

Tunisian Intellectuals: Responses to Islamism

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A number of Tunisian intellectuals see themselves and their country caught between two forces they distrust: a police state and an Islamist opposition, both ostensibly committed to liberalism and democracy. They suspect that the Islamists, if permitted to organize and campaign, would win a fair election in Tunisia, but the government stands in the way, promoting an official version of Islam and keeping Islamists in jail. It brags about its human rights record while it tries to sabotage human rights organizations operating in the country. (Talbi, 2000) It proclaims the importance of education but obstructs the free flow of information that is critical to scholar and citizen alike. These intellectuals, liberal by instinct, have turned to an historical examination of Islam in their efforts to respond to the illiberal policies of the government and the Islamist program of the opposition.*

The rise of the Islamist movement has profoundly altered political life in Tunisia as it has elsewhere in the Arab world. In the 1960s and 1970s, the viability of the state, the legacy of colonialism, the need for national unity, the imperative of economic and social development—these

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were the pressing issues. Islam was merely an element of culture. One of the most thoughtful Tunisian intellectuals of an earlier generation, Hichem Djäit, wrote in 1978:

Intellectuals of the modern type have practically repudiated Islam, either to adopt Marxism or from adherence to modernist ideology, and in both cases from a Western cultural perspective. For now, intellectuals of [this] category are cut off from the masses by their doctrinal positions and because the powers that be push them back and repress them. But they have more influence on the youth than the traditional ulema, and, despite appearances, on the political world itself.

Another leading Tunisian intellectual, Elbaki Hermassi, described three general orientations of Maghreb elites, which he termed *intégrisme*, liberal modernization, and revolutionary Marxism. He wrote that the 'liberal modernizing [tendency] has definitely set the direction and content of today's political movements. For this reason . . . we shall designate it the national elite.' (Hermassi, 1972) Only a few years later it was neither secularizing intellectuals nor traditional ulema who were enchanting university students. Islamists, reacting against both modernization theory and the passivity of traditionalist Islam, had moved to centre stage. Revolution in Iran, the assassination of President Sadat in Egypt, Islamist challenge to the Baathist regime in Syria, the emergence of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in Tunisia, and eventually civil war in Algeria have since made it impossible to treat politics in any Arab state without consideration of the Islamist factor.

A fresh generation of intellectuals in Tunisia has emerged from the liberal-modernizing tendency to examine the significance of the changes wrought by the emergence of Islamism. They mostly know each other, because the Tunisian academic community is relatively small. They are all academics, active or retired: three historians, Mohammed Talbi, Hmida Ennaifer, and Latifa Lakhdar; a political scientist, Hamadi Redissi; three legal scholars, Mohamed Charfi, Yadh Ben

Achour and Sana Ben Achour; and a literary critic, Abdelmajid Charfi. Only one of them, Mohammed Talbi, has to my knowledge attacked the Ben Ali government in print; Mohamed Charfi served as minister of education between 1989 and 1994, the early period of Ben Ali's rule, but Charfi's book, *Islam et Liberté*, published in 1998, attracted unfavourable notice from the government. Mohammed Talbi sets himself apart from the others by his open profession of faith.¹ (All speak both Arabic and French, and some write in both languages. All are modern thinkers, familiar with European philosophy and modern scholarship on Islam as well as much of the classical tradition. Because Tunisia's political predicament resembles that of many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, their responses to the pressures of authoritarianism and Islamism deserve a hearing beyond the borders of Tunisia.

For the sake of convenience I will call this group 'the professors'—without suggesting that they speak for the Tunisian professoriate as a whole or even for all those of the 'liberal modernizing tendency,' many of whom may fear to write or speak. These professors are the principal contemporary exponents of a secularist, post-Islamist perspective in Tunisia. By 'post-Islamist' I mean that their writing shows the imprint of, and responds to, Islamism, just as the Islamist movement reflects and responds to Western theories of modernization and is in that sense 'post-modern' and not necessarily anti-modern. However broad their intellectual reach, and however universal their concerns, Habib Bourguiba lurks in the background of what they write, and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali often occupies the foreground. Rashid al-Ghannushi, exiled in London, seldom gets mentioned by name, but his Islamic Tendency Movement (the MTI, which became the Nahda) is the other major protagonist. Government repression has made al-Ghannushi a hero in some quarters, but, for lack of survey data, no one knows how much support he enjoys in Tunisia. The threat of the Nahda permits the government to justify its repression.

These intellectuals find the choice between Ben Ali and al-Ghannushi unacceptable. They have sought to forge an understanding of Islamic history that supports both religious identity and universal principles. While there are differences of nuance in their views, I will argue that their arguments cohere and overlap in a single broad approach to religion and politics. They collectively challenge the idea of secularism usually attributed to Atatürk and Bourguiba and the notion of authenticity embedded in the concept of an Arab-Islamic *turath* (heritage)² dear to partisans of Arabism and Islamism. In the process, they challenge the arguments of both government and opposition in Tunisia.

Two Versions of Authoritarianism: Bourguiba and Ben Ali

A small, relatively homogenous country with a strong civic tradition, Tunisia took its independence in 1956 with a minimum of violence. Its leader, Habib Bourguiba, was an enlightened leader endowed with charismatic appeal, modernist inclinations, and international esteem. His party seemed sufficiently strong and confident to move the country from one-party domination toward genuinely competitive politics.³ Tunisia seemed destined to prove that an Arab state without significant oil resources could become prosperous and fully democratic according to the secularizing models advanced by modernization theory.

Instead, fifty years after independence and twenty years after the removal of Bourguiba from the presidency, Tunisia resembles Arab states such as Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Yemen, and Iraq in its commitment to a republican form of authoritarianism that incorporates elements of electoral democracy. Like other Arab states, Tunisia proclaims its support for international human rights even though its adherence is inconsistent. Moreover, like other Arab states both republics and monarchies, the Tunisian government now sees Islamism as its principal opposition and takes pains, as do so many Muslim governments, to clothe itself in an official, conventional Islam. Tunisia may

remain on the margins of Arab politics but it now participates in the phenomenon Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) call ‘Muslim politics.’

It was long customary to portray Habib Bourguiba as a radical secularist for his declaration that Tunisians need not fast during Ramadan because they were engaged in *jihad* against poverty—Muslims are exempted from the fast while participating in *jihad*—and for his promulgation of a legal code promoting equality for women. (Hermassi, 1978) Bourguiba enjoyed a strong reputation in Western circles, despite the authoritarianism of his one-party regime, and his successor, Ben Ali, wins favour in the West for his repression of the Islamist movement and his commitment to fight terrorism.⁴ But these simplistic portraits of Bourguiba and Ben Ali do not suffice as a backdrop for the work of the contemporary intellectuals I am calling ‘the professors.’

The story is not one of opposition between religion and state but one of collaboration. The Islamist movement emerged partly as a result of state policies and partly in reaction to them. ‘Integralism (Islamism) in Tunisia was—in the primary sense of the term and not at the level of reaction—created and driven by Bourguiba,’ (Marzouki, 2002) who instrumentalised Islam from the early days of the nationalist movement. Islamism absorbed and integrated the modernism of the nationalist movement and its commitment to action. Politician rather than political philosopher, Bourguiba valued action over theory. Similarly, Islamism identifies ‘true’ Islam with action not mere belief. The Islamists draw inspiration from Bourguiba’s own assertion that the Tunisian culture, though unique, springs from the Arab-Islamic tradition.

Bourguiba initially saw both Arabism and Islamism as a fundamental part of the Tunisian personality, ‘without any understanding of the dynamic forces of the Arab-Islamic heritage.’ (Salem, 1984) On the one hand, those dynamics turned Arabism into a plea for the unity of the emerging Arab states and, therefore, a threat to the independence and autonomy of Tunisia. Bourguiba

backed away from Arabism. (Djaït, 1974) On the other hand, the dynamics of Islam propelled Bourguiba into greater dependence on religion as a legitimating factor in the second decade of independence. Both dimensions of the heritage evolved in ways largely beyond the control of his tutelary state.

Bourguiba never quit invoking Islamic symbols. The nickname he came to cherish and promote, *al-mujahid al-akbbar*, which translated into French as *Le Combattant Supreme*, suggests sacred struggle, the ‘greatest of the jihadists.’ Once securely in power, independence achieved and his rival, Salah Ben Youssef, in exile, Bourguiba replaced the leadership at Zaytuna, the mosque-university, and then eliminated its autonomy, folding it into the University of Tunis as a school of theology in 1960. Moderate shaykhs entered a new government agency, the Directorate of Religious Affairs.. ‘The less moderate ulema were pushed into forced silence or self-imposed exile.’ (Ghozzi, 2002)

With the proclamation of a single *Code du Statut Personnel* (CSP), enforceable in secular courts, Bourguiba deprived Zaytuna of its traditional role of maintaining a separate Islamic system of justice.⁵ The CSP also made Tunisia a pioneer of women’s rights in the Muslim world. Under the constitution women already enjoyed equality of citizenship. The CSP created a civil marriage procedure based on mutual consent as well as a legal divorce procedure, abolishing the practice of repudiation; it abolished polygamy, and regulated child adoption. While Bourguiba won acceptance of the CSP in the name of a unified, secular, legal structure, he also claimed that his actions were consistent with a reformist interpretation of religious law. He claimed to be a *mufti*, one empowered to issue *fatwas* and influence the interpretation of Islam. Similarly, when he riled the Muslim world by drinking orange juice during Ramadan, he acted from a ‘new conception of *ijtihad*.’ (Sana Ben Achour, 2006) One result was ‘normative duality.’ The legitimacy of the CSP stemmed from both positive law and religious sanction. (Sana Ben Achour, 2004)

Islamism in Tunisia arose from circumstances that resembled those in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. Like Sadat in Egypt, Bourguiba rediscovered the Arab-Islamic heritage as he fought off Leftist opposition in the 1970s. His regime encouraged people to fast during Ramadan and emphasized the importance of religious education and culture. There emerged an Association for the Preservation of the Qur'an, which was an official enterprise, but it escaped state supervision. Sheikh El-Mestaoui, elected to the central committee of the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD) in 1971, wanted full application of the Shari'a. In 1973 a government decree (circulaire) tempered an article of the CSP by permitting public officials to decline validation of the marriage of a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. About the same time the government prohibited the sale of alcohol at certain hours on religious holidays. These measures appeared appealed to the nascent Islamist movement in Tunisia, which shared the regime's dislike of Marxism.

By the 1980s, Bourguiba had shifted toward repression. The Islamist movement had begun to function in two different registers, seeking, on the one hand, to wean popular culture from its materialistic, secularizing instincts, and, on the other, to acquire political power. The Islamists shared Bourguiba's vision of transforming society from on high, creating an authoritarian party in the image of the PSD. (Camau and Geisser, 2003) The Islamists were thoroughly Tunisian in their ambivalence about the use of violence, endorsing negotiation and compromise as the proper way of reaching a political agreement 'in disdain of socio-historical realities,' which are that violence normally accompanies fundamental political and social change. (Camau and Geisser, 2003)

Colonel Ben Ali may have headed off an Islamist coup by removing a senile Bourguiba from the presidential palace and putting him under house arrest in the fall of 1987. He opened the jails to free Islamists and began to wrap his presidency in a mantle of Islam thicker than Bourguiba had ever worn. In 1989 he pressed all political forces including the Islamists to sign a National Pact

declaring that Tunisia was an integral part of the Arab nation and the Islamic world. He restored a measure of autonomy to the Zaytuna mosque-university, which resumed its offering of traditional diplomas, and the government provided greater general support for mosques and imams. (Frégosi, 1995) Public television began to issue the call to prayer five times a day and to broadcast Friday services. Yet Ben Ali also proclaimed the CSP and women's rights untouchable.

The Islamist movement flourished in this new atmosphere but its success soon triggered repression.⁶ Ben Ali stopped short of authorizing the Mouvement de Tendance Islamique (MTI) as a political party—the law banned religious parties—but the MTI turned itself into the Nahda (to take 'Islam' out of its name) and, throwing caution to the winds, ran independent candidates in the elections of 1989. Nahda candidates won about 18 per cent of the vote, which frightened the regime but demonstrated that the Nahda did not represent the majority of the country. Soon thousands of Islamists were again in jail. Their leader, Rashid al-Ghannushi, fled to London. Books were banned, e-mails censored and the universities cleansed of Islamist presence or activity.

Ben Ali won a second term as President, and then a third, manoeuvring to overturn constitutional rules against staying even longer. While there are distinctions to be made between his rule and that of his predecessor—for instance, the political infighting of the Bourguiba years seems to have given way to more individual, entrepreneurial struggle for a share of the public pie—the similarities in method (presidential power), in style ('free' discussion within narrow parameters), and in definition of the Tunisian personality ('Arab-Islamic' as defined by the presidency) far outweigh the differences. Security is the prime consideration. Security measures at Bourguiba's funeral in 2000 seemed designed to prevent Tunisians from celebrating their founding hero. By one appraisal, if Bourguiba confiscated political life, Ben Ali simply abolished it. (Camau and Geisser, 2003)

Response of the Professors

The Nahda, now headquartered in London, takes every opportunity to tar the government of Ben Ali by citing human rights abuses, and the government responds by portraying Nahda as a terrorist organization. The government contends that no Tunisian government has ever been more attentive to the protection of human rights. It claims to be dedicated to liberalization, and Nahda, too, insists that it favours an Islamic form of government based on democratic principles and liberty for all.⁷ The government of Ben Ali, like that of Bourguiba from 1956 to 1987, contends that its style, uniquely Tunisian, fits Tunisian realities, and the Islamist movement claims similarly to be one of a kind.

The 'professors' come from a context in which these two forces, government and Islamist opposition, constitute a single socio-political reality. Using the appeals and symbols of Islam, the Islamist movement arose to challenge a government already committed to using those symbols. Government-supported schools and institutions have produced the human material of the movement, and the movement has in turn caused the government to reinforce its own commitment to the Arab-Islamic tradition. Government policies, and not just the repression, reflect Islamist pressures and threats. To these intellectuals the reasoning of both government and opposition appears tightly related to Sunni Orthodoxy and difficult to reconcile with scientific reasoning and universal human rights. (Lakhdar, 2002) Dissonance results. These intellectuals seek to overcome dissonance by bringing together Tunisia's past with the needs of the modern period, preserving Tunisian identity while honouring modern methodologies and responding to modern, universal imperatives.

The professors call for the study of history as a means of desacralising a set of human actions and explicating the emergence of orthodoxies and ideologies. They resist the temptation to

use history as a grab bag of ideas. Islamists give the early period heavy play at the expense of later, inconvenient episodes of Arab-Islamic history. They tend to regard Islamic history beyond the first *fitna* (656-660) as an aberration from the path established by the Prophet and his Companions and hence as unworthy of analysis. Several of these intellectuals label this kind of picking and choosing ‘bricolage’ (*talfiq*); the French term (which can mean do-it-yourself home improvement⁸) implies lack of logical coherence; the Arabic suggests ‘fabrication’ and even ‘falsification.’⁹ By emphasizing history as a set of human choices, contested when they were made as they are now, the professors hope to open the way toward greater liberty, tolerance, and mutual respect. While none of them argues for complete separation of religion and politics, several suggest arrangements that would free religion from political repression and the government from the need to manipulate religion.

Islamic History

Hamadi Redissi asserts that there is a narrative unity to a set of events and a realm of culture, a narrative burdened with the problems so many scholars have described: closure of philosophical thinking, lack of a genuine political theory, continual and extensive recourse to violence, inadequate economic and social development, a long tradition of authoritarianism. In arguing for Islamic exceptionalism, he subscribes to the view that there is something called ‘Islamic history,’ but he tries to separate himself from Orientalists and fundamentalists by arguing that Islam as a set of revelations and religious doctrines cannot be held responsible for this exceptionalism. The exceptionalism results, in his view, from human efforts to essentialise and sacralise that which is contingent and non-essential---from the sayings of the Prophet to the proclamations of contemporary governments seeking to cloak themselves in the ‘mantle of the Prophet.’ Redissi dissociates himself from those who see the burdens of the Arab-Islamic past as decisive for the future (Elie Kedourie, 1994) or determinative of world politics (Samuel P. Huntington, 1996).

Muslims maintain their exceptionalism from universal trends toward liberty and democracy by allegiance to an ideological understanding of the past---seeing the present in the light of the past, rather than the past in the light of present needs.¹⁰

Although the professors apply the tools of the modern historian, Mohamed Talbi exempts the Qur'an from such an examination. As a scholar who proclaims himself a devout Muslim, he takes the Book as the word of God and exempts it from the sort of textual and historical analysis that others, such as Mohammed Arkoun (1982), would apply to it. For Talbi the Qur'an is synonymous with Islam. (Nettler, 2000) The Shari'a, largely built upon the corpus of hadith, does not enjoy the status of the Qur'an and must be subjected to historical analysis. Talbi emphasizes that Muslims have constructed all interpretations of the Qur'an, all versions of the Shari'a, all theories of the caliphate. He notes that Abu Bakr became caliph by decision of a small, informal group who came to a unanimous conclusion; Abu Bakr, in turn, selected his successor, Umar, but the third caliph, Uthman, won the office in a meeting where there was dissent. Three selections reflected three procedures and gave rise to three theories! Talbi quotes one of the great lawyers of the third Islamic century, Abu Hanifa, speaking of the pious ancestors: 'These were men and we are men.' (Talbi, 2000) No single human effort to implement Qur'anic ideas deserves consecration—or disdain.

Abdelmajid Charfi observes that the Islamic tradition tried to sacralise the successors to the Prophet. The ulema invented procedures for justifying what had happened. In claiming divinity for the actions of human beings they contradicted the idea of a transcendent God. (Filali-Ansary, 2003) The companions of the prophet were cautious about proclaiming divinity for their opinions. Instead, they elevated the opinions and actions of Muhammad and enshrined the Qur'an. 'But then, against all expectation and despite all logic, if one can speak of logic in this context, Shafi'i and the

whole group of legal specialists proclaimed these statutes [which came to make up the Shari'a] to be judgments of God,' ignoring the personal coefficient involved in their production and the context in which the interpretations were offered. They saw themselves as simple interpreters of God's legislation. (Abdelmajid Charfi, 1996) An historian must see them differently.

Mohamed Charfi makes a similar point about the caliphate itself. He observes that Orientalists, ulema, and Islamists all assert that Muhammad founded a state. He, Mohamed Charfi, accepts the conclusion of Ali Abd al-Raziq, the Egyptian 'alim relieved of his duties for writing *Islam and the Foundations of Governance* in the 1920s. For Abd al-Raziq, what Muhammad established in Medina lacked the characteristics that have come to be associated with a state: persistence of a community in time, common institutions and a notion of sovereignty. For Abd al-Raziq, it was the superiority of force, not religion, that created the caliphate. (Abderraziq, 1994) 'I think the debate should have ended with Abd al-Raziq,' writes Abdelmajid Charfi (2004a) Yet subsequent generations, led by the ulema, came to see the caliphate. as legitimate, and Orientalists followed them in this judgment, seeing the caliphate as both religious and political. Islamists have sought to revive the 'Medina state' as an ideal for contemporary emulation. For Mohamed Charfi, as for Abd al-Raziq, legitimacy could not inhere in a regime established by force; Mustafa Kemal's abolition of the deserved only celebration. Yadh Ben Achour finds the Abd al-Raziq conclusion too sharp and clear for the facts on which it is based, but he observes that the law did develop separately from caliphal power, which became hereditary and despotic: 'In some measure the history of the Caliphate is a story of compensation in *de facto* power for a Caliph who do did not have power *de jure*.' (Y. Ben Achour, 1980) Islam did not authorize despotism, but neither did it authorize any other form of government.

As a lawyer, Yadh Ben Achour emphasizes the historical generation of the Shari‘a. In an early book, a version of a dissertation published in 1973, he compared the legal history of the West with that of the Third World, mainly the Islamic world. He traces the way in which the law lost its transcendent qualities in the West, while elsewhere the law remained rooted in God’s will. ‘The Muslim jurist has no vision of the law that is detached from religion. The law is applied religion; religion is a rule of law.’ (Y. Ben Achour, 1980) In a later book designed as introduction for first-year students of the law, he explains the failure of the Mu‘tazilites to establish reason as the basis for knowledge and judgment as the foundation of morality and responsibility. ‘They were not systematic philosophers, and their speculation never directly touched the law. The Asharite view came to prevail as a result of the ‘combined power of arms, learning, and numbers.’(Y. Ben Achour, 1993) Ben Achour characterizes that view as deterministic, depriving human beings of moral responsibility for their actions.

Ben Achour sees the law as an empty set that societies fill from their repertoires of customary practices, religious beliefs, and rational calculation. The problem for him is to explain how the Islamic tradition constructed a system in which there was such tight linkage among ethics, ritual, faith, and the law. The system enshrined norms said to come from God, and a believer gets to heaven by following these norms. From that basic idea the ‘*usuli fuqaha*’ constructed a coherence based on obedience to God, the Prophet, the companions, and the ulema. (Y. Ben Achour, 1993) The consequence is a legal structure, created by human beings, that cripples the ability of modern Muslims to take full responsibility for themselves, to be fully human.

‘How close is God to the world?’ In what sort of hands, human or divine, is the direction of worldly affairs? (Y. Ben Achour, 1992) That is a key question for the understanding of the law, according to Yadh Ben Achour, and it is also fundamental to the understanding of the history that

all of these intellectuals are promoting. When Abdelmajid Charfi says, in effect, ‘A transcendent God does not do these things,’ he desacralises virtually the whole of Islamic history. If the tradition is not sacred, then it cannot be embraced as a whole, or rejected as a whole, any more than the Western tradition can be accepted or rejected. Ben Achour writes (1980): ‘It is vital for us to defy both inward-looking authenticity and imitative Occidentalism.’ History is the actions of human beings, many of them well intentioned, that are not necessarily more virtuous or more flawed than those of contemporary human beings. The present cannot claim the ability to escape the past, but neither can it objectify, label, dissect, and exploit it.

These writers differ in assessing the burdens of history. For Redissi the intertwined experiences of Muslims and Arabs have created an exceptionalism in world history that will not be easily overcome. The past suggests what must be avoided: the closure of thought, a spirit of isolating culture, the predatory state, the dreams of Arab unity or Islamic consensus, the history of authoritarian governments. He says it is complicity among clerics, princes, and public opinion that must assume ‘responsibility for maintaining Islam in its exceptionalism.’ (Redissi, 2004) Presumably he puts the Islamists among the ‘clerics,’ even though Al-Ghannushi and others are not members of the ulema. The solution is ‘proceduralism,’ by which he would seem to mean some version of Rawlsian democracy, but he stops short of explaining how Muslim states can achieve it. (Redissi, 2004)

Mohamed Talbi is the most optimistic of these writers. He speaks willingly of the ‘handicap of the past.’ He says, ‘. . . We must explain the painful heritage of the past in order to go beyond it.’ Islam has all too often been a religion of violence rather than dialogue, he says, even though Islam, shaped early on by interaction with Judaism and Christianity, ought logically to be disposed toward dialogue.¹¹ He cites the so-called ‘Constitution of Medina’ as prescriptive of a multi-

religious society. Unlike Rashid al-Ghannushi, he does not argue that the Qur'an and the sunna require liberalism, democracy, tolerance, and human rights, but he sees nothing in the Qur'an that conflicts with tolerance, mutual respect, science, and liberty. 'For reasons that remain to analyse and deepen, intolerance carried the day over tolerance, which had, however, made for the greatness of Muslim civilization.' (Talbi, 1996).

Talbi's optimism stems from his spirituality. Like Mohamed Iqbal whom he quotes frequently, he believes in the oneness of religious experience and the existence of a single truth, even if no human being has access to the truth. History has meaning and moral purpose, but human beings may not be able to discern its direction. Dialogue can help human beings understand the partiality of the truths they espouse and advance toward mutual respect. His spirituality pushes him to a universalism of perspective that carries Tunisians beyond themselves—beyond 'the Islamic or Arab or Arab-Islamic imaginary' which is 'today the motor of our history.' (Talbi, c. 2000) He recalls that Tunisia was also Berber, Punic, Roman, and Judeo-Christian in moments of its history now largely ignored.¹² If religious experience does not depend on historical success, and if there exists a God to inspire the search for truth, then the burden of the past is less crushing. Talbi elicits the optimism of a man of faith; Redissi evokes the realism of social science.

History as Ideology

It seems unlikely that these Tunisian intellectuals would have engaged in the study of Islamic history, if the Islamist movement had not summoned God closer to the world, and governments had not rediscovered the utility of religious legitimation. The professors are responding to a specific set of circumstances generated by independence, dashed hopes, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the persistence of authoritarianism, and the rise of Islamist movements. For Mohamed Charfi, Islamism is 70 per cent a product of circumstances: al-Jazeera, Israeli policy, and George

Bush. Oil constitutes the other 30 per cent of the explanation. Oil wealth permits the Gulf states to propagate their versions of Islam throughout the Muslim world.(Charfi, 2006) While this explanation may be simplistic, it does point up the circumstantial nature of religious resurgence. The professors have responded to these circumstances by trying to show how Islamists distort the past when they invoke one version of it to justify religion as the foundation of modern politics.

For Redissi and for Talbi, the construction of the *turath*, an ideological understanding of Arab-Islamic history, began in the nineteenth century with the *nabda*. Arabs hitched themselves to unrealizable dreams of Arab and Islamic unity, and some cling tenaciously to these dreams even today. The appeal of the *turath* also stemmed from the neediness of the new nation-states, short on legitimacy and eager to find a *raison d'être* beyond grubby origins in military takeover or international complicity.¹³ The polarization of the world during the Cold War may have contributed to the growth of ideological politics in the Arab world, too. Abd al-Nasir and the Ba'ath moved in that direction. Redissi notes that even intellectuals bear some responsibility by touting the impossible dreams born of the *nabda*. (Redissi, 2004) Islamism emerged in response to the relative failures of other ideologies to produce quantitative and qualitative improvements in the lives of Muslims.

The Tunisian Islamists, led by Rashid al-Ghannushi, accused Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba, of promoting Western secularism as an ideology. According to al-Ghannushi, Ben Ali initially sought to accommodate Islamism but eventually reverted to Bourguiba's embrace of *laïcité*. The professors differ with al-Ghannushi in that they see Bourguiba not as a radical secularizer (laïciste rather than simply laïc) but as a pragmatist who pushed Arabism and Islam to bolster his legitimacy. Mohamed Charfi writes that Bourguiba's greatest mistake was to permit the Islamisation and Arabisation of education in Tunisia. 'In brief, the establishments of public instruction functioned for twenty years as schools for the training of Islamic [Islamist] *cadres*.' (M. Charfi, 1998)

While the intent may have been to limit the impact of religious teaching, the result was quite different. Schools expanded too quickly, using teachers who were products of an inferior, religious education and unqualified to teach in public schools. Then, as the regime came under Islamist attack in the 1970s, it sought further accommodation, Arabising the teaching of philosophy (without sufficient translations of European philosophers), doubling the amount of Islam taught in the schools, and entrusting the teachers of religion to provide civic education, as well. ‘That ended up tripling their hours [of religious instruction] with, as a consequence, an increase in ideological influence on the young.’ (M. Charfi, 1998) Even now, after the Charfi reforms, the public schools devote one and a half hours a week to teaching Islam in primary and secondary school, and the emphasis is on dogma. At the primary level pupils learn what is licit and what is illicit according to standard Sunni interpretations of Islam. They learn the seven pillars of Islam and how to pray. ‘There is no effort to teach spirituality.’ (S. Ben Achour, 2006)

Redissi extends the analysis beyond Tunisia. ‘In the Muslim countries, the trajectory of the educational systems is almost identical from one country to another.’ (Redissi, 2004) The public schools all devote substantial amounts of time to teaching Islam from the first years on, and the Islam taught in school is overwhelmingly inimical to tolerance and human rights. He notes that religion is usually taught in private schools in the West, but in the Muslim world ‘public education, from the primary school to the university, gives it an important place, which is, moreover, augmented by the presence of private religious schools financed by pious works, by oil money, and sometimes by public funds!’ (Redissi, 2004) School books whip up resentment against foreign intervention and revert attention to the Arab-Islamic heritage. Like Mohamed Charfi and Sana Ben Achour, Redissi believes the public educational establishments, far from encouraging critical thinking, have fuelled the flames of Islamist protest even as the regime has tried to suppress

Islamism. The government has re-established the Conseil Supérieur Islamique to regulate official Islam and ban Islamist publications. It censored an illustrated history of the Qur'an (Talbi, 2000) but published an elegant, state-sanctioned version. As Redissi observes, the Tunisian government conforms to the pattern of the Arab world as a whole in its control over official religion as in its repressiveness.

State-endorsed orthodoxy prevails in Tunisia but the state cannot insulate against other sorts of religion as it did in the Bourguiba era. Television brings Egyptian and Saudi preaching into Tunisian homes with messages that are not progressive or even consistent with Tunisian law on women's issues in particular. Sheikh Qaradawi, the Egyptian preacher, and Amin Khaled, a didactic, highly Orthodox Saudi, have attracted admiring publics in Tunisia. When discipline of an Islamist prisoner led to a trampling of the Qur'an in a Tunisian prison, media from the Gulf states called Tunisia to account, and the regime used one of its newspapers, *La Presse*, to tout its record of mosque construction and general support for Islam. The state claims a monopoly on Islam, but the widespread access to satellite television compromises the role of the state as sole mediator. (Lakhdar, 2006)

Denouncing ideologies and the orthodoxies from which they spring, the professors decline to embrace secularism. They emphasize that secularism has many different meanings, that the French notion of *laïcité*, the model for the Turkish experiment under Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, does not suit contemporary needs and that a balance between religion and politics of the sort now being sought in Turkey is perhaps more realistic as a goal than *laïcité*. (A. Charfi, 2004a) Talbi says nothing in Islam stands in the way of *laïcité*, unless *laïcité* becomes an anti-religious ideology. (Talbi, 2000) For Talbi, an intolerant secularism is as destructive as an intolerant religion. Yadh Ben Achour writes that the long battle between Sufism and legalism within Islam shows that 'secularism

[*laïcité*] has accompanied Islam forever and that the great intellectual and political battles of today are not as new as one might think.' (Y. Ben Achour, 1993) There are as many varieties of secularism as there are of Islam, he observes. Hmida Ennaifer says that separation between religion and politics can never be complete, but arrangements must respect everyone's right to religious freedom. There must be respect for pluralism. (Ennaifer, 2006)

Historical Specificity and Universalism

The professors see themselves and their country as embedded in a set of larger circles: scientific, academic, economic, social and political. These circles function on the presumption of a set of universal rights and values that do not conflict with Islam but cannot be derived from it without distorting history and manufacturing ideologies. These intellectuals see themselves as citizens of the world who happen to come from a tradition with a long history of accommodating and absorbing foreign cultures. They are convinced that a critical study of history will lead Muslims back toward a universal perspective. The Muslims they cite most frequently and with greatest admiration are Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Rushd, and Muhammad Iqbal, all cosmopolitans whose work opened doors to the world beyond Islam. True to form as academics, the professors call for research aimed at liberating Islamic history from particularism and orthodoxy.

The title of Redissi's book, *L'exception islamique*, betrays his universalistic perspective. He argues that the Arab-Islamic world has painted itself into a corner from which it must escape in order to enjoy the prosperity and liberties that have been gaining ground elsewhere. Talbi's universalism stems from his conviction that there is a single religious truth that one can experience in a variety of ways—Islam is but one of them—and that fundamental truth grounds universal rights. A larger, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world of the sort promised by the Qur'anic links to Jewish and Christian narratives is likely to be a more creative and humane than a religious tradition

closed in on its own experience. For Yadh Ben Achour, civilized living depends upon the rule of law, and law must necessarily reflect local norms and values. But it must also conform to rational, universal precepts of morality. One may take account of al-Shafi'i but one cannot ignore Kant. Mohamed Charfi presses the need for schools in which students learn to think critically and scientifically. It is easy to combat the ignorance of peasants, he says, but much more difficult and dangerous to confront the 'half-ignorance' of those with diplomas but parochial vistas. Authenticity cannot come at the expense of broader understanding. Abdelmajid Charfi argues that the message revealed through Muhammad opened the way for human beings to be autonomous, free, responsible and creative—not segregated and regimented by a set of fixed legal recipes derived by lawyers from the purported sayings and conduct of the Prophet. For him, the Qur'anic message laid the basis for a universal ethic.(A. Charfi, 2004b) Sana Ben Achour makes a case for women's equality in inheritance law both from the perspective of universal human rights and from a reading of the Qur'an that takes women and men to be equal.(S. Ben Achour et al., 2006)

These writers refuse to choose between East and West.¹⁴ They do not claim that science produces absolute truth, and for that reason they cannot definitively reject any partial truth, whether of spiritual or scientific origin, generated under specific historical circumstances. Both Mohamed Charfi and Yadh Ben Achour assert that democracy requires relativism. No value can be absolute, not even the value of democracy itself.¹⁵ No human being, whether *'alim* or nuclear scientist, can aspire to more than an approximation of truth. Government embrace of Islamic orthodoxy cannot alter the truth value of doctrine. No contemporary reformulation of doctrine, however persuasive, can be taken as definitive in the way many Islamists would suggest. For this reason, several of these Tunisian intellectuals denounce the concept of apostasy as particularly destructive for the Muslim world. Talbi finds every opinion useful except those which would deny others the right to express

opinions, which he terms ‘intellectual terrorism.’ (Talbi, 2000) Yadh Ben Achour notes that the Muslim tradition has accorded freedom of belief to minorities (Christians and Jews) but denied it to Muslims. Witness the cases of Faraj Foda, Abu Zayd, and Salman Rushdie.¹⁶ The *dhimma*, according to Talbi, offers good precedent but does not suffice in the present age, because it does not protect atheists, Buddhists, or even dissenting Muslims. Every human being deserves not just toleration but respect, in his view. (Talbi, 2000)

The liberty the professors defend derives from universal human experience. They find historical Islam concerned with justice more than with liberty. (Talbi, 2002 and Redissi, 1998) Yadh Ben Achour admits there are moments when Islam seems liberal by fostering freedom of opinion within a delimited framework of belief. It accords to infidels rights that are not available to Muslims. (Y. Ben Achour, 1980) Redissi notes that Islam entertained three different political discourses, one linked to the notion of prophecy and succession, a second devoted to the advising of kings, and a third developed out of the Greek philosophical tradition. Only the first of these discourses, centred on the question of rightful leadership in the Islamic community, survived into the twentieth century, principally in the Shi‘ite community. (Redissi, 1998) The other discourses might ultimately have been more productive in speaking to the problem of despotism and liberty.

The professors oppose both al-Ghannushi and the Tunisian government on the question of liberty. Talbi joins al-Ghannushi in lamenting the human rights record of Ben Ali. As a human rights activist, Talbi experienced government efforts to swamp human rights organizations with loyal appointees, who then whitewash the regime. ‘Never has Tunisia had a better record of human rights,’ the regime proclaims, but the jails contain several hundred Islamist political prisoners, and the complaints of torture have been numerous over the years. Mohamed Charfi notes, however, that Islamists dissented when the Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights adopted a

resolution promoting freedom of conscience. Talbi observes that a measure of intolerance exists everywhere, but theological intolerance is worse than other forms by virtue of rigidity. ‘Religious tolerance can be exercised by the state in the interest of the state or against the state. It always has a link with the political.’ (Talbi, 1996) For Redissi the problem of tolerating the intolerant is not limited to Muslim states, but several prescriptions of the formulaic interpretations of the Islamic past—Islam or death, Islam or protection, death or repentance—accentuate the problem of tolerance in Islam. (Redissi, 1998)

The professors distrust the Islamists for their certainty that Islam is necessarily political, democratic and liberal, progressive and modern, open to change. The Islamists base their claims on readings of the Qur’an and the hadith, and on selected interpretations of those texts. The result is an orthodoxy, albeit freshly composed, that differs little from the orthodoxy embraced by the Tunisian state. Orthodoxy means rigidity and closure, not the openness that the Islamists seem to promise.¹⁷ While they claim to be asserting timeless truths anchored in the Qur’an and the Sunna, the Islamists shape those truths to match the political needs of the moment. They cultivate the public with appeals that sound innocuous and plausible to naive believers—many Muslims take their formulation to be ‘le véritable Islam’ (Redissi, 1998)¹⁸—but in fact represent a particular political position that if implemented would affect all Tunisians. No position is innocent, especially not a Ghannushi effort to derive civil liberties and democracy from the Arab-Islamic *turath*.

None of these writers argues that Islam is inconsistent with democracy and none argues that Islam requires it. Talbi writes: ‘Democracy is nothing else but organized deliberation by the most appropriate means as a function of changing conditions of time and place.’ (Talbi, 2000) Citing John Rawls, Redissi argues for ‘proceduralism’ as the only possible response to the *de facto* pluralism of the Islamic world. (To seek consensus is to deny the reality of pluralism.) Talbi acknowledges

his debt to both the Islamic and Western traditions and finds himself richer as a result. He joins Mohamed Charfi and Redissi in wanting to expose students to multiple traditions, but Talbi also denounces relativism which he characterizes as finding ‘comfort in doubt but comfort that comes from laziness and resignation.’ (Talbi., 2000) Pluralism is a public good that must be cultivated and extended; democracy is a natural concomitant of pluralism.

Orthodoxy negates pluralism. Abdelmajid Charfi, perhaps the most eloquent on this point, praises Ibn Khaldun for his critique of Arab historians, who twist information to make it conform to norms and rules. Ibn Khaldun forgives these errors on the basis of good intentions and lack of liberty. Charfi says he cannot forgive bad social science. The message of Muhammad must be put in the perspective of the times, and Muslims must assess Muhammad’s own role in processing these revelations. He would, unlike Talbi, apply modern methods even to the analysis of the Qur’an and to the actions of Muhammad, the ‘pious ancestors,’ and the *fuqaha* who created the Shari’a. This is the way to ‘open’ Islam¹⁹ and to move beyond orthodoxy. (A. Charfi in Filali-Ansary, 2003) Latifa Lakhdar calls orthodoxy the *terreau* (potting soil) of Islamism. (Lakhdar, 2002)

These academics call for study and research to combat the insularity of Tunisia and of the Arab-Islamic world. Talbi wants historical study driven not by political or religious passion but by the search for truth. Tunisia needs a centre for religious studies, he says, and Yadh Ben Achour seconds that idea by calling for study of religions from the outside as if we were ‘extraterrestrials,’ but also from the inside to see how religions respond to what lies outside the religious sphere. (Y. Ben Achour, 1993) Mohamed Talbi wants a curriculum in secondary schools that pushes students to read Tahtawi, Abdu, Abd al-Raziq, Taha Hussein, Tahar Haddad, Mohamed Talbi, and Abdelmajid Charfi along with the traditional interpretations of Islam. He wants to make sure students understand scientific inquiry. Abdelmajid Charfi presses for fresh scholarship on all

Islamic texts to interpret them in the context of history. (Filali-Ansary, 2003) More specifically he calls for better understanding of the establishment of the succession to the Prophet, of the institutionalisation of Islam, and of the development of justifications of *'usul al-fiqh*. Abdelmajid Charfi prides himself on having established courses on the history of Islamic thought first at the École Normale Supérieure in 1969 and then at the Faculté des Lettres in Tunis, when he became dean of that institution. In such courses he teaches about Islam as he would teach about any other religion; he thinks of himself as taking distance from his subject even though he puts himself within the tradition. (M. Charfi, 2006)

These writers all want separation of religion and politics, but they differ on how much. Yadh Ben Achour sees balance between religion and politics as characteristic of Islamic history, The state protected religion and provided justice in accordance with divine law. In return, the state enjoyed legitimacy. That balance broke down under European intervention and the forces of modernization unleashed in the nineteenth century. The state sought to take control of religion. 'Which vision of Islam is more stabilizing for the state,' he asks. Abd al-Nasir's? Khomeini's? Bourguiba's? The common motto of these leaders, despite the difference of their policies: 'No Islam above the State.' For Yadh Ben Achour that means that secularism proceeds everywhere, and genuine religious faith moves outside the control of the state. 'Total division is a matter of time.' (Filali-Ansary, 2003) A new balance might take the place of the old. His criteria for balance are freedom of religious conviction, lack of any official philosophical-religious position and no direct reference to religious texts in the law. (Y. Ben Achour, 2006)

Mohammed Charfi writes about the need for separation and the need for balance. 'Governments that foster modernity and teach tradition pursue an unstable equilibrium, a system that is not viable.' (M. Charfi (1998) Talbi favours a clean break between religion and state in order

to save religion from political exploitation, but Redissi, himself a partisan of separation, acknowledges that religion must play some role in legitimating government, and Yadh Ben Achour cannot envision a legal system that does not bear the imprint of religious norms and values. To exclude religious views and perspectives and to ban religiously based parties from political participation runs counter to the open, deliberative, procedural system that these intellectuals endorse. Abdelmajid Charfi acknowledges his support of *laïcité* but also concedes that it comes in many forms, which would necessarily be different in the Arab-Islamic world than in the Christian. ‘. . . In my opinion it would be illusory to ask for the separation of religion from politics. Personally I am for a distinction of levels not for a separation.’ (A. Charfi, 2004a) One cannot ask believers to abandon their convictions when they engage in political actions, but politics must nonetheless have its own rules external to religion. Politics must not instrumentalise religion. ‘No one can pretend that his Islam is better than others.’ (A. Charfi, 2004b) Latifa Lakhdar argues the state cannot be neutral toward religion, at least until society becomes secularized, a process that took many centuries in Europe. (Lakhdar, 2006) Mohamed Charfi and Sana Ben Achour are categorical: the state must control religion. (M. Charfi, 2006, and S. Ben Achour, 2006)

The notion of balance between religion and politics surfaces frequently in the writings of the professors, but none of them defines that idea as precisely as one might wish. Colonialism upset the old balance, which was suited to a set of economic, social, and political circumstances that no longer exist. A new balance must take account of a plurality of beliefs and practices as well as the need for a nation-state integrated into international politics and the world economy. Bourguiba sought balance between authenticity and openness, but in the end the balance tipped toward authenticity, and the openness diminished.

Conclusion

The professors, despite variations in their argument, propose a line of thinking that might be described as both post-modernist and post-Islamist. It is post-modernist in that it attacks the deterministic implications of modernization theory and, especially, its secularization hypothesis. They now see Bourguiba, like Atatürk, as dedicated to state domination of religion and the use of Islam for nationalist purposes. While committed to ‘balance’ between religion and politics, they reject any idea that political modernity implies rejection of religion or its relegation to the domain of ‘folklore’ in deterministic process of social and economic change. Modernity does not mean abandoning tradition. Religion remains vital to the legitimation of the contemporary Tunisian polity as it is to every other Arab state. The professors are post-Islamist in the sense that they also reject the notion that there is an authentic reading of the Islamic past that can legitimate any contemporary government, democratic or authoritarian. They oppose the government’s efforts to teach and protect a sanitized, official version of Islam and they are equally hostile to Rashid al-Ghannushi’s efforts to define the *turath* as inherently consistent with democracy and human rights—even though the professors emphatically support universal rights and especially the rights of women as established by the CSP. Government and Islamist efforts alike depend upon the efforts of human beings to sacralise particular interpretations of scripture and history as authentic representations of the Arab-Islamic past. Both Ben Ali and Rashid al-Ghannushi legitimize their policies in the name of cultural authenticity.

The professors deny, in effect, the possibility of cultural authenticity by suggesting that all such constructs reflect human ratiocination. Truth with a capital ‘T’ needs no authentication. If truth is self-evident, then there is no need to assert or demonstrate its authenticity, but modernity has brought the study of all religions and exposed them to the ravages of history. History

undermines all fixed truths, as Nietzsche observed, by tying ideas to contexts, epochs, and human actions. Human agency explains the emergence of orthodoxies such as the Shari'a and ideologies such as Arabism and Islamism. The truth about Arab and Islamic history is that it is plural, complex, and contradictory, but the professors are careful not to elevate even that notion of truth into the realm of the 'authentic.' (Talbi, 1972 and 1989) In this respect they take some distance from Mohammed Arkoun, the Algerian philosopher and historian, who has made many of these arguments over the past three decades but also insists that modern social can establish the 'truth' about Islam.²⁰ For that reason he shuns the label 'post-modernist.' These Tunisian intellectuals, with the exception of Mohamed Talbi, (who nonetheless calls explicitly for the study of history) appear more willing to forego any possibility of establishing a definitive truth by virtue of modern scholarship, although they entertain the possibility of spiritual truth. At least two of them, Talbi and Yadh Ben Achour, see democracy as the only political system that does not depend on a fixed notion of truth. Only human agency can define a policy, a philosophy, or a version of history as authentic. By virtue of that fact, all claims to authenticity are necessarily false. The concept itself, which supposes that there is a truthfulness beyond the multiple truths that compete for the loyalty of human beings, is suspect.

The notion of a single, unambiguous heritage, often linked with the word *turath*, is thus suspect. The word '*turath*' appears emerged as a term to describe the search for an Arab-Islamic past that would authenticate contemporary actions.²¹ The term has been more associated with the dream of Arab unity than with any other aspiration, although Islamists have also endorsed it, and Marxists have employed it to describe how Arab intellectuals delude themselves by anchoring their aspirations in the past. (Laroui, 1976) Marxists such as Laroui adhere to a notion of truth derived from a single, scientific reading of history, which is at odds with the *turath*. The professors reject not

only a 'scientific' reading but also any definitive reading of history that can be defined, delimited, packaged and objectified as the *turath*.. Feeling beleaguered in a society that is apparently becoming more religious by the day and one where the links to Western media and Western intellectual life seem more tenuous than they were thirty years ago, these intellectuals may not command a wide following in Tunisia or elsewhere. But is there any other Arab country where a significant minority of intellectuals are willing to attack prevailing orthodoxies of government and Islamist opposition with such courage, coherence, bluntness, and insistence? Tunisia may be exceptional in this regard.

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Notes

1. Criticized by Talbi, Hamadi Redissi replied that the personal religious views of a social scientist are irrelevant to his analysis. See 'Fede e sapere: la polemica Talbi-Redisi sull'interpretazione del Corano,' *Annali de sotria dell'esegesi* 17:2 (2000), 625-642.
2. By referring to the past as 'inheritance,' *turath* implies interpretation, a reference not to what has been but what Arabs and Muslims choose to remember of their history. And it implies an objectification, a fixed understanding from which moderns can draw wisdom. "The Arab-Islamic turath . . . is supposed to be authentic and indigenous, expressive of the collective cultural identity shaped by the Islamic-Arab historical experience." (Binder, 2004)
3. For example, Moore (1965) and Rudebeck (1967). Huntington (1968) offered a theory of transition from one-party to multi-party politics.
4. For a highly laudatory account of Ben Ali's Tunisia, see Borowiec (1998). Bécet (2004) claims to chart a moderate course between government and opposition but ends up with favourable treatment. Bécet is slightly more judicious than Borowiec.
5. The terms of the CSP appear to reflect the work of Tahar al-Haddad, a Tunisian pioneer and hero in the realm of women's rights. His book appeared in Arabic in 1930.
6. Ghannushi said the MTI strategy had not been to seize power but to 'enforce' liberties, 'even if this led to the fall of the regime.' (Hamdi, 1998)
7. *al-Hurriyāt al-amma fi l-dawla al-islāmiyya* (1993) is the most complete expression of Ghannushi's thought. Tamimi (2001) offers a sympathetic treatment of Ghannushi and his movement. Hamdi (1998) is critical.
8. A 'bricoleur' is a jack of all trades.
9. Redissi (2004), Charfi (1998), and Lakhdar (2006) all use the term. The *Hans Wehr Dictionary of*

Modern Written Arabic, edited by J. M. Cowan (Ithaca: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1976) defines *talfiq* as ‘invention, fabrication, concoction, fibbing; falsification.’ An incomplete examination of al-Ghannushi’s work (1992) offers some support for the Redissi accusation of ‘bricolage.’ While al-Ghannushi identifies true Islam with rights, consultation, and democratic instincts, he attributes violence and authoritarianism to circumstances that have afflicted all religions including Islam. He differentiates the essential Islam from the non-essential on grounds that are anything but clear.

10. Abdelmajid Charfi (2006) disagrees with Redissi about Islamic exceptionalism. He takes Redissi himself to be an essentialist.

11. See Nettler (1998, 1999a, 1999b). Nettler’s articles provide a list of Talbi’s publications.

12. In using the term ‘imaginary,’ Talbi resorts to a type of analysis used by Mohammed Arkoun.

Much of what Talbi argues fits the general approach of Arkoun, although Arkoun would not exempt the Qur’an itself from historical analysis. Talbi nonetheless calls Arkoun ‘a cultural Muslim’ and Arkoun regards Talbi as a ‘fundamentalist.’

13. On this point the ‘professors’ concur with the analysis of the Islamist Rashid al-Ghannushi.. (Tamimi, 2001)

14. Talbi (2002) warns against phobias of either East or West.

15. Interviews in Tunis, June, 2006. Mohamed Charfi cited the example of fascist regimes that came to power democratically. Democrats had to struggle to reassert the superiority of their system over fascist dictatorships.

16. See, for example, M. Charfi (1998) Chap. 2.

17. Latifa Lakhdar examines the work of three Muslim thinkers on the question of women’s rights and duties, one from 12th century Baghdad, one from 19th century Tunisia, and the third from 20th century Egypt. She found a high degree of similarity, especially in method. She speaks of effective ‘consensus.’ Lakhdar (2001).

18. Redissi (2004). Otherwise, he says, “The élite “bien pensante” denounces [the Islamists] as products of a semi-literate cartel.’
19. ‘Une pensée islamique ouverte, dans le sens que Bergson donnait à la religion ouverte, aiderait à coup sûr les Musulmans à affronter plus lucidement les défis de leur sous développement.’ (A. Charfi , 2003).
20. A group of Tunisians including Hamadi Redissi hosted a conference on the work of Mohammed Arkoun in Tunis in 1993.
21. To judge by the number of books published with the word ‘*turath*’ in the title, the term enjoyed its heyday in the two decades from 1980 to 2000. Books listed in World Cat with both ‘*turath*’ and ‘Islam’ in the title, numbered 417 for the period 1970 to 2004. By decade: 1970-1979—48; 1980-89—133; 1990-1999—147; 200-2004—45. Books with ‘Arab’ and ‘*turath*’ in the title numbered 165 for the whole period. The Beirut center for the study of Arab unity, *Markaz dirasāt al-wahda al-‘arabiyya*, has produced a disproportionate share of titles including the word ‘*turath*.’

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