freedom of religion beliefs, which allow the creation of cultural and religious diversity in societies. These liberal ideas have not been supported by most nationalist conservative discourse. This is because most Islamic nationalists view liberal ideas as a challenge to their orthodox understanding of Islam in order to protect their political interests. Consequently, most nationalist Muslim elites invoke the experience of the Prophet Muhammad, who had the religious mission of spreading Islam and the political mission of uniting the ummah – the community of Muslims. In this sense, Arkoun argues that Islam celebrated the non-separation between the state and the religion, recognized with the experience of the prophet Muhammad in Medina, where the prophet of Islam intended to establish the ummah. He was a prophet who had a religious mission to spread Islam, and at the same time a political leader the community of Muslims. At that time, Islam was *din-dawla* – religion state.²⁸⁸

283 Arkoun 2002 a: 299.

284 Arkoun 2002 a: 303.

285 Arkoun 2002 a: 304.

286 Arkoun 2002 a: 303.

287 Arkoun 2002 a: 304.

288 Arkoun 2002 b: 84.

Abdou Filali-Ansary, one of the greatest commentators on the rejection of Islamic religious nationalism and author of an important book on Arkoun's thought, rejects religious nationalism as much as Arkoun did. Filali-Ansary critically examines the concept of the ummah that was used by several Arab nationalists to establish the religious nationalism after independence. In this sense, Filali-Ansary argues that nationalist Islamists give legitimacy to their discourse by invoking the historical, social, and political experiences of the Prophet Muhammad and his principle of building the ummah. Muslim scholars would enforce religious laws in civil affairs to legitimize an Islamist political system.²⁸⁹

Filali-Ansary explains that the basis of the theory of ummah is not possible because it refers to the establishment of a political power that was established after the death of the Prophet Muhammad under the political system of the caliphate. Specifically, Filali-Ansary directs his criticism at the monarchy of the caliphate, which turned religious law into a political institution. For Filali-Ansary, the change from co-opted and religiously inspired rulers to a monarchical caliphate is a kind of coup d'état, which is a violation of the principles associated with the advent of Islam and the integrity and freedom of the ummah. For Filali-Ansary, the monarchical system based on the caliphate that ruled over Muslim communities was accepted as more or less inevitable. However, it was not considered entirely legitimate. Over the centuries, the title of caliph lost prestige.²⁹⁰ In this sense, one can understand that the caliphate system established after the Prophet's death violated the ethics that the Prophet wanted to promote during his lifetime by demanding freedom and equality among Muslims. However, these norms were changed to reduce the Prophet's ethical message after his death to a political message aimed at subjugating Muslims to the caliph's monarchy.

As Arkoun and Filali-Ansary agree, most Muslim nationalists revive the concept of ummah, which is based on the concept of Islamic religious identity as used by the caliphate monarchy to establish an Islamic state and create a modern-political monarchy that is religiously governed. This goes hand in hand with supporting religious orthodoxy by rejecting a rational interpretation of religious discourse.

Völker evaluates Arkoun's critique of Islamist nationalist discourse from two perspectives. On the one hand, she sees that Arkoun believes that nationalism always relies on a mythologized Islam that supports the interpretation of Islam by official religious scholars (*ulama*). In this regard, nationalism is a political system favored by numerous Islamic countries, and one such attempt to unite Islamic nations is the establishment of the Arab Islamic League.²⁹¹ On the other hand, Völker considers that this creation of Arabo-Islamic unity must be understood

²⁸⁹ Filali-Ansary 2012 b: 2–3.

²⁹⁰ Filali-Ansary 2012 b: 1.

²⁹¹ Völker 2015: 212–213.

as a reaction by Islamic countries to the perceived Western dominance to “cure” Islamic cultures.²⁹² Simply put, Arabo-Islamic nationalism is a response to Western colonialism, to liberate Islamic cultures from Western imperialism. This could be seen as a right to affirm one independence. But this independence from Western colonization should be based on a greater notion of democracy, guaranteeing human dignity and freedom. As Völker explains, the unification of the Arabo-Muslim community should not be an artificial union imposed on a still illiberal people in whom democratic structures have no future.²⁹³ Following on from this, Arkoun looks for democratic rule to be introduced in most Muslim countries and especially in the Maghreb.

In addition to his criticism of the Islamist nationalist discourse, Arkoun also criticizes the positivist nationalist discourse that aims to create secular and modern Islamic states without improving the right to democracy and freedom of thought and religious beliefs. However, the notion of secularity and modernity that they want to create is still informed by a notion of political despotism when the idea of secularity and modernity coincides with undemocratic rules.

The nationalist positivist discourse: The establishment of a modern political dictatorship

In his article entitled “Positivism and Tradition in an Islamic Perspective” (1984), Arkoun refers to the theory of Kemalism, which can be understood as a reference to the political regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881- 1938)²⁹⁴ in Turkey, during which Atatürk built the modern, secular society. Arkoun critically evaluates the policies of Atatürk, who, in his opinion, promoted a violent model of forced secularization according to the Western values of secularism by eliminating all access to the Islamic heritage.²⁹⁵ For Arkoun, Kemalism “introduced a certain mobility into political, institutional and cultural life, but at the cost of a serious break with Islamic her-

292 Völker 2015: 212–213.

293 Völker 2015: 212–213.

294 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a Turkish field marshal, revolutionary statesman, writer, and the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, of which he was the first president from 1923 until his death in 1938. He conducted far-reaching progressive reforms that modernized Turkey into a secular industrial nation. An ideological secularist and nationalist, his policies and sociopolitical theories became known as Kemalism. Because of his military and political achievements, Atatürk is considered one of the most important political leaders of the 20th century. See: Cuthell Jr., David Cameron (2009). “Atatürk, Kemal (Mustafa Kemal)”: In Ágoston, Gábor and Masters, Bruce (eds.). Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire. New York: Facts On File, Inc. pp. 56–60.

295 Arkoun 1984: 97.

itage.”²⁹⁶ Arkoun defines the Islamic heritage as a religious fact. In this sense, the religious fact means that religion is an essential part of the cultural and social heritage of the population and therefore cannot be displaced from the life of the people. One can understand that Arkoun criticizes Atatürk’s regime for promoting secularism, a product of the French system, by completely rejecting and excluding religion. An essential part of Arkoun’s position is his rejection of secular thought *which denies the existence of religion as an essential phenomenon*. Völker convincingly explains Arkoun’s concept of secularism as follows:

Reflecting on a potential frame for a civilian society, Arkoun is indeed sceptical about French laicism, or ‘militant secularism.’ However, he was a member of the ‘Committee for Laicism’ in France. Arkoun’s view on secularism is mainly a critique of the idea that separating state and religion on legal and administrative levels is at all possible because religion still influences society. He is not denying the need for such artificial divisions, but he calls for a secularism which is not blind to the religious fact as social fact.²⁹⁷

One can realize that Arkoun has an ambivalent view of secularity. On the one hand, he believes that secularism is essential for the separation between politics and religions and, thus, for the improvement of civil rules and liberal thought. On the other hand, Arkoun rejects secularism in the sense of a complete rejection of religious fact, which he considers part of social reality, and which cannot be successfully denied. In this context, Arkoun argues that “France is not truly enlightened since it actively and forcefully opposes public expressions of faith.”²⁹⁸ For Arkoun, therefore, a state that promotes the ideas of the Enlightenment should respect the freedom of religious belief as seen by Enlightenment philosophers as its foundation.

In the same line of explication, Völker understands that for Arkoun “a truly enlightened state should be aware of the religious fact (*fait religieux*) and its mechanisms within society and does not on the contrary chose to ignore or even fight it.”²⁹⁹ Following on from this, I would like to elaborate on Arkoun’s concept of secularism. Specifically, I pose the following question: How can Arkoun argue for secularism while holding on to the idea of religion if secularism is understood to mean the separation of state and religion, or in its radical sense, a complete rejection of religious belief?

296 Arkoun 1984: 97.

297 Völker 2015: 212.

298 Arkoun 1994: 77.

299 Völker 2015: 211.

Toward an understanding of Arkoun's ambivalent concept of secularity based on the recognition of the religious fact

In an important article entitled “Mohammed Arkoun ou l’ambition d’une modernité intellectuelle” (1993), Mohammed el-Ayadi examines Arkoun’s secular concept in a remarkable approach, presenting Arkoun’s concept of humanist laicity as protecting the right to religious belief. In this context, el-Ayadi notes that Arkoun urges distinguishing between the concept of laicity and that of laicism. In fact, Arkoun uses the term laicism, just outlined, to refer to a ‘militant laicism’ that consists of rejecting religion. According to el-Ayadi, Arkoun does not adopt a notion of laicism in the sense of a radical rejection of religion. Rather, he openly advocates a concept of laicity that respects the freedom of religious belief.

Arkoun, thus, strives for a humanist laicity in the public space of civil society. Humanist laicity means that citizens of different religious beliefs can live together and that equal and common rules should apply to protect the social and political interests and rights of citizens regardless of their religious, ethnic and cultural affiliations.³⁰⁰ Consequently, humanist laicity differs from laicism in that it respects people’s religious diversity and does not require rejection of religious belief. Importantly, according to Arkoun, the concept of a humanistic laicity, as seen by el-Ayadi, requires a critical sense of religious orthodoxy in order to take root. Indeed, a humanist laicity opposes religious discourses that do not promote critical thinking toward religious orthodoxy.³⁰¹

In other words, promoting critical thinking over religious orthodoxy would help get rid of the manipulated understanding of religious discourse established by official religious scholars who promote patriarchal and fundamentalist ideas about Islam to secure political power and use Islam for political purposes. The importance of humanism here is seen in the ability of individuals to use their reason to rationally rethink religious discourse. Further promotion of renewal interpretations in religious discourse could eventually lead to a situation where different faiths and religious beliefs are no longer seen as a threat to each other but rather serve to preserve democratic rules. One interpretation of the Islamic legacy is based on respect for other religious beliefs and a view of democracy, for example, in the Islamic legal notion of the common good (*maslaha*); the protection of individual freedom and rights. Of course, other reformist thinkers have long invoked Islamic precedents (especially in the Qur'an) to legitimize or reject democracy.

Furthermore, one can argue that Arkoun’s concept of humanist laicity is consistent with the philosophy of Enlightenment. To this end, I explain Arkoun’s idea of Enlightenment, which he understands as emancipation from religious orthodoxy

³⁰⁰ El-Ayadi 1993: 69.

³⁰¹ El-Ayadi 1993: 69.

and obscurantism in order to create democratic societies where religious pluralism and cultural diversity are respected. In this context, Arkoun introduces the concept of autonomy of reason as one of the three major directions of the development and expansion of Enlightenment philosophy. He argues:

The conquest of the autonomy of reason relative to the dogmatic excesses of religion; socially, in Europe, this meant the rise of a liberal bourgeoisie which tended to secularize institutions and to struggle with the clergy and the nobility for power over them.³⁰²

Arkoun emphasizes that Enlightenment thought limits religious dogmatism and celebrates the autonomy of reason. The autonomy of reason could be useful in liberating Muslims from the political monarchy that uses religion to maintain power. Unlike the European Enlightenment, which was led by the bourgeoisie, Arkoun believes that the revolution against dogmatism and political monarchy should be shared, generated and spread by all people and without discrimination. The right to enlightenment should be a global and collective right. People need the right to think and free their minds from religious dogmatism to be autonomous. This leads to a great egalitarian achievement in the intellectual field of education and society and enriches the critical thinking of individuals. In this context, el-Ayadi notes that for Arkoun, the emergence of an intellectual revolution should be grounded in the participation of all social classes.³⁰³

In addition, one can insert that Arkoun prompts the principle of autonomy of reason to argue that it is the basis for the emancipation of the Muslim individual from the constraints of orthodoxy, defined earlier. Autonomy of reason is to challenge the dogmatic and tyrannical notion of religion, manipulated by the official religious scholars. The autonomy of reason is not foreign to rational Islamic thought. Thus, it is presented under the quest of (*ijtihad*), the intellectual struggle, which encourages rational deliberation and the use of individual reason to interpret the religious discourse (see 3.1 and 3.2). For Arkoun, the Enlightenment project is a crucial intellectual and political event that could be used to promote the ideas of democracy, including freedom of thought, belief, and equality in the postcolonial era.

Arkoun repeatedly refers to the adventure of secularism in Turkey during Atatürk's regime, noting that this secular model was not aimed at promoting Enlightenment values based on the promotion of democracy in societies. Hence, the most poorly studied aspect of this great historic adventure is no doubt the effective place of Islam in Turkish society compared to the perception which Atatürk and

³⁰² Arkoun 1984: 84–85.

³⁰³ El-Ayadi 1993: 67.

his partisans had of it. Most authors – Turkish or Western – have allowed themselves to be enclosed in tenacious ideological oppositions such as religion and secularism, tradition and modernity, the Ottoman decadence and the power of the Western model, Islamic conservatism and the progress of civilization, etc.³⁰⁴ Consequently, the so-called modern secular political regimes after independence are determined by the absence of rethinking the Islamic religion in order to free Islamic thought from dogmatism; the absence of psychological, cultural, historical or anthropological studies that would allow a strong link between the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the message of Islam; and the absence of speaking of an inner necessity in Islamic civilization that could explain the constant confusion between secular and religious authorities.³⁰⁵

Arkoun examines the modern nationalist system through the example of the theory of Kemalism to confirm that laicity requires the autonomy of reason as a central principle of Enlightenment thought in order to be successful. This allows individuals to think critically and independently. Secularism cannot be improved by forcibly rejecting religion in societies where dictatorship still manipulates the right of individuals to express their thoughts differently.

There remains a comment directed against Arkoun's ambivalent concept of secularism: Völker calls Arkoun's relationship to secularism a love-hate relationship,³⁰⁶ meaning that Arkoun does not take a clear position on the concept of secularism, i.e., whether he believes that religion must be banished from human societies for good, or whether he finds another, nuanced form of secularism in which religion need not be completely disavowed.

To respond to this comment, one could argue that Arkoun develops his ideas on secularity further, conceding that religion is an inherent feature of society, in 1994 when he discovers the ethical and political thought of Jürgen Habermas. Arkoun argues:

To follow this complex and ambitious course, one should at the outset elaborate the circumstances in which modern thinking is debated, putting theoretical knowledge in critical perspective. A reference to the critical analysis of Jürgen Habermas on the “philosophical discourse of modernity” should suffice to indicate the size of the task I am targeting.³⁰⁷

Indeed, Habermas, one of Europe's leading secular liberal thinkers, argues in his article entitled “Secularism's Crisis of Faith” (2008):

304 Arkoun 1984: 83.

305 Arkoun 1984: 87.

306 Völker 2015: 211.

307 Arkoun 1994: 114.

Secular citizens in civil society and the political public sphere must be able to meet their religious fellow citizens as equals. ... So, if all is to go well, both sides, each from their own viewpoint, must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner.³⁰⁸

Taking a comparative approach, one could argue that Arkoun joins Habermas in advocating a non-rejection of religion, thus, affirming the democratic right to protect religious pluralism. Habermas affirms that citizens in civil society should freely express their religious beliefs and that citizens should be treated equally despite their different religious affiliations. This contributes to peaceful participation in the public sphere. In our contemporary times, Arkoun's approach of humanist laicity and Habermas's notion of post-secularity are attractive for those who wish to unite and embrace pluralism and live in a dynamic democracy. Nevertheless, the notion of post-secularity cannot work when professing a religious position in a thoroughly secularized world – as in the case of Islam in European countries – can be a dangerous undertaking. It is an even greater problem when the faith one professes is viewed as suspect or threatened by the dominant group within one's own society. When a community's deeply held beliefs, the basis of its identity, spiritual life, and cultural norms, are seen as backward, oppressive, undemocratic, and unenlightened, it is easy for that community to internalize these accusations and to close itself off in its religious lifeworld, refusing to engage with the broader society in a non-antagonistic and/or open way.³⁰⁹

The divergence between Arkoun's and Habermas's conceptions of secularity is that Habermas relates his thoughts about post-secular rules to the European Christian community, which comes from an Enlightenment heritage and is accustomed to religion's reform. As Arkoun says, "Christian theology had to cope with the challenges and political revolutions initiated by a dynamic capitalist bourgeoisie and the efficient alternatives offered by reason of enlightenment."³¹⁰ In contrast, Arkoun directs his notion of humanist secularity to most Muslim countries, where the understanding of Islam is not linked to religious reformation and is in tension with the rational heritage of Islam. In this context, Arkoun states:

In the case of Islamic thought, the triumph of two major official orthodoxies with the Sunnis (since the fifth century Hijra) and the Shi'a (first with the Fatimids and second with the Safavids in Iran) imposed a mode of thinking narrower than those illustrated in the classical period (first to fifth century Hijra). Contemporary Islamic thought is under the influence of categories, themes, beliefs, and

³⁰⁸ Habermas 2008: 29.

³⁰⁹ Byrd 2017: 3–4.

³¹⁰ Arkoun 2002 a: 206.

procedures of reasoning developed during the scholastic age (seventh to eighth century Hijra) more than it is open to the pluralism which characterized classical thought.³¹¹

The dogmatic closure of Islamic thought remains relevant. As I have explained, Islamic thought is dominated by a hegemony that codifies orthodoxy, which has implications for the future construction of cultural, political, and social actors in the postcolonial era. In this context, Arkoun argues that most postcolonial nationalist leaders prioritize pragmatic action over political control to protect their authoritarian regimes.³¹² Arkoun goes on to claim that authoritarian regimes manipulate human reason by creating an epistemological break not only with Enlightenment thought but also with early Islamic humanism. This means that they are creating a rupture with the most important studies that deal with rational Islamic thought.³¹³

Arkoun borrows the notion of epistemological break from Gaston Bachelard, who assumes that scientific progress always reveals a break, or constant ruptures, between ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge.³¹⁴ Arkoun presents this distinction of knowledge as a break between the rational and orthodox interpretations of Islam. What Arkoun means by the epistemological break, then, is the interruption of Islamic thought with the philosophical and scientific achievements of its humanistic heritage. Islamic thought at the time of its humanistic framework explored a variety of topics with different emphases. It dealt with strictly religious matters, ethics, jurisprudence, politics, social and economic questions, theology, and philosophy. Linguistics, esthetics (literature, music, painting, and architecture), science and technology, and history, geography, and cosmogony were other fields of inquiry.³¹⁵

Arkoun, thus, invokes the great intellectual and scientific achievements of early Islamic thought to argue that they are indispensable to the progress of contemporary Arab-Islamic thought in order to promote its participation in the current age of modernization. In fact, the epistemological break with the rational Islamic thought led most Islamic countries to be dependent on the hegemony of Euro-modernism. This will be explored below.

311 Arkoun 2003: 27.

312 Arkoun 1984: 86.

313 Arkoun 1984: 86.

314 Bachelard 1938–2002: 5.

315 Arkoun 1977: 19.

Arkoun's concept of intellectual modernity: As a critique of the subordination of most Muslim societies to Euro-modernity-centrism

Here I introduce Arkoun's concept of intellectual modernity as a counterpart to the concept of material modernity³¹⁶ or civilization, i.e., a concept of materialism. As explained above, Arkoun criticizes orthodoxy in religious discourse as well as religious fundamentalism and political dictatorship in nationalist discourse. Arkoun proposes a notion of secularism as a humanistic concept that guarantees religious freedom and respect for pluralism. In the following I explore Arkoun's critique of the subordination of most Muslim societies to Euro-modernism hegemony. According to Arkoun, 'Euro-modernism' in the materialist sense has emerged within the capitalist system and prevents poor, underdeveloped countries from participating in and contributing to global economic and scientific development. As a result, most underdeveloped countries remain economically dependent on rich and developed nations. In this way, the underdeveloped countries are controlled by the dominant countries and are subject to their economic and political systems. This leads to an unjust global power system in which the center of the globe dominates the periphery.

Arkoun criticizes the manipulation of industrialized countries at the global level of political and economic spheres, and does not attempt to accept the fate of most Muslim societies as a destination of control and subjugation to Eurocentric modernity. Rather, he seeks to liberate most Muslim countries from this manipulation, invoking his concept of intellectual modernity, which he uses to encourage most Muslim individuals to embrace the positive aspects of modernity based on scientific and intellectual inquiry. Importantly, Arkoun directs his critique at the culture of materialism in which most Muslim societies are enmeshed; he sees that they are large consumers of Western products and unable to contribute to global cultural, scientific, and economic production.

In this context, and in order to establish a notion of justice on a global scale, Arkoun understands that a notion of intellectual modernity should be introduced in most Muslim societies, and especially in the Maghreb, in order to participate in and contribute to global economic and scientific development. He believes that most Muslim societies are still dependent on developed European countries because the concept of modernity, as they have realized it, is based on consumption without participating in economic and scientific development themselves. Arkoun believes that the economic achievements of Europeans were built gradually, starting with

³¹⁶ Arkoun uses the term "material modernity" in his book (1994). In his article (2003), he uses the term "material civilization." Both terms are used to criticize different forms of neo-capitalism.

religious reforms, scientific advances in various fields and disciplines, and finally through industrial progress. In this sense, he argues:

Intellectual modernity started with Renaissance and Reform movements in sixteenth-century Europe. The study of pagan antiquity and the demand for freedom to read the Bible without the mediation of priests (or “managers of the sacred,” as they are sometimes called) changed the conditions of intellectual activities. Later, scientific discoveries, political revolutions, secularized knowledge, and historically criticized knowledge (historicism practiced as philosophies of history) changed more radically the whole intellectual structure of thought for the generations involved in the Industrial Revolution with its continuous consequences.³¹⁷

As can be understood, Arkoun relies on the concept of modernity in the sense of intellectual achievements in various fields. For Arkoun, religious reform, the freedom to interpret and reform religious discourse, and, thus, the emancipation of religious discourse from the power of religious authority are the first steps on the road to intellectual modernity. In his view, most Muslim countries do not promote such reform because they cling to the tradition of closing the gate of interpretation of religious discourse that has been followed through the 12 centuries of Islam (see 3.2), when religious discourse was manipulated by religious orthodoxy. As a result, most Muslim societies have been cut off from scientific progress. In this context, Arkoun explains:

This evolution was achieved in Europe without any participation of Islamic thought or Muslim societies dominated, on the contrary, by a rigid, narrow conservatism. This is why Muslims do not feel concerned by the secularized culture and thought produced since the sixteenth century. It is legitimate, in this historical process leading to intellectual modernity, to differentiate between the ideological aspects limited to the conjunctural situations of Western societies and the anthropological structures of knowledge discovered through scientific research. Islamic thought has to reject or criticize the former and to apply the latter in its own contexts.³¹⁸

For Arkoun, the key to intellectual modernity lies in the promotion of scientific research. Scientific research is essential to understanding the anthropological structure of knowledge; for example, understanding how religious discourse has been rigorously structured by orthodox assertions. It is important to note that Arkoun highlights the need to reform and rethink religious discourse as a key feature of his contemporary intellectual project. For Arkoun, the emancipation of Islamic thought

³¹⁷ Arkoun 2003: 27–28.

³¹⁸ Arkoun 2003: 27–28.

from orthodoxy is the cornerstone for the creation of a modern intellectual Muslim society that can contribute to global scientific progress.

As explained above, however, for Arkoun, intellectual modernity does not take place in most Muslim societies; rather, a sense of material modernity has taken hold. Most Muslim societies are described as being on the periphery, outside the global center of economic development and scientific research. According to Arkoun, material modernity or material civilization becomes threatening when it has capitalist and materialist effects on societies that are outside the modernization process.³¹⁹

In this context, Arkoun points to the concept of material modernity or material civilization, referring to its elaboration by Fernand Braudel. With this concept, Braudel draws attention to those societies that stand outside the formal process of economic production, referring to them as expressions of material life or material civilization.³²⁰

Moreover, Arkoun believes that material modernity or civilization not only has a significant impact on the subordination and submission of most Muslim countries to Euro-modernity, but also replaces Islamic values of human solidarity and hospitality with a materialism that is a culture of consumption. As a result, most people are more interested in how to get rich than in cultivating their minds toward an ethical and intellectual perspective. Arkoun underscores this point in his statement:

Material modernity has disrupted traditional solidarities and replaced values of fidelity, loyalty, mutual assistance, unconditional solidarity, constancy, generosity, hospitality, and respect for promises, human dignity, and the property of others with strategies of getting rich quickly, for social and economic ascent, and for gaining power.³²¹

Consequently, El-Ayadi points to Arkoun's critique of the material modernity that characterizes most Muslim societies, as most Muslims are subjected to material consumption and modernity is reduced to its material aspects.³²²

Arkoun believes that Muslim countries can emancipate themselves from material modernity by participating in global scientific progress. To this end, Arkoun argues for a modernity based on scientific and intellectual achievement, rather than a modernity based on materialism and exclusion of others, and for a humanistic and ethical project based on the concepts of solidarity and hospitality. With his ethical and humanistic project, he wants to unite the South and the North of the world by overturning the power relations that define our world today.

³¹⁹ Arkoun 2003: 39 fn. 6.

³²⁰ Braudel 1992: 23.

³²¹ Arkoun 1994: 118.

³²² El-Ayadi 1993: 69.

In this chapter, I have examined Arkoun's critique of the hegemonic discourse that shapes the fields of religion and politics in most postcolonial countries in the Arab world and also gives rise to Western Eurocentrism. According to Arkoun, hegemonic discourse has several manifestations: It shapes religious discourse by organizing orthodoxy, it determines nationalist discourse by ordering religious identities, and it establishes authoritarian regimes by promoting enforced secularism. The hegemonic discourse also determines Euro-modernism, in which there is no equal contribution and participation in global economic development and scientific research. Thus, Arkoun proposes the concepts of humanistic secularity and intellectual modernity to emancipate Islamic thought from the hegemony of the aforementioned constructions of religion and politics. His innovative thought on secularity and modernity is crucial in today's global world for creating democratic societies where pluralism and global economic and epistemic justice are promoted. Arkoun's concept of humanistic secularity aims to promote the right to freedom of belief, which is one of the cornerstones of democracy and leads to people with different religious beliefs being able to live together in an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance of each other's differences. His concept of intellectual modernity is an emancipatory key to initiate the participation and contribution of the Global South to global economic and scientific development. In this sense, one can argue with Mohammed Hashas, who claims that "Arkoun needs to be our companion in building a tolerant and ethicist future – "our" here stands for "we" especially the Mediterraneanists, Arabs, Europeans, etc.,".³²³ Consequently, Arkoun's intellectual project is crucial to rejecting racism and global injustice in the contemporary era as he seeks to create a culture of solidarity, hospitality, and tolerance. As just outlined, in the final chapter of this part of the study, Arkoun's concept of emerging reason is explored in more detail as an analysis of his democratic and cosmopolitan project.

3.4 The concept of emerging reason: A key for a democratic and cosmopolitan project

This final chapter addresses Arkoun's concept of emerging reason and explores his intellectual, democratic and cosmopolitan project. I have chosen to examine Arkoun's concept of emerging reason in order to systematically trace his thought because I understand that Arkoun's agenda to rethink Islamic thought prepares the ground to launch his project of emerging reason which he introduced in 1996.³²⁴ As a result of his emancipatory endeavor to liberate Islamic thought from the hegemonic constructs of orthodoxy, nationalism, and materialism, Arkoun develops the

³²³ Hashas 2015.

³²⁴ Kersten 2011: 35.