

## What Makes a “Muslim Intellectual”? On the Pros and Cons of a Category

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At its core, this essay contains a substantiated plea for bringing about conceptual clarity to the notion of “Muslim intellectual,” which the frequent and highly ideologically charged public usage of this term seems to distort. In search for a sound analytical concept of “intellectual” first, relevant sociological and philosophical deliberations are highlighted, indicating that both of their notions differ to such an extent that their applicability to academic pursuit must be doubted. Yet, by discussing some considerations by a study of Islam open to the approaches of the social sciences a possible framework for an analytically meaningful concept of “Muslim intellectual” is presented. At the same time, however, arguments are presented for why those contemporary Muslim thinkers who are usually credited with being “Muslim intellectuals” would hardly fit the analytical criteria for such label.<sup>1</sup>

These days, numerous terms, concepts, and labels bustle about in the popular media, impacting not just the common mind, but also academic discourse. This development is quite alarming, as it causes widely accepted rules of academic speech (e.g. Popper<sup>1</sup>, 16-9, 22-5) to become infested with heavily value-laden and pithily used terms. This seems to be even more the case in the current highly emotionally charged media coverage of Islam- and Middle East-related developments in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which were justified on the basis of religion. To illustrate this rather troubling situation:

Recently, the terms *salafī*, *salafiyya*, *Salafist*, and *Salafism* have been flying around the media, labeling a quite heterogeneous group of Muslims who stand out visibly in their attempts to strictly adhere to the beliefs and, beyond that, the prac-

tices of earlier generations of believers. In the public perception, the term *salafī* has become representative of someone who, on religious grounds, rejects all values upon which the overwhelming majority of contemporary societies are based (liberal, democratic, secular, etc.). This rather woolly notion of *salafī* has now entered the academic context without, in most cases, being subjected to thorough scholarly scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> This is regrettable for several reasons. Firstly, such a lack of conceptual clarity lumps those reform-inclined Muslims in Egypt and the Levant at the turn of the twentieth century, who have explicitly labeled themselves as “salafiyya”, alongside various contemporary groups and personalities that range from the state-supportive religious establishment in Saudi Arabia to militant manifestations such as *al-Qā’ida*. Secondly, the absence of a clearly defined analytical term will render every deduction on this basis at least problematic, if not void.

A similar label originating perhaps more in popular speech is that of the “Muslim intellectual,” the subject of the present paper. Hardly ever properly defined, this tag appears to be ascribed to those Muslims who, by emphasizing rationality over slavishly adhering to a textual tradition, support the general compatibility of Western and Islamic social and political values. In

short, the badges “salafis” and “intellectuals” represent the “bad guys” and “good guys,” respectively, from a perspective clearly shaped in a Western normative framework.

In this paper I will attempt to abstain from this popular notion of *intellectual*, instead considering it as an analytical term that has some explanatory force in academic pursuit. In doing so, I will generally challenge the idea of religiously connoted intellectualism, but conclude that the concept—provided it has been usefully defined—might be analytically effective for understanding social and intellectual change in the Muslim world during the decades around the turn of the twentieth century.

### Three Approaches to the Target

In my attempt to ascribe meaning to the category *intellectual* in general, and *Muslim intellectual* in particular, I will elaborate three rather distinct approaches that have so far contributed significantly to the discussion, while at the same time not being necessarily in line with each other. The reasons for this disagreement are most probably of a systematic nature, rooted in the very self-conception of the respective academic disciplines. While sociology since Weber aims at interpretatively understanding actual social realities, practical philosophy—though related to social

realities—seeks to attain a rational justification of normative frameworks. Although it appears that both perspectives are mutually exclusive and would, therefore, require us to decide which of the two we are going to follow, both indeed have something to offer to our quest—especially with regard to the question of whether it makes sense to place intellectualism within an authoritatively grounded setting. In other words, it may help us to consider the usefulness of a category *Muslim intellectual*, as distinct from *Christian intellectual*, *Buddhist intellectual*, *Marxist intellectual*, *liberalist intellectual*, and the like, or whether the adherence to such a framework somehow contradicts the very idea of intellectualism. Finally, I will demonstrate that a study of Islam which is open to the insights of the social sciences and other humanities has something constructive to contribute to our academic discussion on the topic.

#### a) *The Sociological Approach*

While a distinct branch has developed within sociology investigating the phenomenon of the “intellectual,”<sup>3</sup> the individual to whom we owe the first systematic discussion on this matter was, as is so often the case, Max Weber. He had considered intellectuals within his sociology of domination (*Herrschaftssoziologie*) by defining them as:

those who wield power in the polity ... the intellectuals, as we shall tentatively call those who usurp leadership in a *Kulturgemeinschaft* (that is, within a group of people who by virtue of their peculiarity, have access to certain products that are considered “culture goods”) ... (Weber 530 [transl. Talcott Parsons; italics in the original])

What can be extracted from this most general definition of “intellectuals” is inner-worldliness, or the assumption of public responsibilities, as a decisive criterion (see Shils, “Intellectuals and Powers”; *Tradition and Modernity*). As such, Weber expert Wolfgang Schluchter has argued, intellectuals do not only have access to “cultural assets,” but are decisively involved in the production of “cultural values”—values that, in turn, either relate to culture and society, or neutralize it (Schluchter 1:122, 2:533 f). “Culture-related values” are ethical values, ideally explicitly shaped by pragmatic or situation-dependent considerations, while “culture-neutralizing values” are those produced by theoretical considerations and proclaimed as spatially and temporally invariant “truths.” In a disenchanting world, Weber and his epigones would argue, the latter values originate in the natural sciences and are declared paradigmatic by modern “intellectuals” carried away by progress; it is this very declaration of val-

ues as self-evident, i.e. free from any social and cultural context, that the French cultural philosopher Julien Benda (d. 1956) would eventually unveil as the “betrayal of the intellectuals.” This will be discussed below.

However, both sets of values that, according to Schluchter, intellectuals produce in the disenchanted world have a clear equivalent within a pre-modern religious framework as religious ethics and metaphysics. This, in turn, suggests the existence of “religious intellectuals” as the producers of these values, a fact that Weber and those in his wake are ready to concede (see Weber 304-14; Eisenstadt 29-39 et passim; Schluchter 1:223, 2:178, 206-10, 450f). Authors like Schluchter even go so far as to equate “clerics” with religious intellectuals, as those who “usually produce religious dogmas” (ibid. 1:223 and who are distinct from religiously motivated “lay intellectuals” (ibid.). This notion has a number of shortcomings. Firstly, it only works for communities in possession of a formal clerical estate, which renders it inapplicable in the Muslim context. Secondly, it is very much the production of dogmas—even those derived by the exertion of rational efforts—that leads ultimately to conflict with a philosophical concept of “intellectual,” even though sociologists like Edward Shils (d. 1995) seem to have somehow tried in their works (e.g.,

“Intellectuals and Powers”; *Tradition and Modernity*) on the matter to overcome this antagonism.

#### b) *The Philosophical Approach*

Hardly any thinkers other than aforementioned Frenchman Julien Benda represented the philosophical position toward intellectuals at the *fin de siècle*. As was the case for many other educated French, and even more so for him as an assimilated Jew, the “Dreyfus Affair” of 1894 along with the inglorious role that numerous self-proclaimed intellectuals played therein became a catalyst for Benda’s influential view on intellectuals, presented for the first time in his *La Trahison des clercs* in 1927. Benda initially set out the role of intellectuals as devoted, in an interest-free spirit, to guarding static universals such as “truth,” “justice,” “freedom,” and “reason,” only to unmask them as having quietly abandoned their lofty claim and allowing themselves to become corrupted by special interests (*Trahison* 83-92). However, instead of publicly acknowledging what Benda has labeled as this “betrayal,” intellectuals disguise it by claiming their positions to be guided by insight into an “objective necessity”—or, as Benda has called it, “in the name of a [mystical] union with the evolution of the world” (ibid. 37). This insight into an objective—though defined—

necessity is, for Benda, a declaration of the bankruptcy of reason as the defining principle of intellectualism: since reason was subordinated to external circumstances that are declared inevitable, it became degraded to a mere tool for the affirmation and aggrandizement of an existing order and preconceived developments, and hence, solely as a means of legitimizing dogma. According to Benda, adherence to dogma is diametrically opposed to intellectual pursuit; in this point he implicitly re-invokes the idealist critique of empiricism at the turn of the nineteenth century, which has hardly been brought more to the point than in the remarks of the otherwise rather reviled Johann Gottlieb Fichte (d. 1814). Already in his *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Science of Knowledge* from 1797/8, Fichte had defined a “dogmatist” in very much the way Benda had portrayed the fraudulent intellectual, when he wrote:

Every consistent dogmatist must necessarily be a fatalist. He does not deny, as a fact of consciousness, that we consider ourselves to be free; indeed it would be quite unreasonable to deny this. Instead, he uses his own principle to prove the falsity of this claim. He rejects the self-sufficiency of the I, which the idealist takes as his fundamental explanatory ground, and he treats the I

merely as a product of things; i.e., as an accidental feature of the world. A consistent dogmatist is also necessarily a materialist (1:430-31).

What we may conclude from this is that, for Fichte, an acceptance of any kind of dogma—as an indisputable truth existing outside ourselves—renders the ultimate task of an intellectual, specifically the production of culture-related values, completely void. Thus, we may conclude from both Fichte and Benda, to be an intellectual requires an uncompromising commitment to values that transcend the narrow confines of any dogma, rendering it a particular personal disposition:

The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it. Someone whose character is naturally slack and who has been enervated and twisted by spiritual servitude, scholarly self-indulgence, and vanity will never be able to raise himself to the level of idealism (Fichte 1:434).

Fichte himself, as Benda argued in a later work, was such an intellectual: it was more the idea of national unity advocated by him and like-minded thinkers than the

German Customs Union (*Deutscher Zollverein*) which eventually brought about the German nation (*Discours* 17). In other words, it was first and foremost intellectuals who brought about the novel idea of a nation as a culture-related value, and not any external condition portrayed as inevitable that necessitated the establishment of that nation.

What can be concluded from this brief excursion into a philosophical approach to the concept of intellectual for our own critical investigation is that, at least from this perspective, religion and intellectualism are mutually exclusive. This, in turn, poses the question of whether it is meaningful to speak of “Muslim intellectuals” or indeed, of a “Christian intellectual,” a “Buddhist intellectual,” and so on. Here, we would have to ask whether the attribute that refers to the belonging to a certain religious community is indeed the defining criterion for a particular brand of intellectuals. From the viewpoint of philosophers like the staunch Lutheran Fichte and the acculturated Jew Benda, a person can only be an “intellectual” if her or his religious belonging does not impact the rational argument for or against cultural values in a dogmatic manner. If this is the case, then the attribute that signifies religious belonging becomes more or less redundant; it would then be as significant a *definiens* as “bespectacled

intellectual” or “bearded intellectual.” If, in any case, the religious proclivities of a person become so dominant that religious dogma becomes the crucial reference point for the justification of cultural values, then according to our philosophers, such a person can by definition not be an intellectual.

Be that as it may, a sensible compromise between this prescriptive philosophical notion of *intellectual* and the more sociological one with regards to the Muslim context can be elaborated from the intriguing considerations of controversial Islamicist Reinhard Schulze (b. 1953), who has proposed a differentiation between “scholars” (*‘ulamā’*, sg. *‘ālim*) and “intellectuals” (*mufakkirūn*) in order to better understand profound structural changes in the Muslim world since the late nineteenth century.

### c) *The Approach by a Social Science-Inclined Study of Islam*

Schulze proposes to employ the category intellectual in order to better understand what he calls “the historical function of an ‘Enlightenment process’—that is, the liberation of an intellectual and academic culture within a society from immediate commitment to the directly experienced domination (*Herrschaftsbindung*) of an *ancien régime*” (Schulze, *Internationalismus* 3).

Therefore, for him, *intellectuals* comprise a new social group that a) does not affirm prevalent political rule, rather considering itself as the most suitable for community leadership; b) formulates a general social interest that is solely rooted in the profound knowledge of its own society; and c) would eventually claim a monopoly of definition in evaluating the state of the society and devising political remedies (*ibid.*). What should be quite obvious is that here, Schulze is certainly not concerned with any pre-modern period, but rather with the rapid and profound structural changes that have commonly been used to define modernity (Habermas, *Diskurs* 9-33; Hübinger 304-7). These very changes are what caused the emergence of a new societal elite; this elite, in turn, would then seriously question existing social and political conditions and, moreover, the knowledge that was used to justify its existence. While the ultimate target of this new social elite was therefore the political establishment, it first needed to challenge those who were engaged in the production and administration of hegemonic knowledge (*Herrschaftswissen*)—that is, the *'ulamā'*. Over the centuries, the *'ulamā'* had established firm criteria for what was considered knowledge, or “acquaintance with tradition”<sup>4</sup> (*'ilm*), as well as the methods for its acquisition. The ultimate premise herein

is that knowledge cannot actually be produced, only reproduced: the focal point remains the authoritative texts and, first and foremost, those believed to be God's final verbal revelation to humanity in the Qur'an. Such a strict dependence on text served to prevent free speculation (*ra'y*), since the foundation for any intellectual pursuit remained ultimately indisputable. It is upon this basis that, over time, exegetical traditions emerged which developed a number of genuine tools for controlling the perpetuation of knowledge. One of them is the institution of the formal teaching permission (*ijāza*) that contains the authoritative chain of transmission (*sanad*) and, thus, links its recipient all the way back to the Prophet Muhammad as the most authoritative interpreter of the divine revelation. As another of these tools, one may consider the formally rather restricted process of commenting upon earlier works that, at some point, have assumed an almost canonical status. It can certainly be argued that these formal restrictions—represented, among others, by the three forms *sharḥ* (i.e., commentary proper), *ḥāshiya* (glosses) and *hāmish* (marginal annotation)—indicate the confines within which individual reasoning can be tolerated, and where there must be no provision for irreversible breaks with the exegetical tradition.

Schulze identifies two developments that,

in his eyes, contributed significantly to the undermining of the monopoly of definition held by the *'ulamā'* since the eighteenth century. However, more recent scholarship has convincingly shown that the impact of one of these developments, namely the emergence of a new type of Sufism labeled Neo-Sufism, has been rather exaggerated (Schulze, *Internationalismus* 18-26).<sup>5</sup> The importance of the other development, essentially a technological and economic one, need hardly be explained: its trigger was the final implementation of the printed word across the Muslim world, and the resulting mass production of literary materials (*ibid.* 27-32; *idem*, “Printing” 41-9). That this development constituted a serious threat to the *'ulamā'*'s monopoly of definition is already evident from their arguments against the establishment of an Ottoman printing press under the supervision of the Hungarian convert to Islam Ibrahim Müteferrika (d. 1158/1745) in the early 1720s, even though the latter had developed a clear religious legal framework for his arguments in support of the printed word (Reichmuth 157-60).<sup>6</sup> However, the ultimate precondition for a successful implementation of the printed word was the existence of a newly emerged readership outside the space controlled by the *'ulamā'*. Quite similar to developments in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

Europe (Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 69-85), a self-confident and educated public emerged, primarily amongst the ascending mercantile class, which demanded a new kind of cultural good. These goods did not necessarily relate in an affirmative manner to the existing political establishment, but instead to the economic interest of this new social strata.

The establishment of printing presses from Istanbul to Calcutta in the early nineteenth century, sanctioned by the political ruler but set up mostly by daring entrepreneurs, brought into play a new criterion for the selection of texts-to-be-printed, one not overseen by the *'ulamā'*: namely, marketability. Now, the court was not the only customer for literary products beyond the scholarly estate; increasingly, the interests and literary tastes of the new and ever-growing educated public—considered by numerous scholars to be the nucleus for the emergence of a *bourgeoisie* (e.g. Schulze, “Gräber” 773-77; Pernau passim)—needed to be catered to. Because these interests and tastes hardly overlapped with those of the *'ulamā'*, both social groups occupied distinct social and also physical spaces for their respective production of cultural goods, leading to the eventual embodiment of distinct cultural values. The *'ulamā'* remained in the highly regulated space of the religious seminary—the

*madrasa* or the *dār al-'ulūm*—and in the mosque, where works were meticulously copied by students under the vigilant eye of a senior scholar, and where the discussion circles (*majālis*) were always rather teacher-centered. Religious dogma, the epitome of *'ilm*, continued to be the cultural good produced in these spaces.

In contrast, the newly emerging social strata resorted to using spaces that initially had a much different general function: at first, its members frequented informal places outside the cities, but from the eighteenth century on they congregated in what might be considered the “profane space” of coffee houses, and the salons that developed in private residencies (Schulze, “Gräber” 764-76).<sup>7</sup> It was in these alternative spaces (*maqā'id*) that a less-restrictive ethos of discussion surrounding cultural values—embedded in science, literature and even theology—developed between people from various, although almost exclusively innerworldly, backgrounds. Beyond the knowledge the *'ulamā'* brought forth, ideas (*afkār*) were developed and discussed; their carriers consequently known as *mufakkirūn*—intellectuals, who in the Ottoman lands became known as “afandiyya.” What is interesting is that the topics that the intellectuals debated appear, at least at first glance, strikingly similar to those around which the discourse of the *'ulamā'*

revolved. However, a closer look reveals that the reference points for the groups were significantly different. While it is indeed the case that both groups were concerned with notions of “justice,” “freedom,” or “politics” (idem, *Internationalismus* 33-6), the *'ulamā'* remained clearly within the confines of the Qur'anic revelation and the Islamic exegetical tradition. Hence, “justice” (*'adl*) is discussed in the context of the juxtaposition of divine and human capacities, “freedom” rather critically as epistemological and the resulting action-theoretical concept of “freedom of choice” (*ikhṭiyār*), and “politics” in correlation with the revealed framework as “good governance” (*siyāsat al-shar'iyya*). Even with regard to “society,” the reference point is not so much the actual society in which these *'ulamā'* lived and functioned, but rather the highly-idealized concept of a “community of believers” (*umma islāmiyya*). The *mufakkirūn*, in contrast, although equally referring to an idealized universalistic framework, their ideas of “freedom” (*ḥurriyya*), “justice” (*inṣāf*), or “politics” (*siyāsa*) related to their own experiences within the society in which they lived, and hence, were rooted in an appreciation of their own relatedness as human beings to the empirical world and not—at least not necessarily—to a dogmatic framework. While both groups had perhaps equally

good arguments in support of the validity of their respective views, it was the printed word and the resulting rapid dissemination of the works of intellectuals—aimed at reaching an as-large-as-possible readership (idem, “Printing” 46)<sup>8</sup>—that made the ultimate difference. However, the triumph of the intellectual over the ‘*ālim*’ caused the latter to eventually assess and subsequently rectify its position. It is this adjustment to the prevalent circumstances that caused the genuine *Muslim intellectual* to disappear, at least as a useful analytical category.

### Like a Shooting Star: The Fading of a Category

Admittedly, it took the ‘*ulamā*’ some time to finally recognize the threat that the intellectuals posed to their thus-far hardly contested monopoly of definition. However, once they had realized the gravity of their situation, the ‘*ulamā*’ tackled the problem head-on by appropriating issues as well as strategies that thus far had been exclusive to the intellectuals: their frame of reference would become more inner-worldly, in both content and strategy of dissemination. That European colonialism abolished Muslim rule across the Muslim world helped this transition considerably. While the impact and consequences of colonialism cannot but be considered catastrophic for the indigenous population,

it actually helped the ‘*ulamā*’ to liberate themselves from their traditional confines: they were no longer required to provide a normatively grounded justification for actual political rule, and therefore found themselves in a situation almost similar to that of the emerging intellectuals around the eighteenth century. Now ‘*ulamā*’ left the spatial confines of the seminary and the mosque and entered with the intellectuals into discussions of culture-related values; at the same time, intellectuals became increasingly accepted within the traditional spaces of ‘*ulamā*’ hegemony, which, in turn, facilitated reforms of curricula and means of instruction.<sup>9</sup> Thus, for example, the *ijāza*—originally only issued as a permission to teach one particular text in one particular tradition—became a certificate for the completion of a course in one particular subject, or even of the whole course of study (e.g. Hartung 237-38). It was these processes of mutual “infiltration” of formerly distinct and, indeed, rather exclusive social spaces that eventually blurred the boundaries between ‘*ulamā*’ and *mufakkirūn* and made an analytically meaningful distinction increasingly difficult. Besides, connected to this opening of space was an approximation in the initially conflicting values that each of the two groups had so far monopolized.

Moreover, ‘*ulamā*’ increasingly subscribed

to various technical means to publicize and circulate their views widely. At the center of this was, naturally, the printed word. But increasingly, audiovisual media and, more recently, the Internet with its many available formats, have taken hold. While the endorsement of the use of these media has contributed greatly to the reaching out from the confines of seminary and mosque, new literary genres were also appropriated by the ‘*ulamā*’ in addition to the dissemination of classical religious works. These new genres had previously been peculiar to the intellectuals: now, scholars were also producing popular textbooks with religious themes, spiritual memoirs, and general (religious) treatises on a vast variety of topics, written in a style easily digestible by the religious lay audience—the very same one whose taste the *mufakkirūn* had previously exclusively catered to. After the ‘*ulamā*’ entered into the same arena and addressed the same issues in a similar fashion, the divide between them and the *mufakkirūn* began to blur. Soon, the label *mufakkir* was also applied to ‘*ulamā*’ without any analytical distinction, as examples of the South Asian ‘*ālim*’ Abu I-Hasan ‘Ali Nadwi (d. 1999) and Egyptian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) provide ample evidence for; indeed, this epithet has since even been bestowed upon pre-modern thinkers, such as Ibn Taymiyya

(d. 1328) or Shah Waliyallah Dihlawi (d. 1762). At the same time, self-made men like Indian activist Muhammad ‘Ali “Jawhar” (d. 1931) and Islamist theoretician Abul A‘la Mawdu-di (d. 1979) were bestowed the honorific of “Mawlānā,” until then reserved solely for formally trained ‘*ulamā*’. Does this mean that the concept of the *Muslim intellectual* has been rendered inapplicable, at least as an analytical category with any explanatory force? After all, the label is commonly assigned to a wide array of contemporary Muslim thinkers, like Egyptian Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), Iranian Abdulkarim Soroush (b. 1945), or Swiss-Egyptian Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962), and even academics seem hardly to question whether this is an appropriate label. Therefore, in conclusion, I will briefly outline my doubts regarding whether we gain any insight by ascribing the label *Muslim intellectual* to these or similar persons, and argue that the denominational attribute actually contradicts the very notion of intellectual.

All three personalities mentioned are not products of distinct religious educational institutions; but rather, of Western or Westernized ones. In addition, they all pursued an academic career in the selfsame institutions: Abu Zayd at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Cairo University, Soroush at the Institute for Cultural Research and Studies at Tehran University,

and Ramadan initially at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Thus, their intellectual development seems to predisposition them all as “intellectuals” proper. However, the works with which our three examples have achieved international recognition present us with a different picture. Different as indeed they are, the core of the works of all three is indeed constituted by the unifying project of rationalizing religion in order to make it relevant for contemporary societies: Thus, while Abu Zayd attempted to rationalize the Qur’anic revelation by stressing the historicity of the Qur’anic text, Soroush’s endeavors revolve around rationalizing prophecy, and Ramadan’s around the development of rational arguments for the necessity of a new *fiqh*, taking into consideration especially the fact of a growing Muslim presence in Western countries (e.g. Abū Zayd 5-7; Sorūsh 1-28; Ramadan 93-102). None of them, however, question the veracity of the divine revelation as the ultimate foundation in renegotiation of societal values, and hence rely upon the reality of divinity as the supreme authority. By resting all the insights they produce on the premise of faith, they do not—like Kant did in the late eighteenth century—develop the skepticism towards the existence of God that is required for the recognition of “God” as a regulative idea (Kant 2:512-605 [B 595-732]). Thus,

while Abu Zayd acknowledges the impact of a temporally and spatially concrete Arab culture (*ḥaḍāra*) in the linguistic codification of the Qur’an, he does not call into question the time- and placelessness of God as sender (*mursil*) and His message (*risāla*) to a temporally and spatially confined humanity as its recipient (*mustaqbil*) (Abū Zayd 31-57 et passim).

Tariq Ramadan, in turn, attempts to align Islamic legal precepts with the secular socio-political framework of those European states with a significant Muslim population, stressing the crucial importance of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) in this context. In the process, he proposes a new legal-cum-ethical concept of territoriality that supplements the classical typology of *dār al-islām*, *dār al-ḥarb*, *dār al-ṣulḥ* and *dār al-‘ahd* and aims at providing a framework for Muslims in the West to maintain their normatively grounded moral superiority while integrating into the social and political structures prevalent in the West and contributing to their respective polities (Ramadan 119-52). Ramadan’s views are, even more than those of Abu Zayd, based on faith, behind which one must not—and, in fact, cannot—go. Moreover, Ramadan, who for many is considered the “Muslim intellectual” *par excellence*, does not even attempt to view the normative foundations of his thought in a critical light.



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The one of our three authors who, in my opinion, comes closest to a notion of *intellectual* is Soroush. He, namely, plays down the canonized revelation in the Qur'an to such an extent that it almost fades away completely. In contrast, he emphasizes the primacy of the historically determined "prophetic experience" (*tajrebah-ye nabavī*) by stressing that humanity is to constantly re-experience it and, because of the changing circumstances in time, expand it (*bast kardan*) (Sorūsh 12-15 et passim). While in this way Soroush clearly takes up the cudgel for the autonomy of the subject against the primacy of a de-historicized text, he still seems to assume an essence of religion enshrined in the manifold perpetuations of Muhammad's

experience of a procedural revelation—which, given the historically changing circumstances, will necessarily take on different shapes.

What we may well conclude from this brief survey of the arguments presented by three authors who in popular as well as academic discourse are widely considered "Muslim intellectuals," is that, in the light of the lengthy exposition of the sociological and, beyond, the philosophical argument, this categorization does not hold water. In fact, the most they could be labeled as is "Islamic intellectuals," referring to the normative basis on which their respective views are based. This, however, would be a logical fallacy, since the analytical concept of the *intellectual* necessitates

a critical distance from every faith-based supposition. Hence, one may perhaps consider someone like Anglo-Indian dissident thinker Ibn Warraq (b. 1946), who dissociates himself from accepting any social and ethical value that cannot be justified outside the confines of religion (Ibn Warraq 172-97 et passim), a "Muslim intellectual"—but, again, despite him certainly not agreeing to this label (*ibid.*),<sup>9</sup> it would be just as analytically meaningful and useful for the social sciences as the previously mentioned categories of *bespectacled intellectual* or *bearded intellectual*.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on the initial thoughts I presented at the conference "The Public Role of Muslim Intellectuals: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges" at St. Antony's College, University of Oxford, 30 Apr. 2012.

<sup>2</sup> This situation was in fact highlighted in some contributions to the international workshop "Modern Salafism: Doctrine, Politics, Jihad" that took place as recently as 25 Apr. 2012 at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the "Forschungsstelle Intellektuellensoziologie" (FIS) at Oldenburg University, which emerged out of the Adorno Research Center (founded 1996).

<sup>4</sup> This admittedly rather awkward translation of "ilm" is felt needed in order to distinguish this methodologically genuine approach from that of other Muslim groups concerned with the production of knowledge, even more so as other modes of cognition, such as the "intuition" (*hads*) and "non-discursive unveiling" (*takshīf*) of the Gnostics, or the "rational

comprehension" (*ta' aqqul*) of the philosophers, aimed at yielding different results, for example "absolute certainty" (*yaqīn*).

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→ <sup>5</sup> Against Schulze, see, for example, O'Fahey and Radtke 1993, esp. 59-61, 64-71.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the arguments against the print of Islamic literature before the nineteenth century, see Robinson 64-70.

<sup>7</sup> These spaces correlate somewhat with the spaces in which the emerging *bourgeoisie* in eighteenth-century Europe created a counter-public to the "representative publicness" of the courtly societies, see Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 86-121.

<sup>8</sup> Here, Schulze stresses the symbiotic relationship between printing (*ṭabʿ*) and dissemination (*nashr*) in the process of book distribution.

<sup>9</sup> In 1831, for example, with Hasan al-ʿAttar (d. 1250/1835), the first member of the *afandiyya* had been appointed principal of al-Azhar in Cairo. See Schulze, *Gräber* 777.

<sup>10</sup> Here, Ibn Warraq deliberately adopts a modification of Bertrand Russell's renowned autobiographical essay *Why I am not a Christian: An Examination of the God-Idea and Christianity* from 1927.

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