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Review Essay and Response

Review Essay

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Cherkaoui, Mohamed. 2020. *Essay on Islamization: Changes in Religious Practice In Muslim Societies*. Leiden: Brill.

Mohamed Cherkaoui provides us an essay on how the Muslims worldwide challenge the secularization theory not only by increasing of their religiosity but also by their recent conversion to orthodox Islam. In order to demonstrate this point, the author uses/mobilizes data from international surveys (eg. the *World Value Survey*) and national time use surveys, as well as data stemmed from two ethnographic surveys he conducted in Morocco, a country familiar to him.

Mohamed Cherkaoui challenges many popular theories on the fading of religion, and the connection between secularization and modernization. Secularization theory usually envisaged/links a decline in *public* religious practice and an increase in its *private* practice (prayer and attendance at religious ceremonies, etc.) and draws parallels between this and the socioeconomic development that drove these countries out of the ubiquity of the sacred. Mohamed Cherkaoui for instance criticizes Courbage and Todd's (2007) work predicting the coincidence of the decline of the religious sphere with an increase in the level of education and the fall in fertility, not only in the Muslim world but also in the United States. He found also the explanatory power of the religious market theory weak, especially in its understanding of the conversion of believers into a radical religion.

In the first part of the book, Mohamed Cherkaoui paints a very compelling comparative picture of beliefs and religious practices of some sixty Muslim and non-Muslim societies (chapter 1). Most of the indicators show an increase

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of all dimensions of religiosity. The clearest dimension is the ritual, especially according to the *Time use survey in Morocco*: between two editions of the survey conducted 15 years apart, the time devoted to religious practices by women almost doubled, from 27 to 48 minutes per day. Yet, according to the author, 'the ritual level did not go into the *privatization* of the religious. Religious practice becomes indeed more and more community-based, and ostentatious, to the point where the frantic construction of mosques is no longer sufficient to satisfy demand. In Morocco, for example, the number of mosques erected over the last twenty years has followed a strongly ascending curve, which is almost exponential' (97).

Mohamed Cherkaoui also refers to another dimension of religiosity related to worldview, concluding that 'while non-Muslims have an immanentist vision of religion and believe that it gives meaning primarily to life in this world, Muslims have developed a transcendentalist conception of their faith, oriented as it is essentially to the hereafter, to the divine. These two antithetical perspectives lead to two types of conduct: the faithful of Islam gives more importance to rites and norms, while the followers of other religions give greater significance more often to altruism and philanthropy' (35). The author also argues that that religious tolerance is lowest in Muslim countries compared to Christian, Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian countries, and points out an important variation related to the religious composition of society: intolerance is greater when religious homogeneity is greater. Yet I wonder whether the intolerance is really related to the religiosity or to the demise of democratic culture in most of Muslim countries. In fact, Mohamed Cherkaoui partially acknowledges this point when he states that 'it is hard to believe that the Muslims whose views were sampled in these international surveys have some mastery of this dogmatic knowledge, apart from their candid faith in the truth of their religion. The differences in the percentage of responses to the question under study should, it seems to me, be explained by purely sociological rather than doctrinal considerations.' (31).

In his theorization of the increase process of islamization, he deploys four repertoires of arguments: the morphological, axiological, organizational and individual. At the social morphology level, the author deploys his outstanding mastery of sociological concepts and methods in an impressive analysis of the important upward social mobility of Morocco and Egypt compared to western countries but also of some downward social mobility. Yet he rightly did not consider the relative deprivation as a strong explanatory factor that can explain the religiosity in these countries.

Mohamed Cherkaoui uses his ethnographical inquiry in Morocco to argue that the process of partial rationalization of the traditional Muslim world is not the effect of Salafism nor of any religious reform, such as Protestantism in

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the West, but an unexpected and unintended consequence of two exogenous factors: colonization and politics. By that, he considers the theological or dogmatic aspects as playing only an ancillary role insofar as they have been instrumentalized for purely political purposes : I fully agree with him in this analysis. He concludes by insisting that many forms of rationalization have failed to disenchant the world.

To investigate the connection between religion and politics, Mohamed Cherkaoui goes back to the history of modern political parties, and their exploitation of Salafism in their quest for independence, arguing that this doctrine, new in country like Morocco, was strongly influenced by the Middle Eastern Salafism, where parties campaigned against the zawyias or religious brotherhoods, because of their alleged support for colonization. These parties disqualified also the religious institutions of popular Islam not only in the countryside but also in towns as well. Yet I think the qualifier of 'Salafism' should be replaced by revivalism, in order not to be confused with the Salafism of the Saudi Ben Abdelwahab school. Mohamed Cherkaoui ends up by arguing that all the 'fundamentalists' have played the role of 'proletaroïd' intellectuals, promoters of a messianism that meets the expectations of the disinherited masses, the social pressure that translate and reinforce the micro-sociological mechanisms generating these macrophenomena unexpected and not necessarily wanted. According to him, the colonialism was used by these 'proletaroïd' intellectuals to constantly resort to conspiracy theory, a plot being supposingly carried out against Muslim people who find themselves to be the new untouchable people. He is in fact, generally speaking, right with this observation but I think it should be extended to different degrees to the post-colonial and anti-imperialist left (Hanafi 2018).

Mohamed Cherkaoui studies the axiological sphere by analyzing the paradox of the ethical puritanism of Muslim societies and the adherence of some of them to the standards of the most demanding modernity. By going through public polls on people's confidence in the institutions and relations between Islam and democracy, he provides an effective criticism of those who think Islam and democracy are incompatible. He refutes also the popular exogenous explanations (media and donors funding) and proposed endogenous theories. In doing so, he sheds some light on the 'failure of the numerous attempts to anchor Salafism in the distant past but identified the causes of its present success, and elucidate at the same time the shipwreck of those socialist and communist ideologies that had aimed at projecting these societies into modernity' (118).

Mohamed Cherkaoui's book is a celebration of the profound thinking of Durkheim and Weber's theories about religion, 'whose potential and contemporaneity are more and more striking for sociologists… [C]ontrary to many other sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who

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were victim to a simplistic positivism that predicted the decline of religion, and contrary also to some theoreticians of secularization, these two masters of sociology never believed in this death foretold despite all the signs of the decline of religious practices' (144).

In spite of its importance, the *Essay on Islamization* suffers from some sweeping generalization. Cherkaoui wrote 'It might appear odd or even shocking to the specialist on Islam that I do not distinguish between social, political, spiritual and ideological movements by defining them as fundamentalism, Islamist politics whether institutionalized or not, sectarian Islamic movements, and Sufism. Yet at the outset these movements do share several common traits. The same dogmatic principles underpin their doctrines. The same stock of ideas on the social ideal, and similar semantics are specific to them. They develop a similar line against modernity, which is considered invalid because it is materialistic and scientistic, that is destructive because it denies the spiritual dimension of man' (145). Yes, indeed I found the use of 'fundamentalism' shocking and to certain extent also the use of 'political Islam'. I do understand that in order to construct a theory, you need to zoom out to see the whole picture historically and geographically but, according to me, the result here is not so heuristic and misses the opportunity to grasp the current dynamics in the Arab world where some Islamic movements are undergoing a complete transformation since the outset of the Arab uprisings. In addition, the use of such vocabulary is so loaded ideologically, especially among western and official Arab authoritarian media, that it fails to provide any useful analytical tool.

The term 'political Islam' is indeed losing its meaning, as it does not recognize the fundamental differences between revivalism and post-Islamism, beautifully analyzed by Asef Bayat (2013). This term covers a stereotyping generalization which does not account for the heterogeneity of Islamic political thought, from the moderates to the extremists, carried out by individuals, from Islamic movements to official Islam. The term 'political Islam' is often used to deride a movement and to suggest that all of its varieties are the same, composed of readers of Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood to al-Qaeda. It is worth noting that among those who employ such categorization are the 'guardians' of official-Islam who consider that the Islam to which they adhere is essentially apolitical. As such, the delegitimation by those guardians of the Islamic opposition actors in the religious sphere is a way of denying themselves from being political. In the Gulf monarchies, for example, any opposition actor is viewed as being part of the Muslim Brotherhood (this is how Khashoggi's murder was justified according to some political statements and popular tweets in Saudi Arabia), then considered as a fundamentalist and terrorist. While I agree with Mohamed Cherkaoui in his description and criticism of the

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political imagination of Islamic movements, I think that he does not take into consideration the emergence of some post-Islamic political movements, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, where the neo-revivalist and the reformist intermingle. Karim Sadek (2012) studied Rachid al-Ghannouchi's liberal policy, as an Islamic thinker and activist different from mainstream revivalists, by using Alexis Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition. What Ghannouchi is asking for is the recognition of Islamic identity in the public sphere and recognition of the importance of religious texts, interpreted through innovation (*ijtihad*) and the concept of public interests (*maslaha*). Among the most important reformists in the Arab world today are, Sheikh Ahmad al-Raysuni and Dr. Saadeddine Othmani. The former was the head of the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR) but was pressed to resign because of his fierce criticism of the King's credentials to produce *fatwa*, as the King of Morocco lacks knowledge in religious sciences. He was also famous for his criticism of the 2011 Constitution, which states that the King has a religious function (the Commander of the Believers). He is currently president of the World Union of Muslim Scholars, and his innovative influence transcends Morocco. He is distinguished with his jurisprudential views, based on his theory of approximation and preference[1] (al-Raysuni 1997). Saadeddine Othmani is, since the beginning of 2017, prime minister of the Moroccan government. Othmani was the first to clearly theorize the distinction between politics and religion without separating them. He constructed a theory differentiating between *da'wah* reasoning and political reasoning (Othmani 2009 : 113). Mohamed Cherkaoui forgets to take into account the rich literature of the Arab world to depict the current dynamics of religious movements. No wonder, as he used only 10 references written in Arabic among the 334 mentioned in the bibliography. Some of the missing references are two important surveys (Arab Parameter and the Arab Index) conducted in the Arab world with sample six times bigger than the World Value Survey and more in-depth questions. Both provided amazing pictures about the perception of the connection between politics and religion among people in the region. Just to give you an example, there are polls in the Arab world that show that respondents do not consider being religious as a prerequisite for being a political leader. Asked to prioritize the qualities requested from a political

1 For example, his opinion against the execution of the apostate utilized two basic arguments: First that the killing of apostate is against the maxim of the Qur'an: 'no compulsion in religion.' The second is that everyone is now allowed to convert from one religion to another. Another view he had was that missionaries could be allowed to operate in Muslim-majority countries, as long as Christian-majority countries allowed Muslims to make their own da'wah there.

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leader, only 5% of Tunisians mentioned being religious,[2] indicating that the majority of those who voted for Ennahda did not do so because Ennahda's candidates are religious. This percentage is higher in Jordan and Palestine but still account for less than the quarter of the respondents.[3] Yet this is not the case in Gulf countries.[4]

I found another sweeping generalization when Mohamed Cherkaoui compares Muslims worldview with non-Muslims. Cherkaoui wrote: 'Almost unanimously, Muslims believe that religion gives meaning to life after death, whereas non-Muslims consider that religion essentially gives meaning to life here and now. The former are more ritualistic, more normative; the second are more altruistic, more philanthropic'(28). I think Mohamed Cherkaoui did not take into account the importance of the creeping reform movements in many Muslim countries giving the religion its human status. New schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) have push Muslims to think in more altruistic, more philanthropic way. *Zakat* (payment made annually under Islamic law on assets and used for charitable and religious purposes) , one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is not the only element that demonstrate such importance.

In spite this criticism the book remains an important reference in the current process of islamization in the Muslim world.

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2 The Second Arab Barometer Report 2011.

3 According to the Second Arab Barometer Report in Jordan in 2011, the percentage is 25% in Jordan. The percentage differs in Palestine between surveys (varying from 8.8%, according to *Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre* (JMCC), *Survey Number 73. 2011*. (in Arabic), to 13% according to *Center for Arab World for Development and Research in Ramallah, Palestinian public opinion poll: Arab revolutions, freedoms and democracy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, local elections and presidential elections, negotiation*. 2011. (in Arabic), and 20% according to the *Polling of Palestinian university students in the West Bank: participation in elections, priorities and needs of students, general political trends, and means of electoral propaganda*. 2002. (in Arabic).

4 In Qatar, for example, the majority of respondents considers religiosity to be a major characteristic of the leader (43% strongly agree and 39% somewhat agree, to the question 'Agreeing on taking the opinion of religious ulama when it comes to political decisions'). *Study of Social Harmony: Summary Report*, September 2015. (in Arabic).

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On Religious Practices in Muslim Societies: Response to Professor Sari Hanafi

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The author of an academic study cannot but be delighted by the publication of a review essay devoted to his work and written by an eminent colleague. The fact that this note rises to such a level of intellectual rigour allows us not to despair of the future of the profession and of scientific research in our so fragile disciplines. Indeed, we sometimes find ourselves saddened spectators of the desertion of certain social scientists who leave the secret world of scientific asceticism and the quest for truth for the realm of opinion, ostentation and appearance. These defectors succumb to the charm of the melodious songs of the sirens, which promise them immediate and visible rewards if they engage in essayist fashion and lightness to satisfy the demand for cultural goods from this mass market.

On several points I agree with Professor Hanafi's remarks. On others, I am more reserved even if I assume misunderstandings or lack of clarity in the analyses, demonstrations, explanations, and expositions of my points of view in my book is the cause.

Let us begin with the factual findings. Hanafi is right to point out that I limited my analyses to international data from the World Values Survey (WVS), national time use data from several countries to which I had access, as well as the results of two ethnographic surveys that I had carried out in Morocco. Hanafi paid little attention to these qualitative studies, whose objective was to uncover *qualitative* changes in religiosity that other sources of information do not allow. To ensure completeness, he could have pointed out that I also made intensive use of the Pew Research Center data bases.

He blames me for ignoring the two series of surveys that cover the MENA region (Arab Parameter and the Arab Index), whose sample sizes are, he notes, six times larger than those of WVS and, he adds, with more in-depth questions.

The point is well taken. It is incomplete, however, in that it does not take into account the reasons why I decided not to solicit these data temporarily. First of all, the Arab world surveys draw heavily on those of the WVS. Second, the Arab Barometer covers only 14 Arab countries, whereas the scope of my research extends to Muslim countries. Admittedly, the data of this barometer

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are rich, but they go back only to 2007 and especially 2011, probably following the Arab Spring, whereas those of WVS date back to 1981 for some countries. The great novelty of the Arab Barometer concerns opinions about the Arab Spring. I will investigate them in a chapter of a book that I am currently writing.

Thirdly, there is a decisive methodological argument that enlightens my choices. My hypotheses, demonstrations, and conclusions differ from those of other works on the behaviour of the followers of Islam in that I consider it necessary to carry on international comparisons of Muslim (30) and non-Muslim (30) countries. Why, one might ask, had I not limited my study to the sectarians of Islam? I have frequently explained the reasons in my book. Would it be reasonable and sociologically sound to work out statements on religious behaviour of Muslims without comparing them to the followers of other religions? Of course, nothing prohibits it; but if we restrict our sociological propositions to Muslim societies alone, we will condemn ourselves to the perpetual paralogisms to which essentialism irresistibly leads, or at least to assertions that I would call "mute". To suggest, for example, that such and such a percentage of Muslims pray is a proposition that teaches me little. On the other hand, to establish that Muslims practice their faith ten times more often than Christians is more eloquent, more significant. Such a comparison enlightens us and also helps us to forge hypotheses to account for this great difference in behaviour without resorting to nebulous and pernicious notions, to black boxes, such as the "Muslim mentality" or any quiddity. There is no more Muslim essence than there is Christian or Buddhist essence that would account for individual behaviour.

Need we recall that many studies discredit themselves because of their circular or tautological explanations that postulate the existence of essences? It is easy to make an extensive inventory from Ernest Renan to Dan Diner. In his book *Lost in the Sacred*, this political historian makes these suspicious notions the basis of the explanation he claims to offer us of "the backwardness of the Arab-Muslim world". The backwardness of the Arab world is due, according to him, to the invasion by the sacred of all the spaces and institutions of Islamic societies. It is to be feared that Professor Diner will condemn himself to defending an ideology close to the Aristotelian conception of slavery that was mobilized by Spanish slave traders and ruthless soldiers to justify the enslavement and forced conversion of Indians considered inferior. Do we require a recent example? It is enough to remember the tragic devastation caused by the dreadful utopia of the American neoconservatives who dreamed of forcibly converting the entire MENA region to democracy, but which above all brought wars with incalculable consequences.

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Hanafi sums up perfectly the twelve theories that I had submitted to empirical tests. However, he does not mention the partial explanation of the spread of one type of Islam through geopolitical causes. The world politics of the empire and its allies, the ideology that was its foundation, ended up transforming Muslims into a new pariah people and a positional enemy, to use the felicitous expression that Raymond Aron had forged in his geopolitical works.

On the other hand, he could have drawn the reader's attention to the incompleteness of my twelfth theory of diffusion based on interaction systems. In fact, I should have explained this theory further and devoted an entire chapter to it, even though it uses sophisticated simulation methods and requires empirical data that I was unable to collect.

Hanafi shares with me the idea that relative deprivation, as a consequence of a hypothetical decrease in social mobility, is powerless to account for religiosity in the Islamic world. As far as we can tell from the available data, social mobility in these countries is high, contrary to what is believed. In fact, the structure of mobility is too complex for me to discuss it here.

Allow me to make one incidental point, however. The results of the empirical analyses that I have carried out on social and educational mobility in Egypt and Morocco contradict some of the assertions of the latest World Economic Forum report, *Global Social Mobility Index 2020*. The composite index that the authors of this report have elaborated is so heterogeneous, because it is the result of dubious methodological manipulations, that it is no longer possible to speak of social mobility or educational mobility as sociologists and economists have been accustomed to defining since the end of the Second World War. They have blithely dismissed without batting an eyelid the methodological and theoretical advances in a well-defined field, the fruit of scientific inquiries since at least Sorokin's pathbreaking *Social Mobility*. One cannot help but wonder whether the organizers of the Davos Forum were primarily trying to attract the attention of the media and the political world, even if they meant putting forward inaccurate proposals rather than offering us scientific work. My doubt also extends to the tendentious assertions about inequalities brought forward in this report, which only retained those that support the partisan thesis they are trying to defend.

Let me now turn to Hanafi's criticisms by moving from the most minor to the most significant.

1/ Tolerance, he asserts, is more related to the absence of a democratic culture than to religious practice. Suppose he is right. But the rest of his comment on what I wrote about the doctrinal competence of Muslims has nothing to do with tolerance except that ordinary Islamic zealots cannot rely on any religious prescription to account for their lack of trust in others. Let us have a quick

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glance to my analysis of the degree of tolerance, not tolerance. First, I used many indicators of this notion that empirical data offered me. Second, I spoke only of the degree of tolerance towards the zealots of other religions and not of tolerance in general which is a property of our humanity. Third, all the statements I clearly demonstrated in my book are relevant only to the *average* of the groups. In other words, it is possible to identify subgroups of Muslims who are *more tolerant* than subsets of Christians or Hindus.

On the other hand, I am not sure that democratic culture influences tolerance more significantly than religiosity. Studies in the sociology of religions show that, on *average*, the degree of tolerance is greater in Protestant than in Catholic countries. Religion, democracy, social morphology and degree of tolerance are in fact correlated sets of variables. Tolerance depends strongly on religion and social morphology. Lebanon is a perfect case in point. To account for this, we have substantial theoretical evidence that dates back to the work of Max Weber and Adam Smith on the religious market brilliantly sketched out in *The Wealth of Nations*.

2/ Hanafi is right to underline the fact that the Salafism I was talking about has nothing to do with the doctrine of the Wahhabi school. I myself have underlined this on several occasions. However, should we refrain from talking about Salafism of other movements that identify themselves as such, such as Indonesian, Indian, Central Asian, Pakistani, Turkish or Arab Muslim reformers since the second half of the 19th century? Hanafi advises me to speak of revivalism instead of Salafism. But he knows that revivalism is an expression peculiar to many Christian movements, particularly Protestant ones. On the other hand, talking about revivalism in Islam may imply that I am referring to the same religiosity. But that is not my thesis. I argue that Islam as practiced by the largest mass of Muslims and disseminated since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century – a dogmatic, orthodox, literal, puritanical Islam – is different from the heterodox Islam with pagan tendencies that was dominant in practically all these social strata for centuries. Only certain elites practiced an orthodox Islam that was light years away from the Islam of the peasant. In fact, both Islam and Christianity referred to peasants as *pagani* for centuries. It is therefore understandable why I preferred to speak of conversion when I dealt with the passage from one religiosity to another.

Despite the goals of Salafist reformers, Salafism only rationalized the world on the margins. The disenchantment of the world and its relative rationalization were unintended consequences of colonization.

3/ Hanafi contests one of the empirical results I have highlighted and the interpretation I have proposed. While on average non-Muslims, I wrote, have an immanentist vision of religion and believe that it mainly gives meaning to

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life in this world, Muslims for their part develop a rather transcendentalist conception of their faith, oriented essentially towards the beyond, towards the divine. These two antithetical perspectives lead to two types of conduct: the followers of Islam attach more importance to rites and norms, the members of other religions more often to altruism and philanthropy.

Hanafi criticizes me for not taking into account the reform movements that have taken place in many Islamic countries. He points out that new schools are innovating the *Fiqh*. Certainly, but my point is not at the level of *Fiqh* schools but at the level of the practice of ordinary Muslims.

Furthermore, I am not unaware of the importance of donations and the social functions of the many charitable societies that have always existed in the land of Islam. I do not ignore the fundamental role that Islamic movements and parties play in helping the poor, in assisting neighbours and relatives who have suffered family misfortune, and in providing financial and professional assistance, especially to "brothers". The *Zawiyas* had fulfilled these functions for centuries.

As far as I can testify, *Zakat* was not a rule complied by ordinary Muslims, at least in Morocco. Few peasants set aside a tenth of their harvest for others on the threshing floor. The extreme poverty of the immense mass of farmers did not allow them to respect such a law. This religious practice had declined with the loss of influence of the *Zawiyas*, the guardians of the Islamic faith. Do we have any data on *Zakat* today? I do not know.

4/ I am ready to face Hanafi's criticism of my linguistic approximations and the risk I took in subsuming under the same category groups that are, I agree, different, as I did at the beginning of the chapter on fundamentalism. I would, however, like my moderate recklessness to be judged against my generalizing assumptions and the conclusions I have reached.

It would undoubtedly be useful and urgent to construct a typology of political Islams and the groups that carry them. It is up to experts like Hanafi to try to do so. For my part, I am not sure that I am in a position to succeed in such an operation. My current knowledge of these movements and groups is limited.

Have I nevertheless managed to shed any light at all on the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism? It is up to the reader, and therefore to Hanafi, to make this known. Moreover, I am not sure that the Islamist movements have profoundly changed their doctrine and their intellectual and political project following the Arab Spring. I did not deal with this phenomenon in the chapter devoted to fundamentalism, the first version of which dates back to 2007. But I will address it in the book I am currently writing.

I tend to think that the emergence of "proletaroïd" intellectuals in Islam is not fundamentally different from the birth of the same groups in other

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societies, the most famous being the Pharisees in the history of the Jewish people. I am not sure I can follow Hanafi when he praises Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian Ennahda party and the ideologue of an Islamist tendency, and especially Saad Eddine El Othmani, the current head of the Moroccan government, who has written some very common writings on religion and politics. These "proletaroïd" intellectuals are at an intellectual level far below that of Muslim thinkers who are trying to define their place in universal systems of thought.

Hanafi's review essay provides me with an opportunity to clarify some ideas, clear up misunderstandings, and dialogue with a colleague with extensive knowledge and a positive critical mind. I am also indebted to its author for drawing my attention to Karim Sadek Sadek's doctoral thesis on Islamic democracy, which I was not familiar with. I will discuss it in one of the chapters of my next book in which I will continue my reflection on the relationship between democracy and Islam, to which I have already devoted a long chapter of my *Essay*.

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