

3.5 Conclusion on the thought of Mohammed Arkoun

In this second part of this study, the aim was to examine Arkoun's contemporary intellectual project based on his rethinking of Islamic thought. The purpose was to develop a transcultural approach to create a postcolonial concept of justice. My methodology for reading Arkoun's thought was based on a systematic examination of the various concepts he develops throughout his intellectual career.

The first chapter, then, dealt with Arkoun's interpretation of Miskawayh's multifaceted concept of justice, which was examined by turning to Miskawayh's ethical theory of justice, characterized by his combination of ideas from both Plato and Aristotle. Arkoun's interpretation of Miskawayh's concept shows that Miskawayh is not a mere translator of Greek philosophical thought. Arkoun emphasizes this point to show that Miskawayh's humanism is a combination of Islamic tradition and Greek philosophical tradition. Miskawayh's humanistic thought is based on opening the realm of Islamic ethics to rational and philosophical frameworks.

As part of a rereading of early Islamic thought, and in addition to Arkoun's reinterpretation of Miskawayh's ethical project on justice, the second chapter examined three approaches of thought that characterizes Al-Amiri's early intellectual project. The transdisciplinary approach means that Al-Amiri reconciles the fields of religion and philosophy by using different disciplines to study Islam. The comparative approach to the study of religions aims to convey the tolerant message that Al-Amiri wants to defend by attributing a common characteristic to the different religions in terms of belief. The rational approach is based on interpreting Islam through the rational method of thinking, logic, a thinking tool inherited from Greek thought, which could be promoted within the Islamic legacy. The chapter showed that Arkoun's reinterpretation of the early Islamic thought of Miskawayh and Al-Amiri provides the framework for his contemporary intellectual project, which is based on a rethinking of Islamic thought and a defense of a rational and humanistic stance. Arkoun is a contemporary of the post-structuralist thought of Western philosophy. He, thus, includes an influence of both systems of thought, the rational and humanist Islamic thought and the poststructuralist Western thought. Based on this transcultural approach, Arkoun introduces the concept of applied Islamology, which aims to adapt Islamic discourse to the context of current sociocultural Muslim societies. Applied Islamology also has an emancipatory meaning through a rational interpretation of religious discourse to promote women's rights within the discourse of feminism in Islam. The chapter examines Arkoun's concept of exhaustive tradition, understood as opening the Islamic tradition to more than one tradition to include the marginalized cultural tradition of Islam.

In the third chapter, I examined Arkoun's critique of hegemonic discourse to understand how it is shaped to create and construct orthodoxy in religious discourse, fundamentalist identity and radical secularism in nationalist discourses, and Eu-

rocentrism in a capitalist framework of modernity. The chapter examines Arkoun's critique of orthodoxy through his notions of Qur'anic and Islamic facts to show how the Qur'an, as revealed discourse, was transformed into a written text influenced by past traditional and cultural events and adopted by religious officials to protect political interests. Through Arkoun's notions of humanistic secularism and intellectual modernity, the chapter aims to promote pluralistic and democratic ideas based on freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and equal scientific and economic production on a global scale.

Chapter four explores Arkoun's concept of emerging reason, developed in opposition to hegemonic approaches to thought. Emerging reason emphasizes transcultural dialogue between different systems of thought. The humanistic stance Arkoun advocates in his contemporary intellectual project is explored through his notions of individual autonomy, community, and cosmopolitan concepts. In his writings, Arkoun emphasizes the importance of promoting democratic rules in Muslim societies where critical thinking and intellectual inquiry are encouraged.

To evaluate Arkoun's thinking based on the transcultural approach, postcolonial thinking, and the concept of justice, I argue that Arkoun's project is related to the transcultural approach that forms the basis for this study. Arkoun develops a transcultural approach by combining different traditions of thought, such as the Western poststructuralist school of thought, by which he is influenced in developing his critical methods for rethinking Islamic thought. He is also a reader and a great interpreter of the thought of early Muslim scholars, from whom he transfers their transcultural, humanistic, and rational thinking to our thinking about Islam today. Arkoun's project is transdisciplinary in that he combines various research disciplines, such as sociology, history, linguistics, and philosophy, represented in his method of applied Islamology, to develop a new approach of thinking in the field of Islamic studies.

Arkoun's project is postcolonial in that he opposes the hegemonic construction about Islam and the socio-political, economic, and cultural division of the globe into center and periphery. Arkoun criticizes the postcolonial discourse of religious nationalism, Arab centrism, and an imposed notion of modernity that developed in several post-independence Muslim societies. In addition, Arkoun criticizes modern capitalism, which he argues promotes an unequal distribution of production that makes the global South increasingly dependent on the global North and prevents it from participating in global economic and scientific activities. Arkoun's Enlightenment thinking is perceived as ambivalent, as he sees democratic rules and a civil society as cornerstones for the enforcement of freedom of thought and belief. However, he is critical of a radical secularism that enforces a total denial of religion. For Arkoun, Islam is a religious reality; it promotes the cultural tradition of the individual. Islam must be fundamentally reformed to be well received in our contemporary

world. Arkoun argues for a humanistic attitude based on respect for the individual and the promotion of his ability to think and criticize.

Justice is a matter of course in Arkoun's thought. As a result of a thorough interpretation of Arkoun's contemporary project, I can identify a wide range of concepts of justice, which I call transcultural justice, gender justice, procedural justice, egalitarian justice, epistemic justice, and distributive justice. To illustrate this, the first chapter of the study introduces the concept of justice in early Arabo-Islamic thought, focusing on Miskawayh's early Islamic thought on justice and Arkoun's interpretation of Miskawayh's thought. In the first chapter, the concept of divine justice is explored in order to understand what in the divine appears to man as just and what man promotes in his soul. The concept of human justice is to be understood in the context of what humans promote in the realm of social interaction and in the realm of distribution when they treat each other equally. Following Arkoun's interpretation of Miskawayh's theory of justice, this chapter explores Miskawayh's development of *transcultural justice* by combining Islamic ethical thought and Greek philosophy.

By introducing the concepts of applied Islamology and the exhaustive tradition in chapter two, I have shown that there is a notion of gender justice and procedural justice behind the use of these concepts. Applied Islamology has been used by Muslim feminist scholars as a methodological framework for reinterpreting Islamic texts to seek women's rights in Islam and to call for the promotion of *gender justice* in the religious and political spheres of society.

The exhaustive tradition incorporates a notion of *procedural justice* by asserting the right of the marginalized tradition in most Muslim societies to speak out and be heard, thus, enforcing non-discriminatory policies toward groups of minorities based on their status as non-Arabs. Arkoun demands that non-Arab Muslims living in Arabo-Muslim societies should have equal access to political, social, and economic rights, and not be excluded.

Arkoun defends a concept of *egalitarian justice* that emphasizes equality and equal treatment of different religious beliefs based on his concept of secular humanism. Arkoun believes that in secular societies, citizens must be treated equally despite their different religious beliefs. For Arkoun, secularism should not be directed against religion, but rather against the use of religion for political purposes. Arkoun argues for democratic and civil societies that protect citizens with different religious beliefs to ensure their rights and equality.

In addition, Arkoun's thought articulates a concept of *epistemic justice* based on his plea for scientific and cultural dialogue among different traditions of thought and equal participation in scientific and cultural products and achievements. Taking into account global equality in economic production, Arkoun argues for *distributive justice* that ensures that goods should be distributed equally between the North and the South.

It is important to engage with Arkoun's thought today and in this study, because his thoughts are still relevant to the recent upsurge of popular democratic movements in many Muslim countries demanding cultural and political expressions of democratic or egalitarian aspirations. Arkoun's thoughts are alive to the building of civil societies in which democratic rules are promoted. Arkoun advocates a rational rethinking of Islamic thought, which is necessary, but he rejects a total exclusion of Islam in the public sphere. His thinking about Islam is a reformatory impetus for the individual's ability to think and criticize, and for a nonviolent process toward secular and democratic ways. Throughout his intellectual career, Arkoun defends a heterogeneous Islam; an Islam that is diverse and derives from a complex and rich history with multiple traditions. Arkoun's thinking continues to oppose the political nationalism that has emerged in terms of Arab-centrism or Eurocentrism. "This constitutes a potential trigger to popular action and nonviolent democratic paths so long as we reject old or new fixed mental habits of tyranny and exclusion."³⁶⁷ Arkoun argues for a new ethos based on a humanist stance that offers the prospect of a democratic transformation of the rich resources of thought shaped by a multicentric dynamic of globalization based on transcultural and interreligious dialogue.

I would now like to shed light on some of the difficulties in dealing with Arkoun's intellectual project, which I point out. In this way, I reflect on why Arkoun's intellectual project has not been fully received in Arab academies. Arkoun critically challenges stereotypical ideas about Arab identity and the Islamic religion. Thus, his thinking contradicts the notion of an Arab identity that is firmly established in many Arab countries. Arkoun also contradicts interpretations of Islam that defy criticism and propagate fundamental ideas about Islam. For him, Islam is not a monolithic and homogeneous religious tradition. Islam should be interpreted by recognizing the subdivided Islamic traditions in the Muslim world. This assertion is not to deny the intellectual efforts of contemporary Muslim intellectuals who, like Arkoun, seek a transcultural understanding of Islamic religion and culture, and employ poststructuralist thought as a method of deconstructing Islamist religious thought and Western thought, as is the case in the thought of the Maghrebian thinkers Mohammad

Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010)³⁶⁸ and Abdelkebir Khatibi (1938–2009)³⁶⁹ – to name only two.

The lack of translation and publication of Arkoun's writings is also a problem. Arkoun himself states that his thought is met with a lack of understanding, especially by readers unfamiliar with the poststructuralist critique as it relates to Islamic studies.³⁷⁰ Arkoun writes in French; it is difficult for intellectuals, especially from the Middle East, to recognize his thought; and despite the translation of several of his books into Arabic by his student Hisham Saleh, Arkoun's thought does not seem to be very present in the Arabo-Islamic intellectual debate. In addition, Western "post-colonial" and critical theorists have not yet located Arkoun as a postcolonial thinker, considering him to be a pure Islamologist.³⁷¹

Most of the relevant secondary literature dealing with Arkoun's thought ignores the aspect of the reception of his thought within the Islamic feminist approach. The feminist reception of his thought by Margot Badran (2010), Raja Rhouni (2008; 2010), and Malika Zeghal (2012) helped me to look at Arkoun's thought from a different perspective by presenting his thinking on gender justice as a shared intellectual inquiry between him and Fatima Mernissi (see part one of the study).

Ali Mirsepassi claims that "Arkoun's discussion takes place on an abstract and theoretically rarefied level."³⁷² This is because Arkoun's project is characterized by a lack of systematization, which makes understanding his thoughts difficult and ambiguous for the readers. Arkoun himself understands this claim as a blockage that results in his thought not being discussed in most Arabic scholarship.³⁷³ For this reason, my study of Arkoun aimed to systematically connect the various concepts and

368 Al-Jabri's thought was characterized by three requests, which could be described as deconstruction of Arab thought, overcoming of traditional thought patterns, and a plea for freedom of thought. See: Sonja Hegasy: Portrait of the Philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri: Critique of Arab Reason (2009). In: <https://en.qantara.de/content/portrait-of-the-philosopher-mohammed-abed-al-jabri-critique-of-arab-reason-0>.

369 "Trained in sociology and a prolific writer of poetry, plays, fiction, and essays, Khatibi is best known for his writings on cultural decolonization and for his reflections on language, both in fiction and in his numerous essays. He was also one of the first theorists to establish historical and theoretical parallels between deconstructive and decolonial thought, supplementing the deconstruction of Western philosophy with what he calls "pensée-autre" ("other-thinking") and "double critique: a reciprocal dismantling of Western and Arab systems of thought." See: Olivia C. Harrison: "Abrahamic Tongues: Abdelkebir Khatibi, Jacques Hassoun, Jacques Derrida." In *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization*, 1st ed., 101–28. Stanford University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqds4d.10>.

370 Arkoun 2008: 5.

371 Dübgen 2020: 896.

372 Mirsepassi 2014 b: 155.

373 Arkoun 2008:7.

themes that characterize his intellectual project in order to highlight his ethical and humanistic approaches that lie behind his rethinking of Islamic thought.

I would like to conclude my study of Arkoun's intellectual project by pointing out the contributions dedicated to him as an intellectual pioneer in the field of contemporary Arabo-Islamic thought, the first of which appeared during his lifetime in an interesting book on his relevant thought, and the last after his death.

In an interesting volume realized as a tribute to Arkoun, Filali-Ansary writes, "Professor Mohammed Arkoun was a prominent and influential figure in Islamic Studies. In a career of more than thirty years, he was an outstanding research scholar, a searching critic of the theoretical tensions embedded in the field of Islamic Studies, and a courageous public intellectual who carried the banner of an often embattled Islamic modernism and humanism".³⁷⁴ In an obituary dedicated to Arkoun, Ursula Günther, one of the best-known commentators on Arkoun's thought, affirms "Mohammed Arkoun was not only a sharp-witted intellectual and humanist from the depth of his heart, with a subtle sense of humour. He was also a passionate, charismatic speaker and a dedicated teacher. He felt a part of all that is capable of opening up new links to intelligence, as he put it, and saw himself as 'an intellectual in revolt.' May his idea that thoughts develop a life of their own prove right, continuing to take effect beyond the walls of cognitive demarcations and dominant ideologies."³⁷⁵

Arkoun advocates a new ethos based on humanistic principles that promote openness, hospitality, tolerance, and democratic principles against all forms of discrimination and injustice. Currently, his work needs to be reactivated to challenge the remaining orthodoxy and hegemonic constructs that influence religion, culture, gender, and identity.

374 Filali-Ansary 2012 a: 7.

375 Günther 2010.

