2 Evaluating the standard narrative

Central to the standard narrative of contemporary Arab thought is the binary of authenticity and modernity. As we will see, one of the main things holding back alternative conceptions of Arab thought is the assumption, common among Western pundits as well as Arab authors, that the meanings of these terms are well known and beyond dispute; that authenticity always relates to a set of cultural markers that originate in the past, and that modernity refers to Western science and forms of social organization that do away with authentic traditions. To disabuse us of this stable, unambiguous interpretation of the authenticity–modernity binary, in this chapter we will start chipping away at it in several ways. First, we will look at how the standard narrative is often linked temporally to the modern Arab "turning point par excellence": 1967.[1] As is case with the standard narrative generally, it would be foolish to neglect this crucial event in recent Middle Eastern history outright. The defeat has had a lasting impact on many of the engaged intellectuals who experienced it living in the Arab world, but also outside of it – for example, Edward Said and Talal Asad. When we use this date to make sense of what has occurred in Arab intellectual history, however, we should remain aware of the consequences of carving up history in this particular way. Intellectual history is always linked to changes in society. Hence we justify seeing certain trends, defining problematics, and radical breaks in the development of any intellectual discourse by referencing what happened in the broader historical context. The justifications for taking 1967 as a cut-off point are obvious. The Arab defeat in the June War marked the end of an era of optimistic reform. It signaled the coming out of the Islamist movements. Understandably, the authenticity–modernity problematic that arose during the following two decades was read against this background, namely as the result of changing fortunes within Arab society. The defeat against Israel was conceptualized by Arab intellectuals in terms of an *Arab* trauma and as a consequence the discourse of authenticity and modernity that followed in its wake was largely understood as being particular to the Arab world, not as a problematic that affected the world at large.[2]

1 Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, 82.
2 It was of course not the first such trauma. As mentioned earlier, the defeat of the Arab armies and the founding of Israel in 1948 also gave rise to critical appraisals of the state of the Arab world during the 1950s. These were not, however, marked by a similarly overwhelming sense of defeat. These criticisms were articulated within a different problem space, one marked by an anti-colonial struggle, whose Third-Worldist hopes and principles were embodied in the declaration of the Bandung conference of 1955. As David Scott argues, this problem space began to alter in the 1960s as the Bandung project was undermined, leading to a new set of vocabularies, attitudes and, above

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What has been the effect of this focus? While there is some logic in forefronting the experience of 1967, if we focus on it completely, it may blind us to different ways of telling the story of Arab thought that are more open to connections between what happened in Arab circles and outside the Arab context. Focusing on events particular to the Arab world provincializes their history. In certain cases, this zooming in on the local context can be beneficial, if only to counter universalizing tendencies of much of academic theory. However, it can lead to a distorted view if it excludes the global setting in which this history unfolds; if it makes unintelligible any reference to general trends in the formation of a modern subjectivity that form the backdrop for the specific problem space of late twentieth-century Arab thought. The trick is to balance the universal and the local, to acknowledge how modernity is, in a way, a story of how ideas, institutions, and practices were instituted on a global scale, but that this "universalistic thought was always and already modified by particular histories."[3] One way of exploring these connections, of *de*-provincializing Arab thought, is to look critically at the origins of the problematic of authenticity and modernity and the ubiquitous invocations of *turāth* that accompanied it.

2.1 Challenging the local perspective: What is so special about 1967?

Looking at 1967, one indication that we should indeed be cautious about reading the Six-Day War as *the* pivotal moment in Arab intellectual history is the fact that topics like *turāth*, authenticity, and religion already took center stage and were already being discussed in the kind of critical fashion associated with post-1967 *turāth* debates before the *hazīma* had occurred. A prime example is Abdallah Laroui's *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine.* This book outlines many of the problems that came to be associated with Arab thought during the final decades of the twentieth century, and the question of cultural authenticity is there, front and center, in the first chapter. It was written between 1961 and 1964 and came out in May 1967,

all, a new set of questions that were salient for the intelligentsia in the postcolonial world – see David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11. It is in light of this change in problem space that we can understand why seemingly similar criticisms of Arab societies and Arab thought were different in kind. Whereas previously the mood was one of defiance, the post-1967 moment may be described as one of crisis or tragedy.

3 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xiv.

that is, one month before the outbreak of the Six-Day War.[4] Moreover, it is notable that Laroui conceived of this work during a stay in Egypt right at the time when the writings of Sayyid Quṭb, who was executed in 1966, started to foment fundamentalist strains of Islamism. Regardless whether the image of Quṭb as a staunch traditionalist is truthful, this stereotype of him and of the movement that he helped shape was on the minds of progressives like Laroui and other Arab intellectuals when they turned their pens against the Islamic Revival.[5] Hence, from their perspective, the roots of this conflict lay in the intellectual scene of the 1960s, not in the effect that the *hazīma* might have had on the Arab psyche.

Similarly, Carool Kersten has argued that the Egyptian intellectual Ḥasan Ḥanafī can be read as a harbinger of the later *turāth* discourse, as the latter's "theoretical and methodological framework for the philosophical study of religion" was developed in the 1960s. Ḥanafī's agenda thus defies "the assumption of an immediate causal link between the fallout of the war and the return of religion in Arab intellectualism."[6] Corroborating this trend, if we focus for a moment on a couple of thinkers who will feature centrally in our narrative, we see that the ideas that would captivate intellectuals in the 1970s were fermenting at least one decade earlier in the works of both of Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd and Adonis. Maḥmūd mentions shifting from his earlier logical positivist phase to the study of *turāth*, before the supposedly crucial events of June 1967. Indeed, we see a hint of his later obsession with *turāth* in his book *al-Sharq al-Fannān (The Artistic East)* from 1960.[7] Adonis, meanwhile, in the introduction to his dissertation *al-Thābit wa-l-Mutaḥawwil* (*The Static and the Dynamic*) admits that the main ideas for this work stem from the time when he compiled the first edition of an overview of Arab poetry.[8] This was in the late 1950s. In all, these are some indications that the foundations for the subsequent discussions about heritage and cultural authentic-

4 Nancy Gallagher, "Interview – the Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui, a Moroccan Intellectual," *The Journal of North African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 137.

5 Although Laroui's direct target in *L'ideologie arabe contemporaine* is the Moroccan intellectual ʿAllāl al-Fāsī, he admits in an interview that this book was inspired by two Egyptian experiences: first, his reading of Egyptian publications on the question of society between 1930 and 1950, and second, his own experience of the cultural deterioration (*taqahqur*) in Egypt in 1961. In particular, he mentions that his book was written as a response to Sayyid Quṭb's (*al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām*)—ʿAbd Allah al-ʿArwī, "al-Taḥdīth wa-l-Dimūqrāṭiyya," *al-Ādāb* 43, no. 1–2 (1995): 20.

6 Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam*, 152.

7 He himself confirms having started his project of *turāth* analysis in 1960 – Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, *ʿArabī bayn Thaqāfatayn* (Cairo: Dar al-Shurūq, 1990), 390–91.

8 The introduction to the first volume of Adonis's "Anthology of Arab Poetry" (1964) in fact lays out the structure of the argument that he will pursue in his dissertation in the 1970s – Adūnīs, ed., *Dīwān al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2010), 15–92.

ity that would come to dominate intellectual circles in the final decades of the twentieth century, were already in place.

These first signs of the *turāth* debate could be accommodated if we attribute the occurrence of binary tropes of tradition–modernity, religion–science, backwardness–progress, etc. to the dominance of modernization theory in the 1950s. This origin is proposed, for example, by Reinhard Schulze.[9] But we can even push the clock back further, pointing out that the *nahḍa* is primarily associated with the drive to ensure the progress (*taqaddum*) of Arab society, a bid to undo centuries of what was presented by *nahḍawī* intellectuals as centuries of decay (*inḥiṭāṭ*) – as discussed in Chapter 1. As part of this progressive impulse, we find among this group a renewed, or rather, a new kind of interest in history. One important part of the *nahḍa* project was to articulate a new, coherent historical consciousness that could accommodate modern progressive and nationalist historiography. This involved the formulation of new conceptions of time, progress, and identity, which led to a historiographical realignment that was decisive for the modern understanding of Arab-Islamic intellectual history. Modern printing technology, the emergence of publishing houses and new methods of editing, together with a need to articulate an authentic Islamic intellectual tradition resulted in fierce debates over what the pre-modern Islamic intellectual tradition consists

9 Reinhard Schulze, "Is There an Islamic Modernity?," in *The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and International Relations*, ed. Kai Hafez, trans. Mary Ann Kenny (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 22. More recently, Fadi Bardawil has made the more nuanced suggestion that, while modernization theory has indeed been effective in creating this binary mode of discussing Arab culture, this should not distract us from actors that have tried to move beyond this rigid system – see Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, 5. Whether the division between tradition and modernity as an abstract relationship maps onto how society is in fact organized, as sociologists and economists who espoused modernization have been to prone do, is a different matter. As Baber Johansen has argued with regard to the ideological use of the concept of tradition in postcolonial Morocco, the situation in Moroccan society cannot be captured in any such generalized distinctions, but has to be described as a continuing process of negotiation between a capitalist and a non-capitalist sector in which the dualist relationship between tradition and modernity "is reproduced and sharpened" – see Baber Johansen, "Tradition und Moderne in der Dualismus-Theorie," *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 25, no. 4 (1975): 27. Incidentally, this materialist approach to the question of *turāth*, which looks not at how *turāth*, modernity, or authenticity are discussed by Arab intellectuals but whether applying these terms makes sense from a socio-economic point of view, may offer a different avenue for critique. This is not further pursued in the current study, which focuses on the discussions themselves and the perceptions by Arab intellectuals of what ails Arab societies, not whether their views are a proper reflection of the true relations of political and economic power in these societies.

in.[10] Concomitantly, at around the same time, in the 1930s and 1940s, we see an intellectual face-off between a discourse of authenticity and one of modernity.[11]

This analysis is shared by, among others, ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, Fuʾād Zakariyyā, and Joseph Massad, all of whom point to an even earlier period in the late nineteenth century as the starting point for the interest in *turāth* and the problematic of authenticity and modernity.[12] As mentioned earlier, Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī even calls the question of authenticity and modernity "the renaissance question" (*al-suʾāl al-nahḍawī*).[13] Looking at philosophy in particular, we see a drive towards establishing an authentic Islamic philosophical tradition in the writings of the influential philosophy professor and follower of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq. ʿAbd al-Rāziq was set on demonstrating the "originality and authenticity of Islamic philosophy" as a way of proving the "compatibility of the Islamic theory of life with modern thought,"[14] and an important part of this project was to build an Islamic philosophical canon. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq was an influential figure, a beacon for the next generation of philosophers who continued his project in different ways, including such luminaries as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī and ʿĀlī Sāmī al-Nashshār.[15]

The combination of a drive for progress and a search for authentic roots is key to many analyses of the *nahḍa.* These concepts map onto what Peter Hill has recently termed the two metanarratives of the *nahḍa* that continue to be used by Arab and non-Arab scholars alike to make sense of the *nahḍa.*[16] The first of these metanarratives is a heroic story of the triumph of reason and progress over backwardness, a story in which the Arab nations struggle to get with the times to secure the well-being of their people. This is the story of the *nahḍa* that

10 Ahmad Khan, "Islamic Tradition in an Age of Print: Editing, Printing and Publishing the Classical Heritage," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 54.

11 Roel Meijer, "The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt 1945–1958" (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1995), 24–25.

12 ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, *al-Aṣāla aw Siyāsat al-Hurūb min al-Wāqiʿ* (London/Beirut: Dar aL-Sāqī, 1992), chap. 2; Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 16–29; Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 85–86.

13 al-Jābri, "The Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought," 176.

14 Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "Al-Azhar and Islamic Rationalism in Modern Egypt: The Philosophical Contributions of Muṣṭafā ʿAbd ar-Rāziq and ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd," *Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988): 130.

15 Angela Giordani shares the view that it was specifically the group of philosophers following in the footsteps of Muṣṭafa ʿAbd al-Rāziq who did much to develop the modern notion of *turāth* – see Giordani, "Making Falsafa in Modern Egypt: Towards a History of Islamic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," 125.

16 Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*, 3–7.

arose among the liberal Arab intelligentsia. The second narrative is a tragic one. It tells of an Arab world that has been deceived into adopting Western innovations that have not brought it wealth and well-being, as was promised, but instead destroyed the traditional social fabric that held Arab societies together for centuries. Both narratives have their stock representatives – Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Jūrjī Zaydān, and Aḥmad Amīn on the side of heroism and Rashīd Riḍā, Sayyid Quṭb and Muḥammad Jalāl Kishk as their tragically inclined opponents. These narratives continue to be espoused until this day. In academia, Christopher de Bellaigue's *The Islamic Enlightenment* represents the heroic narrative in what Hill calls its "unreconstructed form,"[17] whereas Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* and some of the work by Talal Asad can be seen as contemporary representatives of the tragic sensibility.[18]

It should be mentioned that, as was the case with the *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm, both these narratives have received a fair amount of criticism as scholarly interest in the *nahḍa* has increased.[19] Yet, as Hill rightly notes, the two metanarratives remain relevant, if only because they continue to be used in the Arab world by historians who require a neat paradigm to make sense of modern Arab history and, in the post-2011 phase of revolution and counterrevolution, "as Arab states continue to trumpet the heroic narrative of *tanwīr* [enlightenment] in combat with its unenlightened enemies; while the tragic counter-narrative of 'intellectual invasion' by

17 Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*, 6. Hill also mentions Tarek El-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity* and Ussama Makdisi's *Artillery of Heaven* as examples of this trend: see Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*, and Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle Between Faith and Reason, 1798 to Modern Times* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

18 Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) in particular ch. 7.

19 It deserves emphasis that this opposition between a heroic and a tragic paradigm is not *the same* as the *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm. The former is a division over future expectations, whereas the latter is a historical frame for describing the pre-modern Arab world. Yet, the two are also connected. The *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm of a decadent pre-modern situation was formulated and used by the heroically minded liberal reformers to paint a future of progress built on the reforms initiated by the Egyptian ruler Muḥammad ʿAlī (1769–1849), while the sense of loss underlying the tragic sensibility informed a rejection of this legacy. These two positions are clearly related to the *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm in a discussion between Jurjī Zaydān and Muḥammad ʿAbduh in the journals *al-Ḥilāl* and *al-Manār* sparked by the centennial of Muḥammad ʿAlī's accession to power. For a description of this debate, see Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt*, 31–35.

the West remains Islamist orthodoxy."[20] As his analysis of the argument shows, however, these narratives did not arise after 1967, but rather echoed earlier divisions in Arab thought, albeit in a new geopolitical, social, and intellectual context.

It is not only the case that these metanarratives echoed through the debates on *turāth* after 1967. *Turāth* itself was also on the radar before that time; *nahḍawī* intellectuals were already reassessing (and in a certain sense reinventing[21]) their shared heritage, and took a great interest in Arab-Islamic historiography. They were also aware of the tensions that might arise between the advent of the modern and the traditional worldview that suffuses *turāth.* The efforts of these scholars in fact honed in on this tension as they formulated ways of adopting new ideas and inventions without giving up too much of their identity as Arabs and as Muslims. It is not the case, moreover, that these earlier generations only focused on the material adoption of modernity, ignoring the need to change to a modern mindset. They were not under any illusion that adopting modern science and technology would be possible without serious repercussions for the mentality of the citizens of the nascent Arab nation-states. Late nineteenth-century journals were teeming with discussions on modern manners, ethics, and social organization. English manuals of ethics were incredibly popular, at least among the liberal, literate segment of the population, and Arabic versions of them were seen as a necessary part of the modern curriculum in university and later also in secondary schools.[22] In the 1950s, the

20 Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*, 9. The concept of enlightenment in contemporary debates in the Arab world and its politicization by less-than-"enlightened" regimes is discussed at length in a recent book by Elizabeth Kassab: *Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution: The Egyptian and Syrian Debates* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). An interesting source that she refers to is the article by Mona Abaza titled "The Trafficking with Tanwir (Enlightenment)"; see Mona Abaza, "The Trafficking with Tanwir (Enlightenment)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (2010): 12–46.

21 For an insightful look at the reinvention of the Islamic classics during the *nahḍa*, see: El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition.*

22 For example, Aḥmad Amīn's *Kitāb al-Akhlāq* (*The Book of Ethics*), which is largely based on Victorian manuals of ethics and education, began as an instruction manual for judges. It was later used in an abridged version in Egypt's secondary education system, which had a tradition of using ethics manuals either translated directly from English or based on Victorian sources – as is clear from records at the Egyptian Ministry of Education, a book entitled *Uṣūl al-Akhlāq* (*The Sources of Ethics*) and likely attributed to the Scottish theologian James Denney (1856–1917) was assigned as reading for students in secondary education in 1925, and has a lot in common with Amīn's book. The general impact of Victorian ideals of character is discussed in, for example, Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 108–11. It is important to remind ourselves, however, that even as European modes of ethics and education were introduced, they were also "refashioned, renegotiated, and rendered intelligible in non-European contexts." Omnia El Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and

doyen of Arabic letters, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, in reaction to the discourse on tradition and renewal that was already being articulated at the time, discussed the necessity of engaging in the slow development of a new self in order to truly renew society.[23] Marxist thinkers like Anwar ʿAbd al-Malik envisioned "the purification [*takhlīṣ*] of the Egyptian thought and spirit [*wijdān*] from all imperialist influences" so as to create a "new personality" by reviving the "national heritage" (*al-turāth al-qawmī*).[24]

Given this historical record of continuous discussions of *turāth* and different iterations of the problematic of progress and decay, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, authenticity and modernity, what are we to make of the claim that 1967 marks the beginning of Arab thought's "contemporary" phase? If something changed in the period following the June War, it certainly was not due to new elements being introduced into Arab intellectual discourse. The basics were already there. Even the critique of the decadence and fleeing from the problems of the everyday is not something to which the pre-1967 Arab community was entirely oblivious, as evidenced by Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Tharthara fawq al-Nīl* (*Adrift on the Nile*) – published in 1966 – or the poem "al-Ẓill wa-l-Salīb" ("The Shade and the Cross") by Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr.[25] If anything did change in the late 1960s, it must be seen as a change in degree, not in kind. The 1967 defeat confirmed a trend, a loss of confidence in the heroic narrative of progress and Enlightenment. Simultaneously, the tragic sensibility gained momentum. A renewed sense of loss of identity set in without the gain of political and economic independence to make up for it. In this new landscape, the topic of *turāth* itself becomes problematic. It is no longer assumed that with the adoption of certain institutions, inventions, and customs Arab societies will be able to become like Europe, only with a different cultural orientation. Aided, perhaps, by a culturalist theoretical turn in Marxist thought in the early 1960s, intellectuals now start to think of the Arab mind as being structurally incapable of coming to terms with modernity.[26] The

Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 158.

23 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Taqlīd wa-Tajdīd* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 2013), 23.

24 Meijer, "The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt 1945–1958," 245.

25 Ṣalāh ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlu lakum …* (al-Maktab al-Tijārī li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Tawzīʿ wa-l-Nahsr, 1961); Najīb Maḥfūz (Naguib Mahfouz), *Tharthara fawq al-Nīl* (Cairo: Dār Misr li-l-Ṭibāʿa, 1966).

26 The importance of Marxist theoreticians, in particular someone like Althusser, for this generation of thinkers has been remarked upon by Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, 125, Manfred Sing, "Arab Self-Criticism after 1967 Revisited: The Normative Turn in Marxist Thought and Its Heuristic Fallacies," *Arab Studies Journal* 15, no. 2 (2017): 152, and Harald Viersen, "The Ethical Dialectic in al-Jabri's 'Critique of Arab Reason',"

problem is no longer simply that of combining old and new. Before that can happen, the old must first be purged of its anti-modern tendencies that determine the Arab mind. Gone is the still somewhat carefree optimism of liberal and socialist reformers who thought that with a little tweaking here and there the postcolonial world could pull itself up out of the morass of colonial backwardness and dependence, without thereby harming its cultural heritage. As part of this endeavor to purge the shared Arab consciousness, there is a proliferation of interest in research methods (*manāhij al-baḥth*) that may be used to unlock the depths of Arab thinking, through methodologically sound analysis of the traditional heritage.[27] Thinkers like Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī and Ḥasan Ḥanafī use frameworks provided by Althusser and the phenomenological tradition, respectively, to formulate elaborate research projects to reread *turāth* in an effort to de-essentialize it and make it compatible with the modern age. They, in effect, try to bring the two sides of authenticity and modernity together, by giving *turāth* a positive spin, portraying it as potentially progressive or at least not as equivalent to passive imitation (*taqlīd*). No matter how one judges the success of these complicated endeavors, *turāth* is now at the heart of the problem. On the one hand it is debated in more theoretically sophisticated terms, yet on the other hand a basic binary structure of this discourse appears to prevail.

This dominance, evident in the growing number of books published and conferences organized around the theme of "authenticity and modernity," means that the role of the intellectual changes as their room for maneuver is restricted. Given the dominance of this problematic and this particular way of understanding authenticity as almost synonymous with *turāth*, it has become incumbent on every Arab intellectual to take a stance on this issue. Whereas before, notwithstanding the various constraints on expression in an increasingly authoritarian climate, in-

in *Islam, State, and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World*, ed. Francesca M. Corrao, Zaid Eyadat, and Mohammed Hashas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 253–55.

27 It should be noted that, like the interest in *turāth*, the focus on methodology was also pioneered by Muṣṭafa ʿAbd al-Rāziq and his students. We see this for instance with his previously mentioned student ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār, who already in his master's thesis displays a great interest in research methods. This thesis, which was published under the title "Islamic Thinkers' Methods of Investigation and Muslims' Critique of Aristotelian Logic" (*Manāhij al-Baḥth ʿind Mufakkirī al-Islām wa-Naqd al-Muslimīn li-l-Manṭiq al-Arisṭoṭālīsī*) would, as Angela Giordani writes, "become the foundation for all of his later work" – see Giordani, "Making Falsafa in Modern Egypt: Towards a History of Islamic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," 214. It may well have been al-Nashshār's lectures at Muhammad V University in Rabat during the 1970s that inspired Moroccan intellectuals like Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭāhā to focus to such a high degree on methodology, specifically in the study of *turāth*.

tellectuals could still propound national, Marxist, or existentialist ideals free from reference to the historical paradigm of *turāth*, starting in the 1970s, these theories have been increasingly channeled through readings of *turāth.* Concomitantly, the meaning of the central terms of the *turāth* debate, authenticity and contemporaneity, has become set. During the 1970s, it was still possible for a literary critic like Shukrī ʿAyyād to offer different understandings of authenticity. When we get to the 1980s, the idea that authenticity is a broad and intricate concept, that it can include non-temporal references to personal creativity and originality and that, barring a few exceptions, it is not a virtual equivalent of *turāth,* is drowned out. By that time, the reigning consensus had narrowed the meaning of authenticity to that of modernity's eternal diachronic adversary. This basic paradigm for Arab thought would remain in place during the final decades of the twentieth century and at least up to the Arab Spring. Moreover, it has affected popular discourse in important ways, as evidenced by the many newspaper articles and televised discussions in which the problem of *turāth* is translated to a broader public.

2.2 Contemporary Arab thought from a global perspective

What changed in or around the late 1960s was not that *turāth* was introduced as a new topic, but that it became a *dominant* interest for a generation of intellectuals. In the 1970s and 1980s, *turāth* and the question of authenticity became the name of the game, for intellectuals working in academia, but also in bureaucratic institutions that saw it as their task to build a cultural identity, and for artists who felt called upon to navigate questions of authenticity and modernity in their work.[28] To what extent this had to do with the defeat of 1967 is not clear. Seen

28 Examples of *turāth* reception in the arts are found in Arab theatre, music, literature, and popular culture – see Pannewick, *Das Wagnis Tradition: arabische Wege der Theatralität;* Dina Amin, "Arab Theatre Between Tradition and Modernity," in *The Modernist World*, ed. Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 481–87; Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music, Modernity, and the Aesthetics of Authenticity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); Wael Abu-'Uksa, "Liberal Renewal of the Turath: Constructing the Egyptian Past in Sayyid al-Qimni's Works," in *Arab Liberal Thought After 1967: Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*, ed. Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Tarik Sabry, *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World: On Media, the Modern and the Everyday* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010). The institutional interest in *turāth* with the aim of creating a firm national identity has already been commented on in Western academia some time ago – see Dieter Bellman, "The Reception of the Cultural Heritage as a Factor of the Process of Civilization and Its Reflection in Arab Cultural Development Concepts," in *Arab Heritage and Traditions: Burden or Challenge*, ed. Günther Barthel and Gerhard Hoffmann, vol. 22, Asia, Africa, Latin Amer-

as a prelude to the 1973 oil crisis and the growing financial and political clout of Islamist organizations and their ideologues, it may well be part of an explanation. These are surely interesting historical questions that affect how we look at intellectual history of the period. For now, what interests us more than the historical explanation is the common perception of 1967 as a marker for a new era in Arab philosophy. Among Arabs, the defeat was felt as a defeat of the Arab nation. Since the effect was felt locally, the subsequent use of this date as a starting point for a new era in the intellectual history of the Arab world had a local bias. The particular focus on *Arab-Islamic* heritage that developed in its wake, and which was explained in the context of the ascent of Islamist politics, did more to strengthen the perception that the excessive interest in the question of authenticity (and modernity) was an Arab affair. It reinforced the insider's perspective on contemporary Arab thought. Discussions of *turāth* in these years hardly referenced broader, global intellectual trends, largely isolating Arab thought. Arab thought became a way of dealing with an Arab trauma through analyzing the Arabic textual tradition. Even if certain ways of understanding Arab thought were gleaned from Western theories, the result was a discourse that was self-consciously parochial.

It is sound historiographical policy to take the insider's view seriously. Only by listening to what is said locally can we avoid riding roughshod over the peculiarities of local intellectual history. At the same time, this does not imply that we ought not be critical of the testimony of these informers. Even if Arab thought was articulated locally and the self-perception of it as a local affair plays a big part in the way philosophical debate is conducted, this should not blind us from seeing similarities between the development of intellectual discourse in the Arab world and other regions. Focusing on the question of authenticity, the obvious candidate for such comparisons would be postcolonial thought in other parts of the world. Here, the possibilities for comparison are legion. The ubiquity of authenticity discourse throughout Africa and Asia in particular following the Second

ica: Special Issue (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), 128–37; and Dieter Sturm, "Heritage and National Consciousness in the Arab Countries," in *Arab Heritage and Traditions: Burden or Challenge*, ed. Günther Barthel and Gerhard Hoffmann, vol. 22, Asia, Africa, Latin America: Special Issue (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), 113–19. More recently, there has been particular interest in institutional involvement in questions of heritage among relatively "young" states of the Gulf – see Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico, eds., *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2014). Interestingly, these developments in the creation of an authentic national identity link up with other strands of current authenticity discourse, in particular the importance of authenticity in branding and presenting an authentic experience to foreign visitors – see Kornelia Imesch, "Authenticity as Branding Tool: Generic Architecture versus Critical Regionalism in the United Arab Emirates and in Qatar," in *Critique of Authenticity*, ed. Thomas Claviez, Britta Sweers, and Kornelia Imesch (Wilmington, NC: Vernon Press, 2020), 251–63.

World War is striking. It is easy to understand why the concerns of intellectuals in these diverse countries would overlap. Following a period of direct or indirect colonial rule that in some cases lasted over a century, it appears no more than natural for intellectuals to articulate a collective sense of self. The resulting similarities between the development of a concept of *aṣāla* in Arab thought and the kind of nativist discourse developed in Iran are obvious.[29] The same can be said about Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement, which played a major role in postcolonial thought in the 1950s and 1960s. So clear are these similarities between various postcolonial discourses of authenticity, in fact, that it is understandable why a prominent Arab intellectual like Sami Zubaida would claim that "the question of cultural authenticity arises primarily in contexts of colonial and imperial expansion and domination."[30]

Yet, I would argue that this postcolonial scene *too* should be read in context. While we should always respect local conditions and idiosyncrasies, we must not underestimate the degree to which Arab and other intellectual scenes of the postwar era were part of a global context, reacting directly to events and trends that developed on a global scale. Particularly during these heady years there was a lot to react to. The 1960s were a transformative period for the entire globe. They were the heyday of liberation movements. Maoism began to make headway as the ideology of the radical Left. Just one year after the Arab defeat, in the summer of 1968, the Western world seemed on the cusp of revolution.[31]

Due, in part, to the outsized role of *turāth* and the defeat of 1967 in the periodization of Arab thought, this global context tends to be left undiscussed. Whether liberal or Marxist, common depictions of Arab thought tend to conceive of Arab thought as a local affair. Whether conceived of as a debate about the secular interpretation of *turāth* or as a movement of opposition to the capitalist order, Arab thought is described in terms of a problem that is particular to the Arab world. It may resemble postcolonial debates of the global South, but it does not substantially overlap with them, because of the specificity of the Arab-Islamic heritage. Nor, for that matter, can it enter into a conversation with intellectual discourse in the West, since the problematics that motivate both are seen to differ radically.

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29 Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998).
30 Sami Zubaida, "The Search for Authenticity in Middle East Cultures: Religion, Community and Nation," *CCAS Occasional Papers*, 2004, 5.
31 The "global" nature of the authenticity–modernity problematic will be discussed in Chapter 3.

There are some exceptions to this depiction of Arab thought as a self-contained discourse in opposition to the West. One recent example is Sune Haugbolle's attempt "to bring the 1967 war into conversation with the global New Left," which belongs to a growing field of studies of the Arab left that is shedding new light on the development of Arab thought.[32] A recent product of this branch of research is Fadi Bardawil's engaging treatment of the vicissitudes of the Left in Lebanon, in which he, amongst other things, wants to tell a story of contemporary Arab thought and politics "which does not assume 1967 as the cardinal and only historiographical turning point." His point is that, insofar as it was a turning point, it was so in particular for the diaspora, including major figures like Edward Said and Talal Asad.[33]

From a different angle, Carool Kersten, in his study of late twentieth-century Islamic intellectuals, wants to show how their ideas "are grounded in a worldwide intellectual fermentation that had actually already started in the 1950s and 1960s." The upshot of this argument that runs through his book is to question the assumption that a turn towards religion and authenticity in Islamic thought is associated with "the allegedly sudden appearance of a resurgent Islam from the late 1970s onwards."[34] Similarly, Hanssen and Weiss write that "the intellectual and cultural effervescence that characterized the 1960s did not simply vanish in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat," but morphed into an anti-imperialist struggle propelled by the Palestinian cause.[35] They also suggest that the hard 1967 cut-off is partly to blame for the lack of interest in the 1945–1967 period among intellectual historians. Another attempt at relativizing the centrality of 1967 is found in the final chapter of Kassab's book on contemporary Arab thought. In a series of interesting observations, she gestures at how Arab debates about authenticity and modernity echo nineteenth-century European and American philosophy, as well as other postcolonial discourses. Unfortunately, this relativization of her earlier 1967-centered narrative is not as thoroughly researched as the Arab thought that is the main

32 Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," 500. A related contribution to the history of the Arab Left is Bardawil, "The Inward Turn and Its Vicissitudes: Culture, Society, and Politics in Post-1967 Arab Leftist Critiques."

33 Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, 85.

34 Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam*, xv–xvi.

35 Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, "Introduction: Arab Intellectual History between the Postwar and the Postcolonial," in *Arabic Thought Against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10.

topic of her book. It reads as an afterthought, rather than an attempt to dislodge the existing understanding of contemporary Arab thought.[36]

Not all engagements with Arab thought that intend to break away from the dominant, Arab-oriented model do so by showing historical continuities. Yvonne Albers's narrative of the "crisis" of 1967 in relation to the founding by Adonis of the journal *Mawāqif* takes inspiration from Reinhart Koselleck and Pierre Bourdieu to describe 1967 as a "critical event," that is, a discursive construct that is taken as an opportunity by an intellectual like Adonis to establish himself as a leading voice in the cultural scene of Beirut.[37] Anke von Kügelgen, in another recent publication, covers both historical and geographical fluidity in connecting nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arab debates on the relationship between science, philosophy, and religion to global debates on these issues in what she calls an "entangled history of migrating ideas" (*Verflechtungsgeschichte migrierender Ideen*), and thereby undermines both the temporal and the geographical strictures that characterize the standard narrative.[38] A further critique of reading the *turāth* debate as a local discourse of opposition can be found in a German study of contemporary Arab thought by Geert Hendrich, entitled *Islam und Aufklärung* (*Islam and Enlightenment*). According to Hendrich, the standard narrative of Arab thought, though not entirely incorrect, leads us astray. By painting Arab discourse according to the opposition of authenticity to modernity – where modernity is shorthand for "the West"[39] – Arab thought is apt to appear "purely locally oriented."[40] Arab thought, it seems, is only concerned with its own heritage and does not engage in understanding or critiquing modernity as such. The result is that Arab thinkers are not able to enter into an equal conversation with their Western counterparts. From the Arab-Islamic perspective, the West is something to be followed or rejected, whereas from a Western perspective, the Arab philosopher who

36 Had she pursued this course, it would have affected the rest of her book, which is written from the standpoint of 1967 and the standard narrative. By admitting that similar trends took place in other regions, Kassab in effect compromises the story that she has told about the specificity of contemporary Arab thought being due to the Arab experience of the June War. This would not necessarily have been a bad thing, as it illustrates the need to approach Arab thought using various narratives. See Kassab. *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective chap. 6.*

37 Yvonne Albers, "Relaunching the Arab Intellectual: Beirut's Cultural Journals, the 'Crisis' of 1967 and the Case of Mawaqif," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 15, no. 1–2 (June 15, 2022): 133–51.

38 von Kügelgen, "Konflikt, Harmonie oder Autonomie? Das Verhältnis von Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Religion," 33.

39 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 154.

40 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 9.

spends his time studying his heritage can appear as no more than a spokesperson for "Islam," not as representative of a particular philosophical position.[41]

What this overlooks, according to Hendrich, is the extent to which modernity, as a global project of economic, political, and social change, has in the course of the previous couple of centuries altered both Western and Arab societies in similar ways. For better or for worse, the world as we know it has been molded according to a liberal, capitalist model. Similar institutions have been created, similar means of government, similar educational regimes, similar personal ideals and values have taken root around the globe. Consequently, intellectuals the world over have found themselves confronted with similar questions concerning what is problematic about modernity and how we ought to cope with it. This shared background, however, is plastered over when contemporary intellectual traditions like that of the Arab world are only described in local terms. such blindness to the international modern origins and sensibilities of contemporary Arab discourse is what leads intellectuals to describe the confrontation between the West and the Islamic tradition as a "Clash of Civilizations." A less dogmatic picture of Arab discourse would characterize it, not as being in opposition to modern Western discourse, but as developing parallel to it. It would stress that, though Arab thinkers refer to a different tradition, due to the globalization of modern ways of life contemporary Arab thought is also concerned with a similar set of questions relating to the effects of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment.[42] Hendrich, like Kassab, points specifically to similarities between contemporary Arab discourse and the German *Lebensphilosophie*, in order to make the case that what we have here is a local instantiation of a familiar form of modernity critique.[43] If this is the case, Hendrich argues, then the right question to ask when turning to Arab thought is not whether it is more "Islamic" or more "modern." Rather, we should direct our attention to the different conceptions of modernity that drive Arab thinkers to adopt or reject aspects of modern life and thought.[44]

Hendrich's approach is interesting for the way in which it not only adduces historical evidence, but also engages in conceptual analysis to come up with a new way of reading contemporary Arab thought. It suggests that, by dissecting the concept of modernity, laying bare its various meanings, interpretations, and connotations, and showing how they give rise to distinctly modern preoccupations in Arab thought, one can break open existing categorizations of Arab intellectuals as well as the political and social debates in which their ideas are embedded. This

41 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 8.
42 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 9.
43 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 22.
44 Hendrich, *Islam und Aufklärung: Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, 46.

book takes its cue from Hendrich, but it proceeds, as it were, from the opposite side of the divide. Instead of looking chiefly at modernity, we will go deeper into how authenticity (*aṣāla*) could become a quintessentially modern ethical ideal. We will look at how this ideal can be interpreted in different ways, and how different interpretations of authenticity may affect or disrupt the problematic of "authenticity and modernity" that forms the core of the standard narrative of Arab thought.

A book that veers even closer to our approach is Robert D. Lee's *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity.* His basic argument is that "the pursuit of authenticity has gathered momentum as a product of both concrete circumstances of dissatisfaction with modernization and an intellectual critique of development and liberalism."[45] In contrast to most studies that detail the concept of authenticity in the Arab world, Lee is familiar with the literature on authenticity and its development in Western thought, and he uses this knowledge to portray the quest for authenticity as part of a global discourse embedded in modernity, rather than as a local obsession; in this sense, Lee presents a counterpart to Hendrich's analysis of modernity.[46] By arguing this, Lee effectively wants to undermine claims by Westerners and Muslims alike that the call for cultural authenticity is "synonymous with reaction and fanaticism,"[47] and to probe how the pursuit of authenticity can be harnessed for productive political projects.

From his study into authenticity theory, Lee distills a list of characteristics of authenticity – particularity, radicalism, autonomy, unicity, equality, and institutionalization – and then aims to show that these ideas can be found in the projects of four Islamic thinkers from various countries and times: Muhammad Iqbal, Sayyid Quṭb, 'Ali Shari'ati, and Mohammad Arkoun. This leads to some interesting observations, especially in the cases of Iqbal and Arkoun, although his treatment of

45 Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity*, 3.

46 An example of what happens when this background to the ideal of authenticity is not taken into account is found in Louay Safi's *The Challenge of Modernity: The Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World.* Here the author, seemingly out of nowhere, concludes his book with the supposedly novel suggestion that "modernization (innovation) and authenticity (originality) are not only compatible with each other, but they are two integral parts of the process of modernization *qua* rationalization" – Louay M. Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 200. Apart from the fact that one may take issue with this way of understanding rationalization (namely as inherently original), it is clear that Safi grapples here with the basic argument of the entire corpus of authenticity studies, namely that authenticity qua originality is an aspect of the modern project.

47 Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity*, 2.

Quṭb, in particular, lacks depth and is therefore less convincing.[48] A further problem with Lee's book is, to my mind, his rigidity in holding fast to the characteristics of authenticity. Authenticity has an intricate genealogy, through which it has found many different ways of entering the academic and everyday vocabulary. This gets lost when one tries to pour each author into the same mold. Moreover, it leaves preciously little space for Muslims to develop their own articulations of this ideal; ways of formulating the meaning of authenticity that do not fit exactly with a European genealogy. Finally, because Lee treats authors from wildly different backgrounds who wrote at different times during the twentieth century, his study lacks the kind of coherence that stems from studying figures who work within the same intellectual discourse in the same language. The people Lee has studied are presumed to have something in common, because they are all Muslim. Lacking a discussion of what Islam is or how it can serve as a connecting thread between a Punjabi philosopher poet like Iqbal, a Shia sociologist like Shariati, an Egyptian proto-fundamentalist like Quṭb, and a Berber-Algerian predominantly francophone critic of "Islamic reason" like Arkoun, it is hard to understand them in an overarching story of Islam in the modern age. Nonetheless, Lee's book remains exceptional, not because it offers an alternative view of Arab-Islamic thought or challenges the standard narrative, but because it does so on the basis of an engagement with the ideal of authenticity as a central concept of modernity.[49]

Robert D. Lee's thesis imparts a richness to the Arabic concept of *aṣāla* that is not often countenanced in works on Arab thought. To uncover this richness, we need to turn to the primary sources, and a good place to start are the several conferences organized around the themes of authenticity, modernity, and *turāth* in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1971 conference mentioned at the outset of Chapter 1 was not the most important of these conferences. Similar occasions, like the Kuwait conference of 1974, and a second conference that took place in Cairo in 1984 (both will be discussed in due course as well), were dominated by issues like "authenticity, specificity, identity, heritage and contemporaneity, cultural renewal, openness, crisis, progress and underdevelopment, and the role of religion, politics, and colonialism in these matters."[50] The other two conferences in Kuwait and Cairo were larger

48 See Shahrough Akhavi's review of the book for a more detailed critique of Lee's treatment of Quṭb: Shahrough Akhavi, "Review of 'Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity' by Robert D. Lee," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 3 (1998): 459–62.

49 A similar attempt to connect debates on authenticity in Iran with the central issue of authenticity in modern Western philosophy is found in Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran.*

50 Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, 116.

affairs, featuring papers that were, on the whole, more elaborate and of higher quality. They present a later stage in the development of the *turāth* discourse in which authenticity is more frankly defined as a historical, cultural, traditional construct that is opposed to renewal and to the modern age.

Why, then, do I single out the 1971 conference? In a sense, it is precisely the less developed, raw character of the earliest of these conferences that makes it interesting. On the one hand, the orientation of the standard narrative is obvious from the title of the conference itself ("Authenticity and Renewal in Contemporary Arab Culture"), from most of the contributions, and from the summaries of the discussions that took place. On the other hand, I will argue that this conference represents a stage at which the *turāth* has not yet become set in its ways. In particular, the meanings of authenticity and modernity that make up the core of the problematic of *turāth* remain at least somewhat open to question. It was at this point still possible to pose the question of what authenticity actually means, and even to put forward different conceptions of authenticity. To present this claim, I want to do four things. First, we will turn to the first paper presented at the 1971 conference. It was written by Shukrī ʿAyyād, an Egyptian literary critic, and it stands out because ʿAyyād does not start by assuming that he knows what authenticity and renewal, the main themes of this conference, mean. Instead, he leaves this an open question, and then goes on to trace the roots of the notion of authenticity and renewal in Arab cultural life. Second, we will compare ʿAyyād's open discussion of authenticity with the more closed treatment that it receives from other participants of the conference, and how it is subsequently squeezed into the standard narrative by commentators. Third, we will take a look at the 1974 and 1984 conferences to get a sense of how authenticity and modernity are articulated at later stages of the *turāth* debate, and to contrast these discussions of this conceptual pair with the kind of discussion we find in ʿAyyād. To finish off, we will look at two Arab intellectuals (Fuʾād Zakariyyā and ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma) writing in the two decades after the 1971 conference, who question the prevalent use of these notions in Arabic discourse and see how, though they share ʿAyyād's sensibility for the meanings of authenticity, these authors frame their argument differently, namely as an intervention in a debate that has become stuck, rather than as a candid conceptual analysis.

2.3 Shukrī ʿAyyād on the twofold meaning of authenticity

Authenticity (*aṣāla*), according to Shukrī ʿAyyād, is a relatively new concept that only gained currency among intellectuals after the Second World War. The Arabic term *aṣāla* hardly comes up in Arabic discourse of the 1920s and 1930s, as prefer-

ence is given to two pairs of opposite terms to discuss cultural-philosophical problems: imitation-ingenuity (*al-taqlīd wa-l-ibtikār*) and old-new (*al-qadīm wa-l-jadīd*). Of these four terms, ingenuity (*ibtikār*) paved the way for what was initially the most important sense in which authenticity was used. Referring to the Egyptian journalist poet and literary critic ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (1889–1964), ʿAyyād writes:

> al-ʿAqqād distinguishes four phases in the transition of poetry from stagnation to the level of revival and perfection: The first of these is the level of weak imitation, or, imitation for the sake of imitation; the second is purposeful imitation, or, imitation that requires of the imitator a certain quality and a degree of ability; the third level is that of creativity that grows out of feelings of national freedom, while the fourth level is that of creativity that grows out of personal independence, or feelings of individual freedom.[51]

When the term *aṣāla* becomes in vogue among Arab intellectuals during the 1950s, it is associated with the "subjectivity (*dhātiyya*), ingenuity, and liberation from the chains of imitation" identified by al-ʿAqqād.[52] Authenticity, in a sense, filled the place of ingenuity (*ibtikār*) to become the opposite of imitation; it stood for the expression of the individual self and the effort to break free from constraints placed on it by one's society and tradition.

This is one interpretation of authenticity shared by Arabic and English. There is, however, another meaning of the term common to both languages, one that appears to go in the opposite direction. This is the meaning that is often linked to the triliteral root of the word *aṣāla* (A-Ṣ-L/ل – ص – أ), which refers to "rootedness." It thus conjures up a sense of "nobility" (*ʿarāqa*), a set of essential and distinguished attributes transmitted by one generation to the next. It is, in the words of the Egyptian playwright Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, a "preserved characteristic, having come down to us from afar."[53]

It would seem that these two senses of authenticity are opposed to each other. However, as ʿAyyād sees it, this opposition is only apparent, because the context in which authenticity is used is different in each case. Whereas in the case of authenticity-qua-personal liberation, the context is that of "talking about individual talent," we tend to talk about authenticity-qua-preservation in the context of discussing "national characteristics." In literature – ʿAyyād is a literary critic after all –

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51 Shukrī ʿAyyād, "Mafhūm al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tajdīd wa-l-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira," in *Muʾtamar al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira* (Cairo: al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiyya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 1971), 59. The rest of this chapter contains many references to Arabic articles and conference proceedings. All translations of these texts are my own.
52 ʿAyyād, 60.
53 As quoted in ʿAyyād, 60.

the former interpretation of authenticity is used to designate the aim of a writer to express his personal identity, whereas the latter is a way of designating the identity of a nation or a people.

To say that these two senses of authenticity are not opposed to each other because they are used in different contexts is to skip over one major problem. While the context in which authenticity is discussed may differ, the people who use different senses of authenticity remain the same. An author who sees his work as a demonstration of his innermost feelings is also a member of a family, a citizen of a country, a member of a religious community and so on. To see his private sphere for articulation of the self as existing entirely apart from these social, legal, and cultural bonds would neglect the fact that the individual personality is formed by these bonds and, moreover, that its expression may conflict with his communal identities. ʿAyyād is aware of this. In fact, he sees this conflict in particular as the central problem of contemporary Arab culture, for as he explains:

> The problem of Arab culture in our age is what brings together or divides the two identities. Because the two senses are contained in the term 'authenticity' we are able to say that 'authenticity' summarizes the problem of contemporary Arab culture.
>
> The contemporary Arab seeks confirmation of his individuality. This aim comes to the fore clearly in literature and it perhaps exemplifies one of the central thoughts in our narrative literature. Yet, the contemporary Arab feels at the same time that he is losing out if he does not hold on to his deep-rooted heritage in the face of Western civilization intruding in his entire life – in the sense of the inherited virtues of his people.[54]

The term "authenticity" combines the notion of an individual and of a communal identity, and the task of the contemporary Arab intellectual is to balance these two notions. This, however, is not all. Besides referring to the individual as well as to the community, authenticity also harbors a contradiction between conservatism and renewal. People are deemed authentic when they are creative and explore new modes of thought, writing, designing, speaking, living, etc. Interpreted in this way, the central terms of the conference – "authenticity " and "renewal" – are almost synonymous. Yet the opposite is also true. People are said to be authentic when they stick to the old ways, when they respect traditions and customs. Food and household goods, for example, nowadays deserve the epithet "authentic" when they are produced using traditional methods, instead of being churned out in large quantities by a modern factory.

There is a sense in which these two oppositions, *individual–community* and *creativity–conservatism*, hang together. The act of being creative involves going out-

54 ʿAyyād, 61.

side of a set of shared customs, rules, or a shared frame of reference, expanding these shared practices or, to some extent, breaking with them. Because, at the same time, these shared practices form the glue that binds the members of a community, any creative act that breaks with these practices implies an opposition of the individual to his community. This is the kind of authenticity espoused by the paradigmatic revolutionary artist who thrives in opposition to "bourgeois" society. At the other end of the spectrum we find an entirely different individual, one who feels that the times are passing her by, that instead of discovering new and highly personal ways of living, her personality is being molded by new forms she has no influence over. This person may react by fleeing into the comfort of her own heritage (*turāth*) in which she feels more sincere to herself (*akthar ṣidqan maʿ nafsih*).[55] She *too* seeks authenticity, but in the sense of being "sincere" to an established model that she identifies with. What ʿAyyād points out here is a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning of authenticity, both in Arabic and in Western languages. Like originality, authenticity refers to a unique (aspect of) identity. However, uniqueness means different things to different people in different circumstances. Depending on what you take this uniqueness to consist in, it can be attained either by doing something unprecedented, or by having a history or a tradition that is specific to you as an individual or group and honoring it. This ambiguity, I will argue in Chapter 3, is one of the reasons why authenticity is such a powerful force in modern society, and the fact that this ambiguity gets lost in the standard narrative of Arab thought is why it lacks a certain depth.

Returning to ʿAyyād, the fact that there are two related oppositions in play means that the Arab intellectual is burdened with a second task. Besides having to account for the authenticity of the individual and that of the community, he has to strike a balance between entrenched values that make up the community and those that are new. As ʿAyyād puts it, there are:

> Two opposites between which the contemporary Arab man of letters lives: How does he square the two so that authenticity is naturally proportioned, combining the values of the community with those of the individual and the characteristics of the old with those of the new?[56]

The way to navigate these oppositions is to adopt a critical stance towards both the old and the new. The intellectual ought to engage in a process of authentication (*taʾsīl*), of constantly reinterpreting and balancing changes in the cultural and literary landscape with his intention of remaining sincere to the core of his tradition.

55 ʿAyyād, 63.
56 ʿAyyād, 63.

Foreign novelties may be introduced into one's tradition, but not without critical appraisal. Authenticity cannot therefore be synonymous with sincerity – as the generation of pre-Second World War intellectuals took it to be, but rather has to be seen as "a relative and developing process, a continuous trend that never stops."[57] In this sense, as ʿAyyād notes, authenticity is not a topic that is only of concern to Arabs, but also to any writer in the West, who is equally concerned with preserving "his identity – national as well as individual – in the face of external influences."[58] Indeed, as we will see later on, ʿAyyād touches here on a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning of authenticity, not just in Arabic, but also as a distinctive modern moral ideal, global in scope.

2.4 Whose identity? Which authenticity?

ʿAyyād presents us with an insightful story about *aṣāla.* It may not amount to a complete history of the concept, but it is a start, and an important one at that. ʿAyyād perceptively uncovers the intricate web of meaning that is spun around authenticity, not simply as an objective term, but as an ideal that can be applied differently in different circumstances. Also, in presenting the genealogy of this concept as dating back to the pre-Second World War era, his paper indicates, once more, that authenticity discourse in the Arab world has a history that dates back long before the crisis of 1967, and that it is not a narrow Arab or postcolonial concern, but a topic that interests everyone. What is most striking about ʿAyyād's contribution to the 1971 conference, however, is the contrast with the other papers, all of which evince a collective, culturalist interpretation of authenticity as a matter of course. Ayyād's paper attempts to articulate, analyze, and problematize authenticity. Yet his emphasis on both its individual and its communal aspect, and the inherent tension between the two, is eclipsed by a consensus that presupposes the communal, historical aspect of authenticity, which would mark the standard narrative of contemporary Arab thought.

To illustrate this lack of ambiguity with regard to the term *aṣāla,* let us compare ʿAyyād's paper to that of other attendees. Take, for instance, the Egyptian philosopher Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, with whom we will become more acquainted later on. In his paper he describes three ways of thinking about authenticity. First, he says, there are those who want to renew Arab culture by "forming it according

57 ʿAyyād, 66.
58 ʿAyyād, 65.

to the molds of the authentic, Arabic culture." Second, he identifies a group of traditionalists who repudiate modernity and "turn their gazes away from the current age." Third, there are those who want to break all ties with Arab culture and take over Western models "without any alteration or modification."[59] In other words, authenticity is presented as something that pertains to a culture as a whole and the only question left is how to configure the common markers of nationalist sentiment – language, history, and religion – in order to retain this sense of a shared identity in the face of a rapidly changing world. No mention is made of the *individual* preserving his authenticity against the onslaught of society, or the conflict between different interpretations of authenticity.

A similar tone is struck by the Tunisian professor Muḥammad Mazālī, whose paper "al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tafattuḥ" ("Authenticity and Openness") portrays authenticity as what is rooted in one's culture – referring to the triliteral root A-Ṣ-L (أ – ص – ل) – as opposed to what is trivial (*tafāha*) or counterfeit (*zayf*).[60] He discusses authenticity in terms of a shared heritage using the classic nationalist tropes of religion, language, and history, and distinguishes the supposedly spiritual East from the materialistic West in order to arrive at his argument that real authenticity should be open to different influences, because both spirituality and an interest in the material world are necessary for man to flourish. ʿAlī al-Raʾī's paper on authenticity and renewal in theater is no different in taking authenticity a cultural notion, describing the mix of foreign and "authentically" Arab influences that have shaped modern playwriting. [61]

Aḥmad Haykal, in his assessment of Arabic poetry, starts out by making a helpful distinction between authenticity, traditionalism (*taqlīdiyya*), and conservatism (*muḥāfaẓa*). He remarks that authenticity and renewal are not necessarily contradictory terms,[62] and that authenticity must pertain to both the individual and the nation (*umma*).[63] However, his primary focus is on describing how Arab

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59 Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, "Mawqif al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha fī Muwājahat al-ʿAṣr," in *Muʾtamar al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī-l-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira* (Cairo: al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiyya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 1971), 73 – 74.

60 Muḥammad Mazālī, "al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tafattuḥ," in *Muʾtamar al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira* (Cairo: al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiyya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 1971), 116.

61 ʿAlī al-Rāʾī, "al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tajdīd fī al-Masraḥ al-ʿArabī," in *Muʾtamar al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira* (Cairo: al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 1971), 102 – 13.

62 Aḥmad Haykal, "al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāsir bayn al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tajdīd," in *Muʾtamar al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya al-Muʿāsira* (Cairo: al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiyya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 1971), 90.

63 Haykal, "al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāsir bayn al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tajdīd," 96 – 97.

poetry developed as a whole; how it acquired different styles and themes and how its particular history supposedly excludes new forms of poetry that would not pass the test of authenticity. He thus reverts to a view of authenticity in terms of essential characteristics of Arab culture. While he acknowledges historical formation of artistic style, he does not consider ʿAyyād's idea that there is a specific way in which an individual can be said to be authentic.

In short, the contributions to the 1971 conference bear witness to what I have earlier described as standard narrative of contemporary Arab thought. Excepting ʿAyyād's paper, authenticity is treated as relating to a historical, cultural, traditional construct that is opposed to renewal and to the modern age. There was little room to put authenticity up for discussion. The stage was set for a period in which the efforts of the intellectual elite were focused on the topic of *turāth*, as the site of a battle between the forces of modernity and those of tradition. This perspective on the concept of authenticity is echoed by some of the Western commentaries mentioned in Chapter 1, and it is particularly noticeable in their appraisal of ʿAyyād's paper. Issa Boullata puts particular emphasis on the achievement of authenticity as a "fluid, continuously changing process in which old and new elements are in constant dialectical relationship,"[64] thus neglecting the tension between individual and community that is central to ʿAyyād's point. Kassab also discusses ʿAyyād's paper, under the subtitle "Shukry Ayad: Authenticity as the Search for a Sense of Self Between One's Own Heritage and the Present Age."[65] Here, too, the emphasis is on the part of ʿAyyād's paper in which he mentions the position of Arab culture in opposition to the West, not on that in which he describes authenticity as a personal ideal, the opposite of inauthenticity.

Before I proceed, I should make it clear that my aim is not to demean the efforts of either Boullata, Kassab, or any of the other commentators who use the standard narrative of Arab thought. Boullata's survey broke new ground by presenting contemporary Arab thought to a Western audience for the first time. Kassab's book is a Herculean effort to give a comprehensive overview of all major thinkers in the Arab world since the 1960s, which serves as the most outstanding introduction to this field in English. Both continue to provide a vital introduction to a neglected field of study. In addition, they are not essentially mistaken in using the standard narrative. Theirs is a neat summary of how Arab thought is approached by the majority of Arab intellectuals. When Boullata explains the rough outline of the intellectual landscape in the Arab world, he uses almost verbatim the formulation of the standard narrative that we find in Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd's paper pre-

64 Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, 15.

65 Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, 118–19.

sented at this conference. In other words, he merely reports what his sources tell him and uses it as a convenient framework for making sense of Arab thought.

These surveys are meant to describe the outlines of Arab thought to an outside audience. They use a helpful narrative that conforms to how many Arab intellectuals themselves perceive the debates that they are engaged in, and this is something that one should never neglect. The dominant internal view of Arab thought, however, should not count as its be-all and end-all. As discussed in the Introduction, a deeper understanding of contemporary Arab thought is gained not by simply registering what Arab intellectuals are saying, or how they perceive what they are saying. It can also allow space for contesting these claims, for arguing with them, for bringing out different voices and alternative perspectives within the Arab world; it can prompt us to explore different ways of embedding Arab thought within a broader framework, geographically, conceptually, and temporally. Apart from description, understanding can also come about through a dialectical engagement with a text or with the discourse of which it is part. If we forego this kind of engagement, then we abide by a narrative that has, as some intellectuals attest, become a suffocating paradigm. As the meanings of authenticity and modernity – still regularly debated in academia, but also in newspapers and on TV shows – are fixed beyond discussion, it becomes virtually impossible to conceive of Arab thought in a radically different way. The fact that many of ʿAyyād's peers and later commentators like Boullata and Kassab can overlook a distinctive voice such as ʿAyyād's is, I argue, not a sign of mere negligence, but a symptom of this paradigm for interpreting Arab thought.

The streamlining of the standard narrative intensified during the final decades of the twentieth century. There is ample evidence that this particular interpretation of authenticity became entrenched in the countless works dedicated to this topic starting in the 1970s and 1980s, as the *turāth* debate truly took off. Books exploring the relationship between authenticity and modernity, tradition and renewal etc. in different fields were authored by both secular and religious intellectuals.[66] This paradigm did not remain consigned to the theoretical debates between intellectuals. It was a hot topic in newspapers, on the airwaves, and in politics. It influenced analyses of Arab society by political and social scientists. An interesting example of how such theoretical discussions can affect scientific re-

66 Hence, this binary could serve as a model, not just for researching culture – for example, Jalāl al-ʿAsharī, *Thaqāfatunā … bayn al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1971). – but equally in the field of education – for example, – or in Islamic law – for example, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmī bayn al-Aṣāla wa-l-Tajdīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwa, 1986).

search can be found in a statistical analysis of the use of the term *aṣāla* in Arab media between 1945 and 1970 that was published in 1983.[67] John Donohue demonstrates that the proportion of articles expressing attitudes on authenticity reached as high as 90% among intellectual publications in the period 1965–70 – compared to 82% for religious and 80% of popular publications, respectively.[68] He concludes that *aṣāla* became an issue in the aftermath of the Second World War, and gradually gained traction in the decades after. Apart from providing the statistical proof to back up ʿAyyād's contention that authenticity discourse was on the rise following the Second World War, it is striking to notice the frankness with which Donohue interprets authenticity. Without giving much thought to possible tensions implied by the concept he investigates, or changes that may have occurred in the use of the term *aṣāla*, Donohue links the rise of authenticity discourse to the confrontations between Arab and Western (or Western-backed) states that took place during this period – that is, the *Nakba* of 1948, the Suez crisis of 1956, and the Six-Day War of 1967. Next, he describes the interest in authenticity as the logical accompaniment to the self-assertion of the Arab world following its post-war era of decolonization. This narrative appears convincing. It offers a nice fit between the development of a national consciousness and the rising interest in authenticity, and it has the added advantage of resonating with the way that Arab thought is viewed among many of the most distinguished Arab intellectuals. Yet it comes at a price. This almost perfect fit is only possible when the ambiguities concerning the concept of "authenticity" are muffled. As a result, the problem of authenticity and modernity continues to be discussed as *the* central problem of contemporary Arab society, and each time, modernity is set up in temporal opposition to various definitions of authenticity, an opposition that simultaneously overlays a cultural opposition between self and other, between Arabs and the West.

2.5 Authenticity and modernity at the 1974 and 1984 conferences

The 1971 conference was not the biggest or most famous meeting of Arab intellectuals in the latter part of the twentieth century, nor do its proceedings contain the most sophisticated contributions. Compared to the 1974 conference in Kuwait and the one in 1984 that again took place in Cairo, it was a rather subdued affair. Its

67 John D. Donohue, "Islam and the Search for Identity in the Arab World," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 48–61.
68 Donohue, "Islam and the Search for Identity in the Arab World," 51.

importance lies in how it both signaled the advent of *turāth*, in its title and in the presentations, and how it simultaneously contained the kind of open discussion of authenticity that, I argue, we see less of at a later stage. To buttress this claim, I want to take a look at the later conferences to see how the problematic of authenticity and modernity is understood several years on. A detailed discussion of a number of these papers is provided by Elizabeth Kassab in her survey of contemporary Arab thought, and I will therefore refrain from commenting on the general ideas presented in these papers.[69] The purpose here is to document how *turāth* is framed by various authors, and to see whether the kind of open discussion of terms like authenticity and modernity, contemporaneity, or renewal is again evident in these later conferences. The purpose is not to dismiss these articles. While not every contribution is as good or informative as the next, many give elaborate and intelligent commentary on Arab society and its ailments, as perceived at the time. Many of the ideas discussed here, like the question of historicism or the concept of "Arab reason" (*al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*), are fleshed out in detail in the contemporary classics of Arab thought, such as those by Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, or Jūrj Ṭarābīshī. We should not forget, however, that these more elaborate theorizations of *turāth* are worked out and discussed at these gatherings that form a linchpin for the Pan-Arab community of intellectuals. Our goal is not to dismiss these dozens of papers, but to taste a change in tone, a stabilization of a particular way of framing what the main issue in Arab thought is and ought to be about.

2.5.1 The 1974 Kuwait Conference: "The Crisis of Cultural Development in the Arab Nation"

The 1974 conference was not framed explicitly in terms of the problematic of authenticity and modernity/contemporaneity, hence it does not give rise to as many discussions of this conceptual pair as we see in the 1971 and 1984 conferences, which do reference this opposition in the title. Several papers focus on specific issues of family organization (Hishām Sharābī) or the role of the university (Muḥammad Jawād Riḍā) in the retardation or progress of Arab society, and do not obviously relate to the issue of *turāth.* This does not mean, however, that these concepts are not referenced. To start with, Muṣṭafā Shākir, in his paper on "The Historical Dimensions of the Crisis of Arab Civilization Development," represents an important strand in contemporary Arab thought, with his view that the source of Arab civilizational retardation lies in the ahistorical attitude that Arabs hold with re-

69 Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, 121–70.

gard to their heritage. This constant orientation towards their past has had a decisive influence on the understanding of authenticity in the Arab world. Although he admits that *aṣāla* has several meanings, related to ingenuity (*ibtikār*), making something new (*khalq al-jadīd*), or to a pristine land, he notes that in Arab debates the concept has become intertwined with history and in particular with *turāth*, and (contrary to ʿAyyād) he presents this as an essential trait of Arab thought.[70] This comes out in the characteristic traditionalism (*taqlīdiyya*) and stagnation (*sukūniyya*) found in Arab societies. The dominant urge is to move back in time towards the glory days of a primeval Islam.[71]

The emphasis on ahistoricism in Arab thought is also a theme in Fuʾād Zakariyyā's contribution to the conference with the title "Intellectual Retardation and Its Civilizational Dimensions." He follows the model that we have already seen in Maḥmūd's 1971 paper of dividing Arab intellectuals into a group of *turāth* boosters who praise its many accomplishments, and *turāth* knockers who blame current problems on its inherent irrationality and illiberalism. The latter are ahistorical in their fatalism, which keeps them from understanding why, if the past really has such a hold on the present, the modern European that they admire was able to find a path to rationalism and liberalism out of its own Dark Ages by returning to the classics.[72] The former, meanwhile, are ahistorical in how they try to read the ideas and scientific accomplishments of the West between the lines of their own heritage – a mode of reading that, ironically, turns the West into the ultimate measure of the worth of *turāth*.[73] Foreshadowing the more critical intervention into the *turāth* discourse that we will discuss in the following section, Zakariyyā does not want to find some complete solution for the problem of retardation, but instead suggests that we look more closely at the concepts used in these debates as a first step towards clarity on what these intellectual struggles are truly about.[74] The historicity argument is again voiced by Muḥammad al-Nuwayhī in his paper on the role of religion in the crisis of civilizational development. Islamic clergy, especially nowadays, are averse to reading the Qur'an and Hadith as divinely inspired, but nonetheless historical documents that ought to be reinterpreted according to present-day concerns. The only remedy, as Nuwayhī sees it, is to let our

70 Shākir Muṣṭafā, "al-Abʿād al-Tārīkhiyya li-Azmat al-Taṭawwur al-Ḥaḍārī al-ʿArabī," *al-Maʿrifa* 148 (1974): 12. Obviously, this essentialist picture of Arab thought runs counter to ʿAyyād's contention that the culturalist meaning of *aṣāla* only became dominant following the Second World War.
71 Muṣṭafā, "al-Abʿād al-Tārīkhiyya li-Azmat al-Taṭawwur al-Ḥaḍārī al-ʿArabī," 39 – 40.
72 Fuʾād Zakariyyā, "al-Takhalluf al-Fikrī wa-Abʿāduh al-Hadāriyya," *al-Maʿrifa* 148 (1974): 65.
73 Zakariyyā, "al-Takhalluf al-Fikrī wa-Abʿāduh al-Hadāriyya," 68 – 69.
74 Zakariyyā, 79 – 80.

practical daily concerns be governed, not by religion, but by secular reason.[75] The author does not reference *turāth* in his discussion, but he does draw on the historical nature of the divide in Arab thought and connect this specifically to the question of religion. Following the structure of the standard narrative, the opposition is now between the traditional religious and the modern secular outlook.

One paper that forefronts the theme of authenticity, despite the fact that this is not the official topic of the conference, is the Egyptian Marxist political theorist Anwar ʿAbd al-Malik (Anouar Abdel Malek). His contribution, entitled "Particularity and Authenticity," describes how the problematic of "authenticity" (*aṣāla*) and "contemporariness" (*ʿaṣriyya*) as it unfolded in Arab thought is a symptom of Western concepts and modes of thinking, and it argues that Arabs need to develop their own, local analyses of what ails their regions or nations in order to break free from the Western hold on their thought.[76] Although the specifics of cause-and-effect in ʿAbd al-Malik's account remain somewhat murky, he emphasizes that the quest for liberation in the Arab world and other regions in Asia and Africa that have known their own glorious past are different from the struggle seen in Latin America, since the ideal of liberation in the former case is linked to a quest for revival of a lost era of prominence. Invoking the *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm, he poses the great question faced by "the Arab" as: "Why the decadence? And how is Renaissance realized? (*Li-mādhā al-inḥiṭāṭ? Wa-kayf tataḥaqqaq al-nahḍa?*)[77] The struggle for liberation thus became entangled with the question of authenticity and modernization, giving rise to two familiar camps: A group that affirms authenticity and another that opts instead to follow contemporary liberalism. These groups then split again into a conservative and a radical branch. The liberals split into mainstream conservative bourgeois and the radical Marxist movements, while those defending authenticity split into the more conservative Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab nationalists – specifically the Nasserists. These internal struggles over authenticity are held back, however, by an Orientalist understanding of authenticity as folklore, that is, as a collection of traces from the past that do not matter in the present. ʿAbd al-Malik suggests that instead of focusing on these sym-

75 Muḥammad al-Nuwayhī, "al-Dīn wa-Azmat al-Taṭawwur al-Ḥadārī," *al-Maʿrifa* 148 (1974): 225.
76 This description appears to be an offshoot of the dependency theory developed in Latin America in the 1960s, which held that underdevelopment outside of the Western world is the result of a system of economic dependence of the periphery on the metropole. Against the modernization theory of the 1950s, it argued that underdeveloped countries can only develop if they break loose from the international system of production. For a more detailed description of dependency theory, see: Ramon Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 2 (2000): 347–74.
77 Anwar ʿAbd al-Malik, "al-Khuṣūṣiyya wa-l-Aṣāla," *al-Ādāb* 22, no. 5 (1974): 41.

bols of authenticity like "the stores of Khan al-Khalīlī and the gatherings of the Shādhilī Sufī order," one should study the *specificity* of Egypt, which lies in the particular role of the army and the Egyptian people throughout its long history.[78] Only by uncovering the specificity of the structures ruling a country, can it break free from the monopoly that Western models have on the possible paths for Arab development. This contribution by ʿAbd al-Malik is interesting for indicating a different treatment of the authenticity–modernity problematic. The author does not propose a reevaluation of the meaning of authenticity, taking it for granted that it refers to folklore. He does, however, propose that such discussions of culture lead Arabs astray, and that they need to be more focused on concrete materialist analysis of local structures of political domination. This Marxist alternative is not our main concern in this study, but it does offer another avenue for studying alternatives to the standard narrative.[79]

A final paper at the 1974 conference worth discussing in more detail was presented by Ibrāhīm Abū Lughud (Abu Lughod). It merits discussion, not because it goes into the question of authenticity, but because it calls out the kind of historical framing for the topic of retardation and development that is the topic of this conference. The title of this paper is "Colonialism and The Crisis of Development in The Arab Nation." It details how the problem of development dealt with at this conference is indebted to modes of thought and social organization that are integral to the colonial project: On the one hand, a Social Darwinist ideal of progress, and on the other hand, an Arab nation divided into independent nation-states. First, Abū Lughud challenges the common view that renewal in Arab lands was virtually non-existent in before 1798 – in effect he criticizes the *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm discussed in Chapter 1.[80] He attributes this view of history to the influence that

78 The reference here is to his 1962 publication: Anouar Abdel Malek, *Égypte: Société militaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962).

79 For this one may turn to the recent research into the Arab Left mentioned earlier in this chapter.

80 Kassab notes that Abū Lughud does not give much detail or evidence for this claim. This is partially true. Although he does refer explicitly to the movement of Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, as well as to movements for renewal of thought and the greater liberty from Ottoman rule throughout the Arab world, he does not give references – see Ibrāhīm Abū Lughud, "al-Istiʿmār wa-Azmat al-Taṭawwur fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī," *al-Maʿrifa* 148 (1974): 242. It would be interesting to know precisely to which literature he was referring, especially since his 1963 book *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe* does start with the Napoleonic invasion of 1798 – see Ibrahim Abu Lughod, *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). Although not much literature on this topic is available even now, since the 1960s there has been a growing interest (at least in Western academia) in reform movements of the eighteenth century, in particular the Sufi movements referred to by Fazlur Rahman in the 1960s as neo-Sufism, and the

Western notions of progress had on movements for renewal in the Arab world, even before it was colonized directly. They began to see Western forms of bureaucracy, law, and education as inherently superior to whatever Arabs themselves could come up with, and made them part of their project for social renewal. It was this temporal-geographical opposition between an Arab past and a European present built on the colonial ideal of progress that gave rise to the two orientations that govern Arab thought: The Islamic reformers who aim to preserve the connection to their heritage, and an elite that, though not popular with the masses, has had great influence in secularizing and Westernizing society through modern institutions.[81] The effects of this division are still felt in Arab society, where two forces were making themselves felt in the wake of 1967. On the one hand, there was a "radical" trend which advocated a complete adoption of modern knowledge in order to break the hold of the West on the Arab world and the hold of the Israeli state on Palestine. On the other hand, there arose a "Salafī" trend that advocated a return to pristine Islam as the solution to the troubles brought on by modernity.[82] Neither is obviously favored by Abū Lughud, who instead maintains that Arabs cannot truly develop unless they undo the colonial influence on their thinking that provides the background for this division over *turāth.*

Even though he does not really go into the issue of authenticity, Abū Lughud's presentation at the 1974 conference comes close to the kind of critical appraisal of authenticity–modernity problematic that we saw with Shukrī ʿAyyād. The former does this, not by tackling any definition, but by providing a historical analysis of current debates and how they are indebted to a modern historiography. It will be left for ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma – discussed in the final section of this chapter – to connect this historiography to the issue of authenticity. Barring Abū Lughud's historical contextualization and ʿAbd al-Malik's effort to direct the discussion from cultural to materialist issues, most of the papers presented at the 1974 conference remain true to the standard narrative by developing authenticity and modernity in historical, communal terms. This is not to say that they merely oppose a modern to a traditional trend. Those who took part reflect on how to overcome the divide by

movement inspired by Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. For a good (though not entirely impartial) overview of the academic debates on the nature of neo-Sufism that continued through the final decades of the twentieth century, see John Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 42, no. 2–3 (2008): 314–30. An example of Western academic study into Wahhabism and its roots in earlier reform trends that Abū Lughud may have had in mind is Henri Laoust, "Le réformisme d'Ibn Taymiya," *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 3 (1962): 27–47.

81 Abū Lughud, "al-Istiʿmār wa-Azmat al-Taṭawwur fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī," 243–45.

82 Lughud, "al-Istiʿmār wa-Azmat al-Taṭawwur fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī," 249.

suggesting ways of thinking about and using the Arab heritage in the interest of modernization.[83] This tendency is captured in the closing statement of this conference. Here, *turāth* is highlighted as a crucial topic, and both the traditionalist longing for the past and the modernist inclination to break completely with the past are rejected.[84] Authenticity is not equated with the past, but it is understood as an intellectual heritage that lies *in* the past and that may be interpreted as a way of going forward into the future. While this framing of the problem contains a definite unease with the opposition between authenticity and modernity, it does not try to overcome it by rethinking what the problem of *turāth* is about. Instead, these attempts to historicize and read history differently largely remain within the strictures of the standard narrative; they take for granted the opposition of authenticity and modernity and try to mediate it.

2.5.2 The 1984 Cairo Conference: "Heritage and the Challenges of the Age in the Arab Nation (Authenticity and Contemporaneity)"

Moving to the 1984 conference organized in Cairo, the proceedings start off with a paper by a figure who was catapulted to prominence as an Arab intellectual in the 1980s with his book *We and the Heritage*, the Moroccan philosopher Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī.[85] This conference carried "Authenticity and Contemporaneity" as a subtitle and, unsurprisingly, the papers presented here often refer explicitly to this conceptual duo. Al-Jābirī is perhaps the only one who argues against simply rehearsing this problematic, instead suggesting that it is a problematic that Arabs should overcome.[86] He begins his paper by recalling the standard categorization of Arab thought into a contemporary (*ʿaṣrāniyya*) and a traditionalist (*salafiyya*) group, as well as a selective (*intiqāʾiyya*) group that tries to take the best from both worlds, and he explains these positions as reactions to what he calls the "Renaissance question" (*al-suʾāl al-nahḍawī*): "Why did we (we Arabs, we Muslims, we the East) fall behind and why did others (Christian Europe, the West) develop? Therefore, how do we awaken? How do we catch up and join this modern civiliza-

83 I have not discussed the papers by Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd and Adonis presented at this conference, since we will be looking at them in great detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

84 "Azmat al-Taṭawwur al-Ḥadārī fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Bayān al-Khātimī," *al-Maʿrifa* 148 (1974): 294–95.

85 *al-Jābirī, Naḥnu wa-l-Turāth: Qirāʾāt Muʿāsira fī Turāthinā al-Falsafī.*

86 Parts of this paper have been translated into English; see al-Jābri, "The Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought."

tion?"[87] Yet, rather than accept this ordering and pick a side, al-Jābirī quickly rejects it, because by presenting the main question of Arab thought in this way, it presupposes that it is up to the Arabs themselves to choose what they want to adopt or not. This, he says, is not the case. The modern ways and institutions were imposed on Arab society from the outside, and the Arab-Islamic heritage that is the subject of so much debate was never and can never be freely chosen. Heritage is something you are born into and are stuck with for the rest of your life. The real problem, therefore, is not that Arabs have not made the correct choice for either authenticity or modernity, or that they have yet to figure out the right mix between the two sides; the real problem is that both strands are now active in Arab consciousness at the same time. Arabs use modern technology and institutions in the public sphere, and allow their private lives to be ruled by traditional custom. They thus come to admire the West for its technological achievements, while detesting its dominance as an attack on their cultural authenticity. They see the problematic of authenticity and modernity not as an opposition between tradition and modernity, but between promise and threat both contained in the "authentic" culture of the Western Other. Like several participants to the 1974 conference, al-Jābirī suggests that the answer to this quandary lies in a thorough historicization of this problematic. A true Renaissance, like the one that took place in Europe, looks back to the past for creative inspiration and as a way of overcoming the present. The Arab Renaissance (*nahḍa*) did not follow this example, but instead looked back to the glories of Arab history mired in nostalgia. The reason for this, according to al-Jābirī, is that the Arab Renaissance did not originate organically from within Arab society, but was imposed from the outside. Modern innovations thus came to be associated with European domination that ought to be resisted. The way out of this quandary is for Arabs to follow the European example, not just by copying modern technologies and consuming Western imports, but by historicizing their own past. The real meaning of contemporaneity, according to al-Jābirī, is not to forget the past, but to rewrite and reorganize it rationally so as to make it fit for the present (as was done in the European Renaissance).[88] This in turn will teach Arabs that the real meaning of authenticity is not

87 al-Jābri, "The Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought," 176–77; Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, "Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Muʿāsir: Ṣirāʿ Ṭabaqī am Mushkil Thaqāfī?," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 35.
88 al-Jābri, "The Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought," 184; al-Jābirī, "Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Muʿāsir: Ṣirāʿ Ṭabaqī am Mushkil Thaqāfī?," 50.

just the outcome of a past Golden Age, but instead it is the act of creating something new. If a particular historical age shows an outpouring of creativity, one should not just keep this heritage alive as it was, but be inspired by the creative impetus that lay at its root to innovate and create something yourself.[89]

Al-Jābirī's contribution to the conference is interesting for our investigation, because while he uses the standard narrative as a starting point, he also suggests a way of breaking with it, of thinking about the problematic of Arab thought anew. In particular, his suggestion that to value authenticity does not simply mean a return to the past, but rather a return to past modes of being innovative is a worthwhile departure from the binary problematic that he criticizes in his contribution. Yet, at the same time, al-Jābirī does not flesh out this alternative conception of authenticity (or of contemporaneity). He instead emphasizes the need to historicize *turāth* and bring out its rational elements, which he thinks align with (Western) modernity.[90] In a sense, this lets the East-–West, irrational–rational distinction in through the back door, and it comes as no surprise that this Eurocentric orientation is one of the issues criticized by various Arab commentators on al-Jābirī's work.[91] What we do not see in al-Jābirī's contribution is the kind of broader historical critique of the concept of authenticity that we find in ʿAyyād (or Fuʾād Zakariyyā and ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, whom we will discuss later). Notwithstanding his suggestion that authenticity may refer to a timeless creative impetus, he does not press this issue in order to destabilize the standard narrative, opting instead for a more conventional critique of ahistoricism, that was also prominent in 1974.[92]

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89 al-Jābri, "The Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought," 185; al-Jābirī, "Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Muʿāsir: Ṣirāʿ Ṭabaqī am Mushkil Thaqāfī?," 54.

90 This critical theory of *turāth* is worked out in *We and the Heritage* and in his four-volume *Critique of Arab Reason*, in particular in the first two volumes – see al-Jābirī, *Naḥnu wa-l-Turāth: Qirāʾāt Muʿāsira fī Turāthinā al-Falsafī;* al-Jābirī, *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*; and Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*, vol. 2, *Bunyat al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1986).

91 Abdelkader Al Ghouz mentions Ḥasan Ḥanafī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭāhā, and Yaḥyā Muḥammad among those taking al-Jābirī to task for his Eurocentrism – see Abdelkader Al Ghouz, *Vernunft und Kanon in der zeitgenössischen arabisch-islamischen Philosophie. Zu Muḥammad ʿĀbed al-Ǧābirīs (1936–2010) rationalistischer Lesart des Kulturerbes in seinem Werk "Kritik der arabischen Vernunft,"* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2015), 276.

92 A closer reading of al-Jābirī's philosophical project may reveal a more nuanced picture of how he views the problematic of contemporary Arab thought and its key concept, particularly the interplay between authenticity and modernity. Unfortunately, this lies beyond the scope of our research. However, in light of al-Jābirī's central position in these debates about *turāth* and the reaction that his work has generated, in particular from one of our interlocutors (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭāhā), it is worthwhile to give a short overview of what al-Jābirī means when he refers to the need to histori-

It is also noteworthy that the comments on his paper did not remark much on the need to overcome the problematic of authenticity and modernity, or on the defini-

cize Arab history. Rather than stick to received ways of describing Arab history, in particular the history of the sciences, al-Jābirī in the first two volumes of his *Critique of Arab Reason* rewrites this history by dividing the pursuit of knowledge into three systems (*nuẓum* – singular: *niẓām*) of thought:

- the "explicative system" (*al-bayān*), associated with jurisprudence and the Islamic sciences generally (excepting Sufism), and Sunni Islam;
- the "gnostic system" (*al-ʿirfān*), associated with Sufism and the Hermetic sciences – for example, alchemy and astrology, irrationalism, and (according to al-Jābirī) Shia Islam; and
- the "demonstrative system" (*al-burhān*), associated with Aristotelian logic, Greek science, and rationalism.

These systems of thought were formed in what al-Jābirī calls the Age of Codification (*ʿaṣr al-tadwīn*), which fell in the eighth and ninth centuries AD, at the height of the Abbasid caliphate. Al-Jābirī's main point is that the first two systems have dominated Arab thought. The first (*al-bayān*) rendered Arab thought backward-looking, because its focus lies on (re-)interpretating texts and it does not concern itself with experimental knowledge. It leads to a closed system of knowledge that does not admit any new content, and also leads to conception of time as being "dead" (*zaman mayyit*) or "moribund" (*al-mayyit al-ashbah*) – see al-Jābirī, *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*, 342. The second system (*ʿirfān*), which together with the first has dominated Arab thought, is dismissed by al-Jābirī as being unfit for any progress, since it is entirely irrational, believing that one can supersede the laws of nature. This leaves the third system of *burhān*, which al-Jābirī thinks has been more actively pursued in the Western part of the Arab world (the Maghrib), than in its eastern part (the Mashriq). The reason for the lack of progress in the Arab world and its inability to adapt to modernity, according to al-Jābirī, lies in the fact that *al-bayān* and *al-ʿirfān* were employed as the epistemological basis for political struggles between different groups (specifically between Sunni and Shia). The solution to this stranglehold is to break the divide between the epistemological field (*al-ḥaql al-maʿrifī* – that is, the system of concepts and premises that allow one to make knowledge claims) and the ideological content (*maḍmūn aydiyūlūjī* – that is, the political use to which these ideas are put) – see al-Jābirī, *Naḥnu wa-l-Turāth: Qirāʾāt Muʿāsira fī Turāthinā al-Falsafī*, 29. This would allow science to advance by embracing the rationalist system of *burhān* combined with a modern empiricist outlook, while sidelining the political struggles which have heretofore impeded scientific progress. For more discussion of al-Jābirī's thesis, see al-Jabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World*; Al Ghouz, *Vernunft und Kanon in der zeitgenössischen arabisch-islamischen Philosophie. Zu Muḥammad ʿĀbed al-Ǧābirīs (1936 – 2010) rationalistischer Lesart des Kulturerbes in seinem Werk "Kritik der arabischen Vernunft"*; Michaelle Browers, "From 'New Partisans of the Heritage' to Post-Secularism: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Development of Arab Liberal Communitarian Thought in the 1980s," in *Arab Liberal Thought After 1967: Old Dilemmas, New Perceptions*, ed. Meir Hatina and Christoph Schumann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Harald Viersen, "Hedendaags Arabisch denken: 1967, al-Jabiri en het turath-debat," *Zemzem: Tijdschrift over het Midden-Oosten, Noord-Afrika en islam* 12, no. 1 (2016): 69 – 96; Viersen, "The Ethical Dialectic in al-Jabri's 'Critique of Arab Reason'"; and Anke von Kügelgen, *Averroes und die arabische Moderne – Ansätze zu einer Neubegründung des Rationalismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 260 – 87.

tion of authenticity and contemporaneity. Most seized on al-Jābirī's claim that the opposition between authenticity and modernity was not rooted in a materialist class struggle, but is rather an entirely cultural affair. Also, we have al-Ḥabīb al-Jinḥānī criticize the fact that the contents of authenticity remain undefined, asking which heritage or which part of it should be returned to.[93] One commenter who did go into the meaning of authenticity in more detail and accuses al-Jābirī of making overly general distinctions using terms like authenticity, identity (*huwwiyya*), or Arabism (*ʿurūba*) is ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, whose critique of authenticity discourse will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.[94]

The next speaker at the conference, the Syrian Marxist thinker Ṭayyib Tīzīnī, is less concerned with redefining the problematic. He goes along with the 1798 starting date for a new phase in the relations between East and West, and frames the problematic of authenticity and modernity as a confrontation between an Arab East and a colonialist, capitalist West.[95] As this problematic was applied to the topic of *turāth*, three trends were formed, one Salafi (*salafiyya*), one contemporary (*ʿaṣriyya*), and one that concocts a mix between the two.[96] Tīzīnī proceeds to explain these positions, and he does so eloquently. It is clear that he feels that each of these strands misses the point in not understanding the underlying socio-economic structure of Arab society, and that they do not give enough weight to the role that the encounter with the modern West has played in shaping the problematic of authenticity and modernity,[97] but he does not work out this criticism, nor does he propose an alternative.[98] Moreover, as the Lebanese philosophy

93 al-Ḥabīb al-Jinḥānī, "Taʿqīb 3," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 72.

94 ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, "Taʿqīb 4," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 73–74.

95 Tīzīnī, "Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Waṭan al–ʿArabī," 88.

96 Tīzīnī, "Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī al-Waṭan al–ʿArabī," 90. Here, Tīzīnī uses the negative term "talfīqiyya," meaning to "concoct," but also to "fabricate" or "falsify."

97 Tīzīnī, 93.

98 Tīzīnī works out his highly theoretical Marxist reading of *turāth* in several monographs that are part of his "Project for a new perspective on Arab thought from the pre-Islamic age to the contemporary stage" (*Mashrūʿ ruʾya jadīda li-l-fikr al-ʿarabī min al-ʿaṣr al-jāhilī ḥatā al-marḥala al-muʿāsira*). Some notable volumes in this project are Ṭayyib Tīzīnī, *Mashrūʿ Ruʾya Jadīda li-l-fikr al-ʿArabī fī al-ʿAṣr al-Wasīṭ*, 5th ed. (Damascus: Dār Dimashq, 1971), and Ṭayyib Tīzīnī, *Min al-Turāth ilā al-Thawra: ḥawl Naẓariyya Muqtaraḥa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1978). For a concise overview of his life and works, see Sarhan Dhouib and Anke von Kügelgen, "§ 8.7 Ṭayyib Tīzīnī," in *Bd. IV "Geschichte der Philosophie in der islamischen Welt des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts,"* Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2021), 451–65.

professor Nāṣīf Naṣṣār points out, Tīzīnī does not give any evidence for why this tripartite division is best suited to describing Arab thought.[99]

A contribution that does go into some detail concerning the meaning of the terms mentioned in the title of the conference is the comment on this talk formulated by the Moroccan philosophy professor Muḥammad ʿAzīz al-Ḥabbābī.[100] "Contemporaneity," according to al-Ḥabbābī, signifies an openness and flexibility that allows one to adjust to the current age. In a sense, this adjective applies to everyone, since everyone is contemporary with the current age. He also argues that this concept should not be seen as the opposite of what lies in the past, because one can always conform to the current age while drawing on a shared heritage (*turāth*). Al-Ḥabbābī then goes into the popular opposition between contemporaneity and authenticity (*aṣāla*). He remarks that the latter is the binding element between the "I" and the "We," that is, between the individual and the society in which he lives, and he adds that in order to perform this function, authenticity must always be open to changing appraisals and interpretations in reaction to changing circumstances. In this sense, it is a mistake to oppose it to contemporaneity. We should rather see it as completing contemporaneity, since it provides current generations with useful experience. Hence, he criticizes Arab liberals – mentioning Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd explicitly – who want to adopt Western models wholesale, without regard for what their own authentic heritage has to offer – as opposed to the Islamist demand for cleaning authentic culture of foreign blemish.[101] While it is interesting to see al-Ḥabbābī use a critique of the concept of authenticity as a basis for his critique of Maḥmūd, he does not go as far as ʿAyyād. When he says that a clear definition of authenticity is necessary, he means by this a definition of which time (*li-ayy zamān*) or period it refers to, not whether it necessarily refers to any historical era in the first place.[102] Authentic, for him, is "whatever has become rooted in

99 Nāṣīf Naṣṣār, "Taʿqīb 2," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 111–12.

100 Although it is mentioned as a comment (*taʿqīb*), al-Ḥabbābī's contribution can be seen as an individual paper. A footnote at the beginning of his "comment" makes clear that he was not able to join the conference in person, and that his paper was read out following Tīzīnī's presentation, even though it does not react to it – see Muḥammad ʿAzīz al-Ḥabbābī, "Taʿqīb 1," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 99.

101 al-Ḥabbābī, "Taʿqīb 1,"101.

102 al-Ḥabbābī, 107. This identification of authenticity with the past is articulated most clearly in another comment on Tīzīnī's paper by al-Anbā Ghrīghūriyūs: "Authenticity and with it *turāth*, or in it *turāth*, is the past with everything that mankind is proud of in being carried on from *turāth*, which is the outcome of religious and social values and experiences that have long been handed over through generations" – see al-Anbā Ghrīghūriyūs, "Taʿqīb 5," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-*

the mindset and behavior of peoples" ("*mā taʾaṣṣal fī dhahniyyat al-shuʿūb wa-sulūkihā*").[103]

In the next major contribution by the internationally renowned Algerian philosopher Mohammed Arkoun (Muḥammad Arkūn), the problematic of authenticity and modernity is not addressed directly. Arkoun does however give a synopsis of his analysis of *turāth*, which he has worked out in more detail elsewhere.[104] According to his analysis, clearly influenced by French structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers, *turāth* exists on four different levels: that which is thought (*la pensée/mā qad fukkir fīh*), what it is possible to think (*le pensable/mā yumkin al-tafkīr fīh*), what it is not possible to think (*l'impensable/mā lā yumkin al-tafkīr fīh*), and what has not yet been thought (*l'impensée/mā lam yufakkar fīh*). Arkoun applies this model to envision a radical transformation of Arab-Islamic thought, which has until now been constrained by strictures that make it impossible to think in directions that go against Muslim orthodoxy. By erasing these strictures through critical historical analysis, a whole field of the unthought is opened up for discovery, and *turāth* may not only be revived but Arab thought as such may be saved from the shackles of the past ("*li-inqādh al-fikr al-ʿarabī min quyūd al-māḍī*").[105] While Arkoun's contribution displays theoretical sophistication, he does not try to break with the standard narrative paradigm. The goal is to break free from the past by unlocking the unthinkable, not to challenge the premise that *turāth* belongs to the past and that the "mythical consciousness" (*conscience mythique/wāʿī usṭūrī*) aims to return to that age, while the modern, rational thinker (with whom Arkoun associates himself) looks to the open possibilities of the future.[106] That historical orientation – the hallmark of the standard narrative – is rather a starting point of Arkoun's proposal for the renewal of Arab thought. Con-

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ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 125.

103 al-Ḥabbābī, "Taʿqīb 1," 107.

104 Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984). Arkoun wrote mainly in French, although there is one publication on the topic of Arab thought that came out first in English: Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi, 2002). For a comprehensive discussion of Arkoun's work, see Ursula Günther, *Mohammed Arkoun: ein moderner Kritiker der islamischen Vernunft* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004); Ali Mirsepassi and Tadd Graham Fernée, *Islam, Democracy, and Cosmopolitanism: At Home and in the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chap. 4; and Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam*, chaps. 9–11.

105 Muḥammad Arkūn, "al-Turāth: Muḥtawāh wa-Huwwiyyatuh – ījābiyyātuh wa-Salbiyyātuh," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 167.

106 Arkūn, "al-Turāth: Muḥtawāh wa-Huwwiyyatuh – ījābiyyātuh wa-Salbiyyātuh," 163.

sequently, it differs essentially from the kind of approach that, for example, ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma proposes in his commentary on Arkoun's contribution, namely to view *turāth* not as a unified whole, but as a reflection of different current ideologies, and to therefore see Salafism, not as anti-modern, but very much as a phenomenon rooted in the modern age.[107]

The papers discussed so far were the contributions to the section of the conference that focused on "Taḥdīd Mafāhīm Ishkāliyyat al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara fī Iṭār Muqārin" ("The Definition of the Concepts of the Problematic of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in a Comparative Framework"). Many papers were presented in other panels, and many of these do not directly discuss the problematic, focusing instead on particular questions regarding law or education. In these papers too, however, we can sense the dominance of the standard narrative. For instance, Aḥmad Ṣidqī al-Dajjānī's presentation on "Western Thought and Change in Arab Society" rehearses the familiar frame for dealing with early twentieth-century thought in the Arab world by using the tripartite division of traditionalists, modernists, and in-betweenists, whom he dubs respectively the school that withdraws into itself (*al-munkamisha*), the school that indulges (*al-munghamisa*), and the school that talks back (*al-mustajība*). In conclusion, al-Dajjānī sees the only solution in going with the third option, represented by such thinkers as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, who "mixed between the authentic and the contemporary."[108] A more topical paper that does break with the trend of taking the definition of authenticity and modernity for granted is that by the Kuwaiti politician Aḥmad Kāmil Abū al-Majd. In his presentation on the topic of politics, he considers first what *turāth*, authenticity, contemporaneity, and renewal mean. His treatment of *turāth* rehearses a common refrain – "a collection of what has come down to us in terms of thought from those who came before and the traces that it has left be-

107 ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, "Taʿqīb 2," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 172–76. An even stronger argument for breaking with *turāth* is formulated in response to Arkoun's paper by the Syrian intellectual ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbd ad-Dāʾim. A typical middle course solution that fits the standard narrative is suggested by Tunisian researcher ʿAfīf al-Būnī, who favors taking over from the West what is necessary to modernize and rejecting "colonialism, exploitation, Westernization, submission, and the idea of 'the European model'" – see ʿAfīf al-Būnī, "Taʿqīb 6," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 196; ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbd ad-Dāʾim, "Taʿqīb 7," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 197–99.

108 Aḥmad Ṣidqī al-Dajjānī, "al-Fikr al-Gharbī wa-l-Taghyīr fī al-Mujtamaʿ al-ʿArabī," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 328–29.

hind"[109] – and it sets up a group of traditionalists versus modernists, accusing each side of being unreflective and mechanical in their adherence to one side or the other. What Abū al-Majd has to say about authenticity and contemporaneity is more interesting. He points out that this opposition is false, given that the opposite of authenticity (*aṣāla*) is counterfeit or forgery (*zayf*). [110] Regarding authenticity, he notes that this concept is commonly used to refer to *cultural* authenticity, even though its proponents are not quite clear as to where the borders between their own "authentic" culture and those of others lie, nor what the right unit of analysis is when it comes to authenticity – whether we should look at nationality, language, religion etc. As for contemporaneity, this term has come to be used widely as authenticity's counterpart in Arabic discourse, even though its meaning is not singular and Europeans prefer to use the term modernity, which is also available to Arabs, namely *ḥadātha.* It may be in relation to time (that is, in opposition to the past), in relation to content (that is, the big changes that separate past from present), or in terms of region (*iqlīmī*) – here Abū al-Majd refers to the concept of contemporaneity as an ideal, namely as an ideal of progress (*taqaddum*).[111] Unfortunately, after making these distinctions, it is not clear how Abū al-Majd fleshes them out or how he uses them in his paper, which turns to the role of Islamic principles in contemporary politics, other than as a general guideline to remain critical towards both traditionalism and attempts at renewal.

A final topical paper presented at the 1984 conference that we will discuss was presented by Jalāl Aḥmad Amīn, a well-known Egyptian economist and the son of the renowned *nahḍa* intellectual Aḥmad Amīn. He starts out his contribution on "*Turāth* and Arab Development" by claiming that the lack of development in the Arab world has long been linked to discourse on *turāth* and the return to the roots (*judhūr*) of Arab-Islamic civilization. Whenever Arabs experience foreign domination or a political or economic setback, the reaction has always been to turn to their heritage and stamp out foreign influence. At the same time, this "Salafi" trend has been opposed by a liberal-secular and a Marxist-secular trend, which saw the answer to the problems plaguing Arab society in learning from foreign examples, instead of rejecting them. The struggle between these groups was a chief feature of the *nahḍa,* and while it was put on hold during most of the Nasse-

109 Aḥmad Kāmil Abū al-Majd, "al-Masʾala al-Siyāsiyya: Waṣl al-Turāth bi-l-ʿAṣr wa-l-Niẓām al-Siyāsī li-l-Dawla." In *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara,* 571–93. Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1985.

110 It is interesting that, whereas *aṣāla* became a central concept in modern Arab public discourse, there is no real equivalent to the notion of inauthenticity in Arabic.

111 Abū al-Majd, "al-Masʾala al-Siyāsiyya: Waṣl al-Turāth bi-l-ʿAṣr wa-l-Niẓām al-Siyāsī li-l-Dawla," 574–75.

rist era, it re-emerged after the 1967 war. So far, Amīn faithfully follows the Marxist version of the standard narrative. He adds to it an interesting gloss, however, by arguing that it is not just the Salafi trend, but also the liberals and the Marxists who are "*turāthī*" in their thinking, or as he puts it, in their "metaphysics."[112] The reason for this is that each of these trends, according to Amīn, turns to its own preferred heritage and idolizes it. Marxists hold up Marxist-materialist philosophy as the ultimate truth, and liberals proclaim the Western natural, social, and human sciences as the sole measure for progress. Even though these groups present their claims as universal, in reality they are following a particular heritage. Moreover, they follow the precepts of these examples slavishly, and are therefore no less traditionalist than the Salafists.[113] This leads the author to conclude that the real question facing Arabs is not about a choice between authentic and modern, or between foreign and domestic, but a choice between two frames of mind, a choice between traditionalism and creativity.[114] Naturally, the latter is the option that leads to development, according to Amīn, and although he admits that he does not have any specific plan for how such creativity is reached or built on the basis of *turāth*, he argues that it can only be achieved by later generations, if they are given the chance to develop their talents through education.[115]

Given the enormity of this topic, it is not surprising that Amīn would leave us with a very general answer to the question of how to develop the Arab world. But that is not the reason for closing our discussion of the 1984 conference with a discussion of his paper; rather, Amīn's paper is interesting for being one of the few that challenges the categorization of Arab thought and tries to change the question. Admittedly, he is not the first to suggest that Marxists and liberals are just as traditionalist in their regard for a particular heritage as the Salafists are in their commitment to *turāth*.[116] It is remarkable however to see him connect this observation to a larger point about the entire problematic of authenticity and modernity; that the really important question is not about what is foreign and what is domestic, what is original to *turāth* and what is not, but rather how Arabs can be creative

112 He phrases it in a subtitle as: "We Are All Metaphysical *Turāthīs*" (*Kullunā Turāthiyyūn Mītāfīzīqīyyūn*) – see Jalāl Aḥmad Amīn, "al-Turāth wa-l-Tanmiya al-ʿArabiyya," in *al-Turāth wa-Taḥaddiyāt al-ʿAṣr fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī: al-Aṣāla wa-l-Muʿāsara* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿarabiyya, 1985), 759.

113 Amīn, "al-Turāth wa-l-Tanmiya al-ʿArabiyya," 763. Amīn argues this in the following section entitled "All of Us Are Also Traditionalists" (*Kullunā Ayḍan Muqallidūn*).

114 Amīn, "al-Turāth wa-l-Tanmiya al-ʿArabiyya," 767.

115 Amīn, "al-Turāth wa-l-Tanmiya al-ʿArabiyya," 774.

116 Al-Jābirī makes this argument, for example, at the beginning of his ground-breaking *We and the Heritage*, published in 1980 – see al-Jābirī, *Naḥnu wa-l-Turāth: Qirāʾāt Muʿāsira fī Turāthinā al-Falsafī*, 12–16.

rather than conventional in their thinking. With this suggestion, Amīn tends towards the kind of analysis we found in ʿAyyād and, to some extent, in al-Jābirī; a kind of questioning that does not take for granted the parameters of the debate in which they are engaged, but attempts to rearrange the landscape in which this debate takes place.

The goal in considering these conferences is to show how little this is in fact done in contemporary Arab thought. Even focusing on the exceptions, there is little discussion of the main line of the *turāth* discourse, and when it is discussed, it does not kindle much response from commentators. The main line of the discussion about authenticity and modernity within the framework of *turāth* appears and increasingly so if we compare ʿAyyād's paper, with which we started, to later discussions in 1974 and 1984. While ʿAyyād feels that he can open a free discussion on the topic of authenticity in order to define it and describe its genealogy and its various meanings, later writers tend to take the historical, culturalist interpretation of authenticity as a given. Even if they do not, even if they question this interpretation of authenticity, they do so from a different position. Once the standard narrative has taken shape, any divergence from it is necessarily framed as an intervention. This change in tone, from free discussion to intervention is a mark of discursive sedimentation. After all, it only makes sense to frame your rethinking of the premises of a debate as an intervention, when these premises are widely known and generally accepted. To illustrate this change in tone, we will close this chapter by looking at two such interventions by authors whom we have already met as participants in the conferences of 1974 and 1984: Fuʾād Zakariyyā and ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma. We will see how, at the height of the *turāth* debate in the 1980s and 1990s, they both expressed their qualms about the standard narrative in ways resembling ʿAyyād's 1971 paper, and we will notice a marked change in how they present their argument as a way of shaking up the concepts of authenticity and modernity that dominated Arab thought in their time.

2.6 Critical interventions: Fuʾād Zakariyyā and ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma

Let us start with the Egyptian existentialist philosopher Fuʾād Zakariyyā. In a later book he appears to go against his earlier, more standard treatment of authenticity by pursuing the analysis of concepts that he proposes in his contribution to the 1974 conference. Writing at the height of the *turāth* debate in the 1980s, Fuʾād Zakariyyā captures the dominant trend of the previous two decades as follows:

> The formula (*ṣīgha*) "Authenticity and Contemporaneity" appeared in our cultural life at a certain time during the previous two decades (more or less). It was seized upon soon enough

> by writers and researchers and created a fundamental core that gathered around it a crystal which became bigger and bigger, until it encompassed a large part of our cultural and intellectual production since its first appearance. This formula spread among the old and the young. It came to be present at all symposiums, conferences, and circles. It became a constant fixture in our intellectual magazines and literary pages. Each intellectual, when receiving a cultured young gentleman for a conversation or a meeting, would expect at least one question concerning the problem of authenticity and contemporaneity and, more often than not, his expectation was proven correct.[117]

Given the dominance of this "formula" it is surprising, Zakariyyā writes, to see that "during all of this no one stopped to analyze this formulation itself and become aware of the extent to which it is able to express the problem that is thrust upon us." Although he tentatively goes along with the idea that the formula "authenticity and contemporaneity" became *en vogue* or was created in response to the 1967 defeat, he regards this as merely the most recent articulation of an older problematic.[118] He maintains that a deeper analysis of this problematic is necessary to pinpoint its basic flaws, which have led to "an obvious imbalance in the intellectual framework" of Arab thought.[119] According to Zakariyyā, authenticity has two general meanings, neither of which displays a clear opposition between authenticity and contemporaneity. In its first meaning, authenticity is taken as *temporal*, referring to something that is with us today, but which traces its genealogical roots back to ancient times. This link to the present is important for Zakariyyā, because if the authentic object, animal, or person in question is around today, it shows that authenticity cannot be entirely opposed to the contemporary.[120] The second meaning of authenticity lacks this temporal dimension. This is the kind of authenticity that pertains to "being true to oneself and the true expression of the self (*al-ṣidq maʿa nafsihi wa-l-taʿbīr al-ḥaqīqī ʿan al-dhāt*)." It is the kind of thing often said in relation to the "authenticity of emotion" or "authenticity of the poet."[121] Here also authenticity and contemporaneity are not opposites, because the contemporary includes both emotional authenticity and its opposite forgery or deception.

If we want a true opposite of authenticity, we must turn to the last of these terms, to "forgery (*zayf*), superficiality (*saṭḥiyya*), and literal imitation (*muḥākāa*

117 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 87.
118 He notes, in particular, the French historian Jacques Berque as having introduced it as a translation of the French "authenticité."
119 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 88.
120 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 89.
121 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 89.

ḥarfiyya),"[122] in other words, *inauthenticity*.[123] The difficulty is that this is not how the problem of authenticity and contemporaneity is generally perceived. The dominant framework for talking about this problematic is articulated in terms of a binary division (*taqsīm thunā'ī*) that is structured along a temporal axis: You either sympathize with the past or you support a call for the present. This binary, however, is based on oversimplification. It forces Arabs to choose between two kinds of inauthenticity, leading to two kinds of alienation (*ightirāb*), one that is *temporal* – imitating the Arab-Islamic past – and one that is *spatial* – imitating the Western present.[124] The way out of this bind is to recognize that the important problems faced by Arab intellectuals do not fall neatly into either of these two categories. They should see that to be authentic does not imply being out of sync with the current age. "Authenticity," he writes, "entails that we are true to ourselves and that we seek inspiration for solutions to our problems from our reality." To achieve this, Arabs need to pay attention to two dimensions. The first is that of "ingenuity and creativity" (*al-ibtikār wa-l-ibdā'*), meaning that authenticity must always involve creating something new that is originally yours. The second is the temporal dimension, by which Zakariyyā means that erasing the binary opposition between authenticity and modernity does *not* imply an erasure of the past. We carry the past on our backs and should make use of it insofar as it "includes elements of creativity and a longing for the future."[125]

Clearly, Zakariyyā's analysis of the problematic of authenticity and modernity has a lot in common with ʿAyyād's. Both of them are sensitive to the different meanings involved in the term authenticity; both are aware of how its temporal opposition to the contemporary influences the way in which the term authenticity is understood; both, moreover, wish to complicate the question of authenticity and go beyond a simple opposition in terms. At the same time, there is a notable difference between the two. ʿAyyād presents us with a reflection, whereas Zakariyyā's text reads as an intervention. In the latter, the exasperation at the direction that Arab thought has taken is palpable. Everyone is now talking about these two terms, authenticity and modernity, without having discussed what they actually mean or how this problematic connects to real problems faced by Arab society.

A few years after Zakariyyā's remarks on authenticity, we find a similar critical stance in an examination of authenticity and modernity in Arab discourse by ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma. Looking back on how the *turāth* debate has developed thus far, and

122 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 90.

123 As mentioned in footnote 110 of this chapter, there is no real equivalent to the notion of inauthenticity in Arabic.

124 Zakariyyā, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mīzān al-ʿAql*, 93.

125 Zakariyyā, 97.

the center stage afforded to authenticity and modernity, al-ʿAẓma notes the conceptual confusion that surrounds this debate: Authenticity (*aṣāla*) is used interchangeably with cognates like subjectivity (*dhātiyya*) and identity (*huwiyya*), while the term *ḥadātha* went from denoting the modernist movement, as well as the contemporary (*muʿāsara*) to being short-hand for a very general sense of "contemporaneity, social-cultural revolutionism, the adoption of modern ideologies like Marxism, and other matters."[126] The discourse of authenticity and modernity among Arab thinkers rests on an essentialist and binary understanding of history. It is essentialist, because it presupposes the continuity of an Arab-Islamic identity that is ahistorical and that will find the sources for its own revitalization buried deep inside itself. It is binary, because it presupposes an Other that is its opposite and its enemy.[127] Modernity, which is associated with the West qua the Arab's Other, represents a break or rupture with the singular Arab-Islamic entity; authenticity is its homecoming.

A fundamental mistake in this picture, according to al-ʿAẓma, is that it does not acknowledge the degree to which authenticity is itself part of modern culture. "The real roots of authenticity," he writes, "do not hide outside of modernity, because modernity is the root of authenticity."[128] Sure enough, the Arabs have a history, they have traditions, but these have always been and will always be refracted through the circumstances of the day.[129] Distinctive about these circumstances is that they are marked by a modernity that is global in scope, and which is built in large part on Western principles, customs, institutions, and tastes. "The West and the universal civilization (*al-madaniyya al-kawniyya*)," writes al-ʿAẓma, "are hiding inside of us in many ways, because we wear trousers and study in universities, we settle our differences in civil courts … and adopt imported political concepts."[130] Moreover, it is incorrect to think of these Western influences as being of a kind. The West, like the East, is a concept that harbors many contradicting tendencies and concepts. It contains both "trends of darkness and of enlightenment (*nazāʿāt iẓlāmiyya wa-tanwīriyya*), openness and closedness, progress and degeneration, democracy and tyranny."[131] Like Zakariyyā, al-ʿAẓma wants to say that the modern world that we actually live in does not lend itself to strict dualisms of authentic and modern or East and West, regardless of the neat categorizations used

126 al-ʿAẓma, *al-Aṣāla aw Siyāsat al-Hurūb min al-Wāqiʿ*, 8.
127 al-ʿAẓma, *al-Aṣāla aw Siyāsat al-Hurūb min al-Wāqiʿ*, 11.
128 al-ʿAẓma, 14.
129 al-ʿAẓma, 15.
130 al-ʿAẓma, 16–17.
131 al-ʿAẓma, 17.

by theoreticians of *turāth* like Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, or others whom he mentions as representatives of contemporary Arab thought.

This realignment of the concept of modernity naturally has repercussions for the meaning of authenticity. After all, if *ḥadātha* is not something Western, but a global phenomenon that is fundamental to the contemporary reality of the Arab world, then how should we understand its counterpart, *aṣāla?* Al-ʿAẓma finds the origins of the common nativist conception of authenticity in the development of Arab nationalist thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which based itself on the German Romantic nationalist ideology. These concepts were later taken over by Islamist groups, who nowadays are the most vocal defenders of Muslim authenticity.[132] Authenticity, in this political and cultural sense, has come to stand for a nebulous, positive conception of the self that does not do justice to the complexity of people's identities and the societies of which they are members.[133] Notwithstanding the fact that the opposite of authenticity is actually "forgery" (*zayf*),[134] modernity and authenticity have become catchphrases for a general framework for a discourse of binaries (*thunāʾiyyāt*), like "self and other, authentic and foreign, what remains and what occurs in an instant, the lasting and the interrupted, intrinsic and extrinsic, positive and negative, Renaissance (*nahḍa*) and decline, strength and weakness."[135] Interestingly, al-ʿAẓma adds that such a discourse of authenticity is structurally closely related to that of Orientalism. The binaries of authenticity and modernity mirror those of an ontological division of the world into Orient and Occident.[136]

Like ʿAyyād and Zakariyyā, then, al-ʿAẓma gives us an alternative take on authenticity. The difference is that, where ʿAyyād's could still present a recapitulation of the different meanings of *aṣāla*, by the time al-ʿAẓma (and Zakariyyā) tackle the question of authenticity they have to present their analysis as an *intervention* – a clear indication of the extent to which authenticity has taken on a stable role within the standard narrative. Al-ʿAẓma frames his intervention, not by arguing for the party of authenticity, or of modernity, or for some combination of the two, but by examining its structure. A historian by trade, al-ʿAẓma adds to this a measure of historical depth that echoes Abū Lughud's contribution to the 1974 conference. The opposition between modernity and authenticity is, according to al-ʿAẓma, not itself ancient. It is rooted in modern Western ideas that have been fundamen-

132 al-ʿAẓma, 24–25.
133 al-ʿAẓma, 26–27.
134 al-ʿAẓma, 26.
135 al-ʿAẓma, 30.
136 al-ʿAẓma, 31.

tal for articulating the *nahḍa* project of Islamic revival.[137] This is evident in that the earliest notion of a nationalist ideal of authenticity stems from German Romanticism, with figures like Herder and Hegel.[138] We see it in the enthusiasm of early Islamic reformers like al-Afghānī, ʿAbduh, and Riḍā for Rousseauian political ideas and other Enlightenment ideals like natural religion, rejection of immanence, utilitarianism, and empiricist materialism.[139] Most important for these reformers, however, was the addition of nineteenth-century thought, particularly evolutionary theory, Social Darwinism, and the ideal of progress. These Darwinian elements were allied with a Romantic political project of national strength and unity to form the ideological background for the Arab intellectual scene during much of the twentieth century.[140] We see the effect of this nowadays, not only among the Islamists, but equally among contemporary authors of a liberal bent who suggest a reconciliation between the two sides. Rather than debunk the Romantic notion that a people is the guardian of an innate spirit that resides in the marrow of its members, they accept this idea and try to reconcile it with the need to adopt inauthentic Western elements. Again, al-ʿAẓma offers Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd as an example. With his invocation of the "I" and the "We" of an Arab-Islamic identity that carries "a deep-rooted principle from which was emitted – and continues to be emitted – our other judgments in various arenas," Maḥmūd displays precisely the kind of ideological weaponization of *turāth* that one finds among Islamist intellectuals.[141] Here, again, history becomes an unfailing, unalloyed source of identity in a clash of civilizations.

2.7 Authentic interventions

Doubtless these are not the only examples of Arab intellectuals critical of the fundamental discursive structures of Arab thought. This kind of criticism, however, remains rare. My point in presenting these examples is to add substance to the claim that the standard narrative is, indeed, "standard." Yet, a second aim is to show that there are also alternatives out there. My qualms about the straightforward oppo-

137 al-ʿAẓma, 35.
138 al-ʿAẓma, 24.
139 al-ʿAẓma, 37–38.
140 al-ʿAẓma, 39–40.
141 al-ʿAẓma, 57, quoting Maḥmūd.

sition between authenticity and modernity are shared by Arab intellectuals.[142] Interventions like these dislodge any easy classifications of contemporary Arab thought, and it is important to show that this kind of critique has already been articulated for quite a while by Arab authors. At the same time, we must acknowledge that, despite diverging voices, the standard narrative continues to dominate Arab thought unchanged and virtually unchallenged.

There is another, more important takeaway. These critiques may be taken as just that: challenges to the status quo, rather than substantive alternative frameworks for thought. I want to argue, however, that they are (or can be) more than that. Particularly evident in ʿAyyād and Zakariyyā's approach is that they do not simply contrast different meanings of authenticity, but also point to different moral implications of this term. The contradiction between the individual and the community inherent in authenticity is a contradiction in moral claims on the individual, about whether to privilege his creative original impulse or his sense of authentic belonging to a culture and a heritage. In other words, the ambiguity in the meaning of a term like *aṣāla* is not an innocent linguistic one. Authenticity is not ambiguous in the way that the term "bank" can refer to the land alongside a river and a financial establishment, or that in the phrase "thou still unravished beauty of quietness" the term "still" may refer either to a state of being calm or of continuing to be as one was before. Authenticity, particularly in modern times, encompasses a moral ideal, and the two meanings of authenticity point to two related, but in a certain way incompatible moral claims. On the one hand, we understand authenticity as a personal ideal of independence and creativity. We moderns are called upon to be authentic, while to deny someone authenticity – calling him "inauthentic" – is seen as an insult. Here, to be authentic refers to being yourself in a way that is unique to you, that characterizes who you are. On the other hand, authenticity is also used in a collective sense. Here, authenticity rather refers to being in tune with your shared roots, thus implying similarity to your peers that distinguishes you from other groups. In both cases, an intrinsic value is attributed to "staying true to yourself," but naturally their outcomes differ wildly. The personal ideal of authenticity underwrites individualism and, in certain cases, a breaking away from the past. The cultural ideal forms the basis for feelings of solidarity between those who share a past or certain characteristics that they wish to protect and honor. This has, of course, become a powerful political rallying call, at the heart of movements for national independence and the expression of

142 In fact, one of our main interlocutors, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭaha, refers to it as the "hoary old problematic" (*ishkāliyya mustahlaka istihkākan*) – see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭāhā, *Suʾāl al-Manhaj: fī Ufuq al-Taʾsīs l-Unmūdaj Fikrī Jadīd* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Fikr wa-l-Ibdāʿ, 2015), 55.

grievances of minorities in the modern state. This ambiguity in the term authenticity is, as we saw, not alien to the Arabic language. In Arabic, too, *aṣāla* and its adjective *aṣīl* can be used to refer to both ideals of authenticity. Our hypothesis is that "authenticity" in Arabic potentially implies a similar range of conflicting moral claims.

The upshot of bringing out this moral horizon is potentially significant. If authenticity indeed has different interpretations that, moreover, have different moral premises and effects, then a more diverse interpretative framework for looking at authenticity discourse would not just provide a new perspective on Arab thought, but a way of uncovering the ethical in debates that, ostensibly, have shunned any substantive discussion of ethics – a point already discussed in the Introduction. It would be a way of cutting ourselves loose from the one-dimensional framework according to which a thinker either proposes a return to the past or a push towards the future. Instead, it would require us to look in detail at how they articulate an ideal of authenticity (and modernity) and the various ethical claims that this entails. Studying authenticity in detail would provide a tool to paint Arab debates as more than ruminations on the meaning of *turāth.* It would give us a way of reading their texts as opposing perspectives on the role of the individual and the community in contemporary Arab society. Moreover, given that this discourse on authenticity is global in scope, it would provide a firm basis for taking these debates out of the confines of the Arab context and bringing them into conversation with authenticity discourse in other regions, both in the postcolonial world and in the West.

To appreciate this dimension of authenticity, we need to become acquainted with its rich genealogy in the modern age, one that has given rise to a variety of highly influential branches of theory in philosophy, art, psychology, and political and social science, through which it has influenced almost every aspect of mainstream modern thought and society. This will help us to think differently about *aṣāla* in the Arab context, not merely in the one-dimensional straitjacket of a nostalgic longing for the past, but as a potential means for expressing different conceptions of the individual in relation to modern society. Such a reappraisal of authenticity would naturally complicate the familiar standard narrative of Arab thought. The opposition between authenticity and modernity that remains key to contemporary Arab thought requires a simple version of authenticity of the nostalgic-longing type to uphold its opposition to a disenchanted modernity. This straightforward opposition becomes untenable once authenticity takes on different meanings. Moreover, it is hard to discern any kind of opposition to modernity in something like the authentically creative individual, if only because this kind of person is associated with rather than opposed to modern culture. On reflection, this should not come as a surprise. As I mentioned above and as we will explore

in the next chapter, the ideal of authenticity is anything but a relic. It is instead one of the defining characteristics of modern life. The requirement to be authentic, to be true to yourself, is present in all areas of our societies, from advertising, to art, to politics. To see Arab authenticity discourse as entirely reactionary is to neglect the fact that the moral impulse to be true to one's culture or heritage is one that derives its force, not from classical sources, but from distinctively modern ideals about identity and communal belonging that relate to specific conceptions about how the past relates to the present; authenticity discourse is supported by a particular temporal vocabulary.

If this is so, then before we can adequately gauge the meaning of authenticity, we must take a closer look at time. This, in a way, has already been suggested to us by both Zakariyyā and al-ʿAẓma. One fundamental aspect of the standard narrative of Arab thought, according to them, is that it takes for granted the temporal opposition between authenticity and modernity, and uses it as the central axis of its binary conceptual framework. Authenticity *is* past, just as modernity *is* present and future. This, I take it, points us to a deeper truth about authenticity that has remained underdeveloped in discussions of Arab thought. If authenticity is bound up with time, then what you take authenticity to mean will, to some degree, be determined by your conception of how time functions. Different ideas about authenticity and modernity become possible given different perspectives on how past, present, and future are related. If, indeed, different temporal imaginaries are constitutive of different notions of authenticity, then a reappraisal of authenticity in Arab thought will require a simultaneous investigation into conceptions of time. On the one hand, it can help us understand the structure of the standard narrative and explain its dominance. On the other hand, this perspective implies that any diverging conceptions of time put forward by Arab intellectuals, may be studied as attempts at reconfiguring the dominant narrative.