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Islamization of Knowledge as a "Muslim Question": The Critique of *Islāmiyyat al-Ma'rifah* Between Universality, Cultural Locality, and the Rhetoric of the Crisis of Islam

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Abstract

*Islamization of knowledge (*islāmiyyat *or* aslamat al-ma'rifah*) has emerged as one of the most significant Muslim global intellectual enterprises over the past half-century. Its efforts to integrate Islamic epistemology with Western knowledge systems have, however, subjected it to extensive criticism, a subset of which dismisses it as an ideological programme aimed at reviving religion, defying secularism, and subverting Western universal values. This article focuses on this subset of criticism and analyses its discourse by framing it within the broader context of the "Muslim Question." Reminiscent of the historical* Jewish Question*, the "Muslim Question" continues to serve as a lens through which Islam and Muslims are systematically constructed as a problem. To retrace and investigate the inherent structure shared by the "Muslim Question" and this criticism, this study undertakes a discursive analysis of the decades-long critique of Bassam Tibi. It puts the criticism within the broader narrative of crisis; however, distinguishing it from the European rhetoric of the "crisis of Islam," and questions it at the intersection of reasonable critique and Islamophobia. This article concludes that a critique of the Islamization of knowledge and its recent facet, knowledge integration (*al-takāmul al-ma'rifī*), should acknowledge the plurality and diversity within Muslim intellectual traditions and resist homogenizing them under reductive categories. Such a merited study will have the potential to promote a more nuanced and balanced engagement with the intricate realities of contemporary Muslim thought and practice.*

Keywords

Islamization, knowledge, epistemology, education, Muslim Question, cultural locality, universality, Islamophobia.

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Introduction: Islamization of Knowledge as a "Muslim Question"

At the heart of the heated exchange between champions and critics of the Islamization of knowledge lies the pivotal and regenerative question of whether Islam is compatible with modernity. The earliest responses to this question can be traced back to the emergence of Islamic modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led by key Muslim reformists such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), Muḥammad ʻAbduh (d. 1905), and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935). Despite differences in their political agendas and accomplishments, their reformative thought was anchored in four shared convictions. First, they regarded the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad's (peace be on him) tradition as paramount sources of authority and accorded the knowledge inferred from them the highest status. Second, they conceived of Islam as a self-directed, all-encompassing system of life. Third, they embraced legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and emphasized the revitalization of its methods. Lastly, they advocated the harmonization of Islam and modernity and encouraged capitalizing on Western technological and scientific advancements. It is within this last contention that the Islamization of knowledge has emerged and evolved into one of the most significant intellectual enterprises in modern Muslim history.

The concept of Islamization (*islāmiyyah*/*aslamah*) emerged within Muslim scholarly circles during the late 1970s and through the 1980s as scholars sought to face the challenges of secularism. The phrase "Islamization of knowledge" gained prominence during the 1977 World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca, where it was proposed as a theoretical framework for reconciling Western models of human sciences with Islamic epistemology as grounded in the Qur'ānic worldview.[1] Three key participants in this conference rose to play a substantial role in the dissemination and implementation of Islamization. The first is Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (d. 1986), co-founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). The second is Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931), founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC).[2] The third is Abdul Hamid Ahmad AbuSulayman (d. 2021), the

[1] Hasan Dzilo, "The Concept of 'Islamization of Knowledge' and Its Philosophical Implications," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23 (2012): 247-56; Ghulam N. Saqeb, "Some Reflections on Islamization of Education since 1977 Makkah Conference: Accomplishments, Failures and Tasks Ahead," *Intellectual Discourse* 8 (2000): 45-68; Christopher Furlow, "Islamization of Knowledge: Philosophy, Legitimation, and Politics," *Social Epistemology* 10 (1996): 259-71.

[2] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, "Preliminary Thoughts on the Nature of Knowledge and the Definition and Aims of Education," in *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, ed. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 1979), 19-47.

Rector and founder of the Kulliyyat Ma'ārif al-Waḥy wa 'l-'Ulūm al-Insāniyyah (Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences), at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. These three institutions have been the torchbearers of the agenda of Islamization of knowledge to date.

Islamization of knowledge was further demarcated as a global intellectual and political initiative in the 1980s through various mediums, including publications and international meetings such as the conferences of Islamabad (1982), Kuala Lumpur (1984), and Khartoum (1987). Gradually, the project garnered widespread appeal and strong financial and institutional support from numerous Muslim-majority countries and non-governmental Muslim organizations. Concurrently, however, the Islamization of knowledge endured critique both internally by scholars who endorse its premise[3] and externally by those who reject it.[4] This led to a series of reappraisals of its function and scope, culminating in its rebranding as "knowledge integration" (*al-takāmul al-ma'rifī*). Nevertheless, its objective remained consistent: to resolve the methodological crisis within the traditional Islamic sciences and withstand the secular influence of post-enlightenment Western thought.[5] Central to this objective is the effort to anchor social sciences within the Islamic worldview, named by the project's ideologues, the monotheistic universal worldview or "*al-ru'yah al-kawniyyah al-tawḥīdiyyah*."[6] This is, in a nutshell, the story of the inception and evolution of the Islamization of knowledge. Detailed information,

[3] For example, see Abū Ya'rib al-Marzūqī, "Islāmiyyat al-Ma'rifah, Naẓrah Mughāyirah: Mudākhalah ma'a Luayy Safi," *Islāmiyyat al-Ma'rifah* 14 (1998): 140-66; Al-Marzūqī, *al-Ipistimūlūjiyyah al-Badīlah: Marāss al-'Ilm wa Fiqhuh* (Tunis: Al-Dār al-Mutawassiṭiyya, 2007); Qāsim H. Ḥamad, *Ipistimulūjiyyat al-Ma'rifah al-Kawniyyah: Islāmiyyat al-Ma'rifah wa 'l-Manhaj* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 2004); Luayy Safi, *The Foundation of Knowledge: A Comparative Study in Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2014); Fatḥī Ḥ. Malkāwī, *Maqālāt fī Aslamat al-Ma'rifah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 2018), esp., 91-136.

[4] Sari Hanafi, *Studying Islam in the Arab World: The Rupture Between Religion and the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2023.), esp., ch. 3; Hanafi, "Islamization of Knowledge and Its Grounding: Appraisal and Alternative," *Islamic Studies Review* 1 (2022): 135-60; Burhān Ghalyūn, "Al-Islām wa 'l-'Uulūm al-Ijtimā'iyyah: Tasā'ulāt ḥawla Aslamat al-Ma'rifah," *Qirā'āt Siyāsiyyah* 3 (1993): 119-38; Alī Ḥarb, *al-Insān al-Adnā: Amrāḍ al-Dīn wa A'ṭāl al-Ḥadāthah* (Beirut: Al-Muassasah al-'Arabiyyah li 'l-Dirāsāt wa l-Nashr, 2005).

[5] Syed Farid Alatas, "The Sacralization of the Social Sciences: A Critique of an Emerging Theme in Academic Discourse," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 40 (1995): 89-111.

[6] Abdulhamid AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 2011).

historical surveys, as well as an in-depth study of the transition into *al-takāmul al-ma'rifī* are covered in a recent co-authored publication.[7]

This article focuses on a criticism of the Islamization of knowledge that frames it as a "Muslim Question." Reminiscent of the historical "Jewish Question," the "Muslim Question"—and, for this matter, other closely related constructs, such as the Muslim Problem[8] and "*le fait islamique*"[9]—refers to the pervasive interrogation and debates of issues surrounding Muslim communities in non-Muslim societies, and especially their construction as problematic for the broader society. As Anne Norton reasserts in the new preface to her book, *The Muslim Question*, Islam and Muslims continue to be "the great question for the West."[10] Research on the "Muslim Question" has even transcended the European and American contexts, as scholars have expanded its field of investigation to other non-Western contexts including China,[11] India,[12] and Russia.[13]

This criticism mirrors in some ways the inherent structure of the "Muslim Question" as it operates across its same three dimensions. Firstly, it appears, in certain contexts, to be less about Muslims' concerns and more about the entities they are situated against for scrutiny, whether it be European society,[14] Canadian,[15] or North Indian.[16] Secondly, it

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[7] Mourad Laabdi and Aziz Elbittioui, "From Aslamat Al-Ma'rifa to al-Takāmul al-Ma'rifī: A Study of the Shift from Islamization to Integration of Knowledge," *Religions* 15 (2024): 342, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030342.

[8] Ismail A. Patel, *The Muslim Problem: From the British Empire to Islamophobia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

[9] Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed, *Islamophobia in France: The Construction of the "Muslim Problem"* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2023).

[10] Anne Norton, *On the Muslim Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), ix.

[11] For example, see Jingyuan Qian, "Historical Ethnic Conflicts and the Rise of Islamophobia in Modern China," *Ethnopolitics* 22 (2023): 43-68; Yan Sun, "'Islamization' and Crackdown in Ningxia: Another Xinjiang?" *The Journal of Contemporary China* 32 (2022): 984-99; Luwaei R. Luqiu and Fan Yang, "Islamophobia in China: News Coverage, Stereotypes, and Chinese Muslims' Perceptions of Themselves and Islam," *Asian Journal of Communication* 28 (2018): 598-619.

[12] For example, see Sonia Sikka, "Indian Islamophobia as Racism," *The Political Quarterly* 93 (2022): 469-77; Amarnath Amarasingam, Sanober Umar, and Shweta Desai, "Fight, Die, and If Required Kill": Hindu Nationalism, Misinformation, and Islamophobia in India," *Religions* 13 (2022): 380; Nishant Upadhyay, "Hindu Nation and Its Queers: Caste, Islamophobia, and De/Coloniality in India," *Interventions* 22 (2020): 464-80.

[13] Cf. Greg Simens, Marat Shterin Shiraev, and Eric Shiraev, eds., *Islam in Russia: Religion, Politics, and Society* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2023); Shireen Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (London: Routledge, 2015); Elina I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

[14] Peter O'Brien, *The Muslim Question in Europe: Political Controversies and Public Philosophies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).

consistently represents Islam and Muslims as a problem and an alien body.[17] Lastly, it relentlessly emphasizes assimilation and urges conformity to preset societal norms and expectations. By situating this criticism within the framework of the "Muslim Question," I join other scholars, such as Baldwin, Legrand, and many others,[18] in their attempts to deconstruct its subtle implications for Muslim identity representation and illustrate how it may contribute to reshaping its perceptions and dynamics by positioning it in relation to modern hegemonic systems of knowledge and the discourse of universality.

This paper is structured into two main sections. The first section thoroughly analyses the criticism of the Islamization of knowledge, with particular attention to the criticism of Bassam Tibi (b. 1944). This section is further divided into three subsections, each one focusing on a principal problematic area in Tibi's perspective. Firstly, I examine his interpretation of the Islamization of knowledge as an Islamist, fundamentalist enterprise and foreground his conflated distinction between the categories of Islamism and Islamic fundamentalism and how such conflation leads to an oversimplified characterization of the complex nature of Muslim thought and practice. Secondly, I examine Tibi's stipulation of the rejection of Islamization as an indigenous response model, namely de-Westernization, and his acceptance of Western knowledge systems as universal. Thirdly, I investigate the dichotomous interplay of universality and cultural locality within the critique of Islamization, drawing on key political and philosophical arguments to challenge the notion of radical universality.

The second section reframes the Islamization of knowledge within the discourse of crisis. It consists of two subsections. The first subsection defines the parameters of this crisis both at the micro and macro levels and emphasizes its distinction from the narrative of the crisis of Islam; a

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[15] Abdolmohammad Kazemipur, *The Muslim Question in Canada: A Story of Segmented Integration* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

[16] Manoja K. Naatha, *The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India* (Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

[17] Sarah Bracke and Louis M. Aguilar, "Thinking Europe's 'Muslim Question': On Trojan Horses and the Problematization of Muslims," *Critical Research on Religion* 10 (2021): 205; Sara R. Farris, "From the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question: Republican Rigorism, Culturalist Differentialism, and Antinomies of Enforced Emancipation," *Constellations* 21 (2014): 296-97.

[18] For example, see Erik Baldwin, "Religious Dogma without Religious Fundamentalism," *Journal of Social Sciences* 8 (2012): 85-90; Vincent Legrand, "Anti-Islamization of Europe' Activism or the Phenomenon of an Allegedly 'Non-Racist' Islamophobia: A Case Study of a Problematic Advocacy Coalition," in *New Multicultural Identities in Europe: Religion and Ethnicity in Secular Societies*, ed. Erkan Toguslu, Johan Leman, and Ismail M. Sezgin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 139-59.

narrative that depicts Islam as an accelerator of radicalization and nihilism while absolving Western powers of any involvement in this crisis. The second subsection covers the overlap between reasonable critique and Islamophobic tendencies within the critique of Islamization. It draws on the arguments of intragroup racism and borrows Tariq Modood's five-scale interrogatory model designed to measure suspected views on the spectrum of Islamophobia. With this evaluation of the dominant paradigms shaping the debate on Islamization and Muslim contemporary thought more broadly, this study advocates for an approach that acknowledges plurality and diversity within Muslim intellectual traditions and resists tendencies to homogenize or marginalize them under reductive categories. This approach promises a more balanced and inclusive intellectual engagement with the intricate and multilayered realities of contemporary Muslim thought.

The Criticism of Islamization of Knowledge: The Case of Bassam Tibi

Islamization of Knowledge, Islamism, and Fundamentalism

Bassam Tibi, a Syrian-born German scholar of political Islam, has been a lifelong critic of the concept and project of the Islamization of knowledge. Spanning almost four decades, his criticism has been consistent and inflexible. Several of his main premises and arguments have scarcely evolved over the years, despite the advent of new theories and methods in Islamic studies that have significantly reshaped our understanding of modernity and political Islam. Tibi draws a close connection between the Islamization of knowledge project and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The story he reasserts goes as follows:

> The 1970s were characterized by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism which is not only a political movement aimed at warding off the political and economic hegemony of the West. It also includes a cultural strategy. The "Islamization of knowledge" is a basic formula in this fundamentalist agenda. It is an expression of the "Revolt against the West." This revolt is "the reassertion of non-Western peoples of their traditional and indigenous cultures, as exemplified in Islamic fundamentalism." It is not simply a revolt against Western domination as was the case during the decolonization period. The current fundamentalist revolt is directed against Western norms and values as such.[19]

Tibi's critical stance in this excerpt, as in later works, is rooted in a discourse of rupture and disenchantment with the modernizing process in Muslim societies following the 1967 Six-day War. The story he

[19] Bassam Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge: The Politics of Islamization of Knowledge as a Postmodern Project? The Fundamentalist Claim to De-Westernization," *Theory, Culture and Society* 12 (1995): 1.

recounts goes as follows. In the decades leading up to the Six-day War, Muslims enjoyed living under secular regimes that competed to modernize their societies by emulating Western models. However, the Arabs' defeat in 1967 marked the failure of the secular nationalist project. This setback gave rise to Islamism as an alternative political ideology that resulted in the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism, a movement driven by the sole goal of subverting Western political, economic, and cultural dominance. Islamization of knowledge, according to Tibi, is a "basic formula in this fundamentalist agenda, and an expression of a revolt against the West . . . a battle against unbelief, a reassertion of local against global knowledge and the invading civilization related to it."[20] As such, Tibi presents the Islamization of knowledge project as both an endeavour to challenge Western hegemony and its educational system.

Linking the rise of Islamism to the failure of secular regimes and the decline of their nationalist and pan-Arabist agendas post-1967 resonates with the prevalent interpretation of this phase in contemporary Muslim history. However, the crux of the issue lies in presenting Muslims' critiques of Western epistemologies and their responses to globalism as monolithic. This is further highlighted by Tibi's choice of epigraph, which quotes Montgomery Watt: "Muslims show surprisingly little interest in other forms of knowledge, even those which would be useful to them for practical purposes."[21] Using this essentialist quote as an opening statement casts doubts about Tibi's underlying objectives. Watt's sweeping assertion that "all Muslims" exhibit minimal interest in non-Islamic forms of knowledge is fundamentally flawed. Throughout both the pre-modern and modern periods, Muslims have actively engaged with diverse forms of knowledge and made significant contributions to their advancement. This selection of epigraphs fails to acknowledge the diversity within the Muslim community and their multifaceted intellectual engagements.

As a result, key political categories such as fundamentalism and Islamism are perpetually conflated in Tibi's narrative and thus voided of their inherent complexity. The militant persuasions of figures such as Osama bin Laden (d. 2011) become effectively equated with the nuanced philosophical positions of scholars like Syed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988). From Tibi's perspective, they are all Islamists and, by extension, fundamentalists, since Islamism is a "potent manifestation of the global phenomenon of religious fundamentalism,"

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

and "all Islamists share a common commitment to remaking the world."[22] However, neither Nasr's Sufi-oriented traditionalism and perennialism nor Fazlur Rahman's intellectual reformism fit this definition. Tibi is not unaware of the multiple forms of fundamentalism as he has recognized it once.[23] However, he insists on exhibiting an invariant understanding of these categories, thus overgeneralizing them and obscuring the boundaries between them.

This tendency towards overgeneralization characterizes Tibi's broader work on political Islam and persists even as he addresses it head-on. For example, in his *Islamism and Islam*, he defines Islam as an act of faith and Islamism as a "powerful instance of the global phenomenon of religious fundamentalism [and] religionized politics."[24] He further demarcates Islamism as stemming from dogmatic political interpretations of Islam and an idealized utopia driven by a longing for a divine system of governance, which he regards as a figment of imagination, not aligned with the true teachings of Islam. However, he does not explain what he means by the true teachings of Islam and whether there is a consensus regarding these teachings within the community of scholars. This position is difficult to maintain since scholarly disagreements among Muslims have long existed and their tolerance has been institutionalized, even in the *sharīʿah* where a distinct subfield called the science of juristic disagreements (*ʿilm al-ikhtilāf*) has been established to address juristic divergences.[25]

Tibi's oversight results from both neglecting the fact that Muslims engage with globalism in varied ways and failing to recognize diversity within Muslim thought and practice. As scholars have observed, certain Muslim societies selectively adapt elements of Western culture, such as television programmes and fast-food chains, while adhering to rigid traditional norms and exporting Islamist ideologies. Others reembrace cultural and intellectual heritage to engage more effectively with dominant global cultures. Jan Pieterse calls the first approach "delinking

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[22] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

[23] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 6.

[24] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 6.

[25] Cf. Mourad Laabdi, "*Ikhtilāf* Before and After the Age of *Taqlīd*: Rethinking Islamic Law Through the Lens of Juristic Disagreements," *The International Journal of Islam* 1, no. 5 (2024): 1-20; Laabdi, "'*Ilm al-Ikhtilāf* in Modern Western and Muslim Studies of Juristic Disagreement: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2024): 185-210, https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2024.0389; Laabdi, "Legal Controversy /*'Ilm al-Khilāf*," *Oxford Online Bibliographies in Islamic Studies*, last modified August 28, 2018, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0257.xml.

for delinking" and the second "delinking for relinking."[26] Moreover, recognizing the variations in how Islamization is conceptualized and implemented across different intellectual, political, and geographical contexts is crucial for a deep understanding of the intricate issue of Islamization.[27] As Abdul Rashid Moten has demonstrated in *Varieties of Islamisation*, there is not one uniform Islamization, but rather a spectrum of diverse and pluralistic Islamization(s).[28]

Islamization of Knowledge, De-Westernization, and the Absent Past

Failing to recognize the diversity within the Islamization of knowledge movement led Tibi to reject it on the basis that it advocates for de-Westernization, and reflects the fundamentalists' desire to "implement modernity as a tool while emphatically refusing its logic."[29] However, as I establish elsewhere,[30] de-Westernization is associated primarily with the agenda of Syed Naqib al-Attas, who conditions the realization of Islamization on the total rejection of Western knowledge.[31] Several of the projects' architects differed with him on this point, while certain champions of the movement embraced select aspects of the de-Westernization model. Such did Fazlur Rahman by reiterating the priority of scrutinizing Western knowledge for its secular underpinnings.[32]

Tibi's critique of de-Westernization is deeply entwined with his steadfast advocacy for Western modernity and scientific paradigms. Despite admitting the limitations inherent in modernity's claim to universality, he insists that its rejection would precipitate detrimental "cultural fragmentation."[33] As with his approach to fundamentalism, where he acknowledges its varied manifestations but portrays it as a singular entity, Tibi also concedes the contentious nature of asserting the universality of Western knowledge and science. However, he urges its continued adoption to preserve its global significance and authority,

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[26] Jan N. Pieterse, "A Severe Case of Dichotomic Thinking: Bassam Tibi on Islamic Fundamentalism," *Theory, Culture and Society* 13 (1996): 125-26.

[27] Laabdi and Elbittioui, "From Aslamat al-Ma'rifa," 12.

[28] Abdul Rashid Moten, *Varieties of Islamisation: Varying Contexts, Changing Strategies* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).

[29] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 11.

[30] Laabdi and Elbittioui, "From Aslamat al-Ma'rifa," 2.

[31] Muhammad Naqib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Art Printing Works, 1978), 133-66; al-Attas, *The De-Westernization of Knowledge* (Pulau Pinang: Citizens International, 2009).

[32] Fazlur Rahman, "Islamization of Knowledge: A Response," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Studies* 5, no. 1 (1988): 3-11.

[33] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 15.

contending that without such recognition, science risks being relegated to the status of mere "cultural beliefs."

This argument falls short on two fronts. Firstly, for the way, it grapples with the complex issue of universality to which I return in the ensuing section. Second, for disregarding a long record of historical interactions between Muslims and non-Islamic knowledge systems. In the early epochs, Muslims adeptly synthesized the sciences from the diverse cultures they encountered. Their successes owe much to their dialogical approach, which is based on both embracing the new knowledge rather than shunning it outright and perceiving knowledge exchange as a negotiable transaction. The annals of Muslim history have preserved countless instances of scholars who deftly sailed the confluence of faith and empirical inquiry and demonstrated a remarkable ability to reconcile reason with tradition. This proficiency extends beyond disciplines centred on rational inquiry, such as philosophy and the natural sciences, to encompass fields where the religious view held sways, such as theology and religious studies. Eminent scholars like Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819), al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) epitomized this approach with their highly impartial and objective studies of the beliefs and practices of the diverse traditions they explored.[34]

Tibi's study could have benefited from a deeper exploration of historical interactions between Muslims and other cultures, particularly at the level of the relationship between science and religion. An important example of such exchange is the debate over the interplay between religion and philosophy during the medieval era. Al-Farābī's (d. 339/950) philosophical insights about the subordination of religion to philosophy continue to provide a fertile ground for comparison.[35] Another useful example is the medieval debate on the merits of Arabic grammar compared to Greek logic. Philosophers argued that, unlike Arabic grammar, logic universally serves to separate truth from falsehood. Conversely,

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[34] Mario Kozah, *The Birth of Indology as an Islamic Science: Al-Bīrūnī's Treatise on Yoga Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Abū 'l-Rayḥān Muḥammad al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq Mā li 'l-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī 'l-'Aql aw Mardhūlah* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1983); Hishām Ibn al-Kalbī, *The Book of Idols: Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, trans. Nabith A. Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Abū 'l-Fatḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, ed. Aḥmad F. Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992). Another strong manifestation of the fluidity of the early Muslim scholarly tradition is the intrinsic pluralism of Islamic law.

[35] Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*, ed. 'Uthmān M. Amīn (Cairo: Librairie Anglo-Egyptienne, 1969); al-Farābī, *Kitāb al-Millah wa Nuṣūs Ukhrā*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1991), 44-46; al-Farābī, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), 53-57, 131-34.

grammarians associated logic with Greek culture and, therefore, contended that it has less relevance for the Arabic language in its diverse contexts.[36]

In the conclusion of his criticism, Tibi adopts a somewhat alarmist and fearmongering tone,

> It would not be surprising to see the Middle East fall back into an era of "flat-earthism" if the politics of the Islamization of knowledge becomes the authoritative source for determining the relationship between the contemporary culture of the Middle East and the place of sciences as an expression of modern secular knowledge in it.[37]

This caution reflects a narrow and homogenous perspective that stems from a failure to connect the present to the past of Muslims' response to non-Islamic knowledge models. The assertion regarding the resurgence of flat-earthism is an unnecessary exaggeration that not only lacks substantiation but also calls into question the intention behind such an absurd warning since Muslim scholars have historically embraced the concept of a spherical earth.[38] That Tibi is unaware of this historical context is highly unlikely. The other explanation, and the closest, is that he intentionally disregards it to depict the relationship between Muslims and Western knowledge systems as irreconcilable, therefore, imposing that they have no alternative but to accept those systems unquestionably.

Islamization of Knowledge, Western Knowledge, and the Claim of Universality

When Tibi rejects the concept of Islamization of knowledge, he is fully aware that his nominated alternative—unmediated Western knowledge systems—is a claim of universality. Between the wholesale acceptance of Western knowledge and an "Islamized" version of it, Tibi unhesitatingly opts for the former. He argues that localizing science would cause cultural fragmentation, leading to the emergence of multiple sciences (European, Asian, Christian, Islamic, etc.) rather than a singular, unified science, or, as Tibi describes, "just science."[39] In such a scenario, Western science, which Tibi deems the sole true science, would be relegated to a

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[36] Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtā' wa 'l-Mu'ānasah*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zīn (London: Hindawi, 2019), 117-48; David S. Margoliouth, "The Discussion between Abū Bishr Mattā and Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī on the Merits of Logic and Grammar," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 73 (1905): 79-129.

[37] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 20.

[38] Cf. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Khawārizmī, *Kitab Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, ed. Hans Mzik (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowit, 1926); Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Farghānī, *Jwāmi' 'Ilm al-Nujūm wa Uṣūl al-Ḥarakāt al-Samāwiyyah*, ed. Yacob Golius (Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1986); Muḥammad Abū 'l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ibn Ḥawqal's Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Araḍ: Opus Geographicum*, ed. Johannes H. Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[39] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 15.

form of "cultural belief," which will lead to the subversion of its intellectual and practical authority.

The question of universality has sparked fervent discussions both within the realms of social and political theory and the historiography of science. Within the latter domain, three distinct camps can be identified: universalists, localists, and globalists. Universalists promote science and technology as transcendent entities that surpass all cultural boundaries.[40] Conversely, localists perceive them as products of social and cultural contexts[41] and contend that they may serve as pretexts for colonial hegemony and intellectual imperialism.[42] However, the localist argument falters in addressing crucial questions such as the seamless transfer of science between cultures.[43] Globalists, taking a reconciliatory stance, discount science's inherent universality while recognizing its capacity for "globalizability." They assert that Western science, while intrinsically linked to modern industrial capitalism, possesses attributes that facilitate its application across diverse cultural landscapes.[44]

These different positions on Western science challenge Tibi's assumption that there is a consensus regarding the detachment of science from social constructs and political practices. Then, if such variety and ambiguity exist within the hard sciences, it is even more pronounced within the human and social sciences, which is the area of the Islamization of knowledge project. Unlike hard sciences, human and

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[40] Paulin J. Hountondji, *La Rationalite, Une Ou Plurielle?* (Dakar: African Books Collective, 2007); Hountondji, "On the Universality of Science and Technology," in *Technik Und Soziales Wandel*, ed. Burkart Lutz (Frankfurt: Campus, 1987), 382-89.

[41] David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); Joseph O'Connell, "Metrology: The Creation of Universality by the Circulation of Particulars," *Social Studies of Science* 23 (1993): 129-73; Andrew Cunningham and Perry Williams, "De-Centring the 'Big Picture': The Origins of Modern Science and the Modern Origins," *British Journal for the History of Science* 26 (1993): 407-32.

[42] Joseph M. Hodge, "Science and Empire: An Overview of the Historical Scholarship," *in Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970*, ed. Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3-29; Michael Osborne, "Introduction: The Social History of Science, Technoscience and Imperialism," *Science, Technology and Society* 4 (1999): 161-70.

[43] Barry Barnes and David Bloor, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge," in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 21-28.

[44] Cf. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, "I Am Knowledge, Get Me out of Here! On Localism and the Universality of Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 42 (2011): 590-601; John Ziman, *Real Science: What it is and What it Means?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4-5.

social sciences are interpretive in nature and engage less in empirical testing.[45] Their theoretical research too is largely contextual, as scholars' interpretations of social phenomena are profoundly determined by the area and scope of investigation which influences the topics and questions they choose to include or exclude.

Within the domains of philosophy and political science, two perspectives are particularly pertinent to the critique of universality. The first perspective posits that universality is logically impossible. On the one hand, universality, as a political construct, cannot encompass everything and everyone, as it is bound by time and space. On the other hand, to be realized in other cultures, universality must undergo cultural translation. As Judith Butler argues, "Without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic."[46] In other words, true universality necessitates translation into other languages. However, in the process of this translation, there is always a risk of the reinforcement of particularization, localizability, and cultural specificity with every reassertion of universality.

The second perspective underscores how the doctrine of universality can perpetrate imperialistic culture. Universality and things labelled "universal" often align with the dominant culture, become inseparable from imperial supremacy, and serve to strengthen existing power structures.[47] Historical examples, such as the British expeditions in India and French endeavours in North Africa, illustrate how universality was invoked by esteemed scholars to determine and justify who belonged within the circle of civilization and remained outside of it. Remnants of their hegemonic thoughts persist in certain disciplines today.[48] Similarly, the United States' imperialistic actions in the Middle East over the last few decades have often been justified in the name of conferring universal values, echoing France's colonial slogan of "mission

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[45] Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Why Studies of Human Capacities Modelled on Ideal Natural Science Can Never Achieve Their Goal?" in *Rationality, Relativism and the Human Sciences*, ed. Joseph Margolis, Michael Krausz, and Richard Burian (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 4.

[46] Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoy Zizek (London: Verso, 2000), 35.

[47] Ibid., 15.

[48] Peter Pels, "What Has Anthropology Learned from the Anthropology of Colonialism?" *Social Anthropology* 16 (2008): 280-99; Edward W. Said, "Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World," *Salmagundi* 70-71 (1986): 44-64; Diane Lewis, "Anthropology and Colonialism," *Current Anthropology* 14 (1973): 581-602.

civilisatrice."[49] Therefore, it appears that whenever universality is invoked, it becomes entangled in a ceaseless struggle for hegemony.

Finally, in relation to Tibi's warning that the champions of *islāmiyyat al-ma'rifah* aspire to universalize Islamic knowledge,[50] an important question arises: what if a marginalized group lays claim to universality? What would be its implications for the power dynamics between the dominant and dominated groups? Butler calls this situation a "performative contradiction," where the marginalized group seeks to present its knowledge as universal while simultaneously preserving its distinct local attributes.[51] In such a situation, the typical response of the dominant group is to dismiss the endeavour, as Tibi does,[52] as preposterous, illogical, and a threat to "true" universal values. In this light, Tibi's criticism serves as a reminder of the intricate challenges of navigating claims to universality while preserving diverse cultural identities within the realm of indigenous knowledge production.

Islamization of Knowledge and the Rhetoric of the Crisis of Islam

Islamization of Knowledge and the Narrative of the Crisis of Islam

As part of a larger intellectual reform movement, the Islamization of knowledge is better understood if approached as a reaction to a crisis. On the micro level, this crisis represents a dual-sided juncture that encompasses both a methodological crisis within the traditional Islamic sciences and an epistemological crisis that stems from the import and adoption of Western philosophies and modes of learning.[53] On the macro level, the crisis involves the paradigm shift in the world order, wherein the Western world has emerged as a global power and affected the realities of Muslims and others. World powers often rise during times of hegemonic crisis, disrupting the old order and challenging its intellectual and moral foundations.[54] Therefore, the Islamization project, in its pursuit of intellectual autonomy and independence, clashes with the dominant powers' interests and interrupts their established paradigms.

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[49] Max P. Friedman, "From Manila to Baghdad: Empire and the 'American Mission Civilisatrice' at the Beginning and End of the 20th Century," *Revue Française D'études Américaines* 113 (2007): 26-38; Mathew Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914," *The Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 109-35.

[50] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 3.

[51] Butler, "Restaging the Universal," 38-39.

[52] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 4.

[53] Laabdi and Elbittioui, "From Aslamat Al-Ma'rifa to al-Takāmul al-Ma'rifī," 1.

[54] Salman Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order* (London: Hurst, 2014), 130.

The persistence of the question of coloniality within the discussion of the Islamization of knowledge is inherently tied to a causal relationship between Western global hegemony and the historical decline of Muslim societies. Therefore, despite Tibi's ostensibly uninterested remarks on this matter,[55] the glorification of the past continues to be a fundamental aspect of the narratives adopted and propagated by various Arab nationalist and Islamist movements.[56] Advocates of the Islamization of knowledge project, whether or not they share the same nostalgic vision of a glorified past, also view colonialism as a direct major obstacle to local development and as a stark reminder of the pressing need for reform.

Therefore, any effort to deconstruct the Islamization of knowledge should consider situating it within the broader context of the prevailing crisis. Illustrations of this crisis include the rising of anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe,[57] provocative desecrations of Muslims' holy book, the systemic violence against Muslims in China[58] and India,[59] the pervasive American military presence in Muslim-majority countries,[60] and the enduring inequitable situation in Palestine. Contrarily, Tibi perversely approached the Islamization of knowledge project through a different lens, framing it within a narrative of the crisis of Islam, which is often promoted by right-wing Western media outlets and political factions, which portrays Islam as a catalyst for radicalization, terrorism, and anarchy, while absolving Western powers of any involvement in this crisis.

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[55] Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge," 10.

[56] Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, "Islam and the West: Narratives of Conflict and Conflict Transformation," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 1-28; Lauren Langman and Douglas Morris, "The Roots of Terror," in *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 49-74.

[57] "Anti-Muslim hatred has reached 'epidemic proportions'," *United Nations: UN News*, last update, March 4, 2021, https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086452.

[58] Austin Ramzy, "China's Oppression of Muslims in Xinjiang, Explained," *The New York Times*, last update, July 27, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/world/asia/china-genocide-uighurs-explained.html.

[59] Lindsay Maizland, "India's Muslims: An Increasingly Marginalized Population," *Council on Foreign Affairs*, last update, March 18, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/india-muslims-marginalized-population-bjp-modi.

[60] Mohammed Hussein and Mohammed Haddad, "Infographic: US Military Presence Around the World," *Al Jazeera*, September 10, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/10/infographic-us-military-presence-around-the-world-interactive; The Mapping Project, "Mapping U.S. Imperialism," *Counter Punch*, June 9, 2022, https://www.counterpunch.org/2022/06/09/mapping-us-imperialism/.

The prevalence of this narrative in political discourse is undeniable, as it continues to shape politicians' depictions of Muslims and Islam. French President Emmanuel Macron made this stance unequivocal in a 2020 speech when he declared, "Islam is a religion that is in crisis everywhere in the world today."[61] Before him, Donald Trump decidedly proclaimed: "Islam hates us. . . . We have to get to the bottom of it."[62] He continued to provide ample examples of this narrative throughout his four years of presidency, ranging from controversial public remarks to discriminatory policies that directly targeted Muslims.[63]

Furthermore, the narrative of the crisis of Islam appears to obscure a proclivity towards dichotomization, echoing Edward Said's *Orientalism* in many respects. Such tendency acts as a facade that masks a deeply ingrained way of seeing the world—in the sense of John Berger's 1970s classic series. Through this way of seeing, the world is split into two adversarial spheres: the self, which represents a secular, democratic, and civilized Occident, versus the other, which represents a fanatical, totalitarian, and uncivilized Orient. For example, President Macron has repeatedly pitted "Islam" and "Islam in France" against "the republic" and "foreign Islam," urging the liberation of Islam from what he described as extraneous, non-French forces.[64] In an address, President Macron introduced novel dichotomies such as "perverted Islam" with "enlightenment Islam," while continuing to juxtapose the notion of "freedom of belief," which he believes can only be guaranteed by the republic, with the lack of this freedom, which he associates with the "perverted Islam."[65]

Another example of the "crisis of Islam" narrative can be seen in the media coverage of Russia-Ukraine, which underscored a disparity in how

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[61] Emmanuel Macron, "Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, président de la République, sur la lutte contre les séparatismes, Les Mureaux le 2 octobre 2020," *Vie Publique*, October 2, 2020, https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/276537-emmanuel-macron-02102020-separatismes.

[62] Theodore Schleifer, "Donald Trump: 'I think Islam hates us'," *CNN*, last update, March 10, 2016, https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/donald-trump-islam-hates-us/index.html.

[63] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (California: University of California Press, 2018).

[64] Julien Pavy, "Emmanuel Macron veut libérer l'islam de France des 'influences étrangères'," *Euronews*, last update, October 2, 2020, https://fr.euronews.com/2020/10/02/emmanuel-macron-veut-liberer-l-islam-de-france-des-influences-etrangeres.

[65] Emmanuel Macron, "Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur l'État et le Culte Musulman, Paris le 16 février 2023," *Vie Publique*, February 16, 2023, https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/288257-emmanuel-macron-16022023-forum-de-l-islam-en-france.

European governments responded to the refugee crisis. For example, the contrasting treatment by Polish border guards was evident as they greeted Ukrainian refugees with flowers and repelled refugees of Middle Eastern origin with batons just a year earlier.[66] Despite the Polish government repeatedly absolving itself of discrimination against Muslims,[67] it has been established that the Polish ruling party's negative discourses about Muslims have contributed to the shaping of public opinion against this specific group. According to a recent study of immigration patterns in Poland, sixty-five per cent of respondents expressed aversion towards Arabs, ranking them as "the least favoured" ethnic and religious group among twenty-four others.[68]

Islamism, Islamization of Knowledge, and the Question of Islamophobia

I would like to begin by acknowledging three pivotal issues central to this section's analysis. First, the terminology engaged to describe hostile and prejudiced structures towards Islam and Muslims is varied, including terms such as anti-Islamism, anti-Muslim fear, anti-Muslim racism, and Islamophobia—the latter understood as a form of racism.[69] There is neither a consensus on the most suitable term, nor is there a universally endorsed definition, as these terms continue to be utilized differently across political, social, and juridical landscapes. I opt for Islamophobia because it is the term used by Tibi and his critics. Second, the nexus between Tibi's criticism of the Islamization of knowledge and the issue of Islamophobia lies in his sweeping critique of Islamism. He repeatedly portrays Islamization as an extension of Islamism, thus an intrinsically malevolent force and an eminent threat to the West. Nevertheless, it is imperative to emphasize that this discussion neither aims to accuse Tibi nor delves into his personal life or character. To uphold the integrity and objectivity of my critique, I intentionally exclude his public interviews and media appearances. I engage exclusively with his academic writings, which I recognize as a legitimate

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[66] Andrew Higgins, "At the Polish Border, Tens of Thousands of Ukrainian Refugees," *The New York Times.* February 25, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/world/europe/ukrainian-refugees-poland.html.

[67] The Newsmakers, "Here's Why Poland Takes in Millions of Migrants... Just Not Muslim Ones," Youtube video, 10:27, April 2, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYSX2vI7oPk.

[68] Agnieszka Dudzińska and Michał Kotnarowski, "Imaginary Muslims: How the Polish Right Frames Islam," *Brookings*, July 24, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/research/imaginary-muslims-how-polands-populists-frame-islam.

[69] Tariq Modood, "Islamophobia and Normative Sociology," *Journal of the British Academy* 8 (2020): 35, https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/008.029; S. Sayyid, "Islamophobia and the Europeanness of the Other Europe," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (2018): 422.

intellectual undertaking, and permit myself to exercise the same scholarly prerogative that underpins their creation.

The question of whether Tibi's sweeping critique of Islamization inadvertently serves to legitimate Islamophobic leanings raises significant challenges, particularly in light of his self-identification as an "Arab-Muslim insider" who engages with these issues from within the Muslim tradition.[70] The lack of substantial studies on the intersection of insider Muslim scholarship and islamophobia further complicates the examination of this issue within the context of Tibi's work. However, insights can be gleaned from critical race theory, specifically regarding the conceivability of intragroup racism among Black individuals. This debate has elicited two divergent perspectives within race theory. The first group argues that a Back individual can indeed exhibit racism, especially if they occupy a position of power which enables them to discriminate against others, irrespective of their racial identity.[71] The second group contests the view asserting that the conceptualization of racism should be confined to anti-Black policies and practices perpetuated exclusively by white individuals in America.[72]

Building on these perspectives on intragroup racism, one could argue, following the first standpoint, that it is plausible to deem a Muslim "Islamophobic" if they hold a position of power and leverage it to antagonize fellow coreligionists. As a scholar and public figure with a considerable audience and access to influential political and media platforms, Tibi may be seen as using these channels in ways that are discriminatory towards other Muslims. However, according to the second position, his provocative views, regardless of how prejudiced they may appear to some, cannot be classified as Islamophobic, because the category of "Islamophobia" would be reserved for anti-Muslim policies and practices enacted exclusively by non-Muslims.

Accusations of Islamophobia are not new or foreign to Tibi, as his work has been described as both Islamophobic and Orientalist. Tibi responded to these charges in at least two of his works. In the first work,

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[70] Bassam Tibi, *The Shari'a State: Arab Spring and Democratization* (London: Routledge, 2013), 5.

[71] Randall Kennedy, "The Right-Wing Attack on Racial Justice Talk: How Critical Race Theory Has Become a Handy Target for an Old-Fashioned Assault on Civil Rights," *The American Prospect,* September 28, 2021, https://prospect.org/civil-rights/right-wing-attack-on-racial-justice-talk.

[72] George Yancy, "No, Black People Can't Be 'Racists': The Term 'Racism' Must be Understood within the Context of an Anti-Black American Polity," *Truthout*, October 20, 2021, https://truthout.org/articles/no-black-people-cant-be-racists/.

he allocates a full chapter to these allegations.[73] In his defence, he involves the argument of the right to dissent as a constituent of academic freedom and positions himself as an advocate for the freedom to criticise Islamism.[74] He also consistently aligns his writings on the subject with critical reasoning, alleging that the reason for attacking him is his rejection of the Islamists' aspirations for a *sharīʿah* state. However, this claim does not hold since several other scholars are critical of Islamist ideology without being accused of Islamophobia. For example, Wael Hallaq's *Impossible State* sparked heated responses from scholars in both the East and the West for challenging the compatibility of the pre-modern Muslim state with the modern state as a centralized political entity, an idea with which Tibi would agree.[75] Yet, no serious scholar accused him of Orientalism or Islamophobia. The point is that the problem that Tibi's readers face is not the act of criticizing Islamism per se, or Islamization by extension, but the structure and tone of this critique, which, as has been elaborated earlier, is largely sweeping, reductionist, and systematically impartial. It is these weaknesses that allow Tibi's Islamist opponents to accuse him of misinterpreting the tradition and distorting its foundational sources of knowledge as a recent engagement with his theory of Islamism has shown.[76]

In the second work, Tibi advances the argument of freedom of speech.[77] He specifically singles out Gilbert Achcar's portrayal of his criticism as a form of granting validation to other scholars' Islamophobic tendencies,[78] to which he responded by calling it an attempt at curtailing freedom of speech and vilifying enlightenment as heresy. In both works, Tibi consistently employs two approaches. On the one hand, he presents his critique as an act of reasoning founded upon the recognition of the universality of rational knowledge and firmly reasserts his advocacy for the universality of European cultural modernity.[79] On the other hand, he situates his critique within the framework of what he calls "enlightened

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[73] Tibi, *Shariʿa State*, 182-210.

[74] Ibid., 184, 186.

[75] Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[76] Joseph S. Spoerl, "Islam and Islamism," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 14, no. 1 (2022): 13-36, https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2022.2146396.

[77] Bassam Tibi and Thorsten Hasche, "The Instrumental Accusation of Islamophobia and Heresy as a Strategy of Curtailing the Freedom of Speech," in *Freedom of Speech and Islam*, ed. Erich Kolig (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 187-207.

[78] Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 296.

[79] Tibi and Hasche, "The Instrumental Accusation of Islamophobia," 189.

Muslim thought,"[80] an expression that likely draws inspiration from the French phrase, "Islam des lumières," which is commonly used by a group of French scholars of North African descent, such as Abdou Ansari-Filaly and Malek Chebel,[81] and whose views on these matters have significantly influenced Tibi's. Identifying with this group, Tibi portrays its members as "Muslims who subscribe to civil Islam of the 'enlightened turn.'"[82]

However, as the exposition of Tibi's critique of Islamism and Islamization in this and the previous sections has shown, this "turn," in his eyes, is possible only if Muslims embrace Western systems of knowledge as universal and renounce the cultural particularity of their heritage. For someone like Salman Sayyid, this perspective is a form of Islamophobia, since it describes a situation "in which the demands for Muslim autonomy are perceived as interrupting the future direction of a society away from becoming modern and prosperous: in other words, becoming Western."[83] Tibi sanctifies his views and criticism by characterizing his critics' responses as subversive and an effort to "taint" critical reasoning.[84] Then, the pressing question is: how can we define the boundaries between reasonable criticism and discriminatory and Islamophobic remarks? Do Tibi's critics have valid grounds to call his criticism Islamophobic? One possible way to tackle these concerns, though not conclusively, is by employing Modood's interrogatory model developed specifically to answer such questions.

In this model, Modood advances five questions whose answers may help determine the place of the suspected views on the spectrum of Islamophobia.[85] Within the context of the criticism of Islamization of knowledge, they can be formulated as follows:

1. Does the suspected criticism stereotype Muslims by assuming they possess uniform thoughts?
2. Does it focus on Muslims or a discussion with Muslims that the critic would be willing to join to understand?
3. Do the conditions of the criticism facilitate reciprocal knowledge exchange and learning?
4. Is the used language respectful within its given context?
5. Does it involve disingenuous criticism driven by concealed motives?

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[80] Ibid., 213.

[81] Malek Chebel, *Manifeste pour un Islam des Lumières* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2011).

[82] Tibi, *Shari'a State*, 136.

[83] Sayyid, "Islamophobia and the Europeanness of the Other Europe," 423.

[84] Tibi and Hasche, "The Instrumental Accusation of Islamophobia," 202.

[85] Modood, "Islamophobia and Normative Sociology," 45-46.

Modood suggests that if the answer is "Yes" to numbers 1 and 5 and "No" to numbers 2, 3, and 4, then, the case at hand might be an instance of Islamophobia. Tibi's criticism receives a score of four out of five. It scores "Yes" to questions 1 and 5 because it stereotypes Islamists by assuming the uniformity of their thought and is driven by the ulterior motive of promoting Western models of knowledge as universal. Then, it answers "No" to questions 2 and 3, as Tibi focuses on a debate with a group that he does not envision joining to attain a deeper look into the areas he critiques about them. The conditions of his criticism do not foster in any perceivable way a reciprocal exchange due to his disinterest and preconceived opinion that no good will emerge from the Islamists, as broad of a category as this is in his work. For the fourth question, the answer is "Yes," for Tibi's expression is predominantly respectful. Although instances of abrasive and undermining language are detected in his writing, they are within tolerable limits of respect.

Nonetheless, to sum up, putting Tibi's critique of the Islamization of knowledge through the frameworks of critical race theory and Modood's interrogatory model proves challenging. While some of its aspects may appear to reflect Islamophobic tendencies, particularly in their sweeping generalizations, lack of historical depth, and perceived failure to engage diverse Muslim voices, other dimensions exhibit a complex relationship between critique and prejudice. Ultimately, the contemporary discourse surrounding *aslamat al-ma'rifah* must necessarily navigate these intricate dynamics to deepen our understanding of both the intellectual crises it probes and the causes and implications of its framing within the broader social and geo-political contexts of Islam and Muslims today.

Conclusions

Finally, it appears that the model of Tibi's critique of the Islamization of knowledge shares the same tri-partite structure often remarked about the "Muslim Question's" discourse. First, Tibi's critique seems less about Muslims and their struggles and more about the entities against which he situates them for interrogation. His focus is often redirected back to Europe and its ideals of rationality, freedom of speech, democracy, and so on. Second, he systematically portrays the Muslims he labels Islamists and fundamentalists as an alien force incompatible with the core values of modernity. Through this binary framework, secularism, science, and universality are situated on one end of the spectrum, whereas religion, tradition, and locality are fixed on the other side. Third, Tibi relentlessly emphasises the urgency of assimilation in ways that imply that the only path to reconciliation between Islam and modernity is for Muslims to abandon epistemological claims rooted in their religious tradition and assimilate into the Western models and systems.

However, according to this analytical framework, the more Muslims attempt to assimilate, the less likely they will be genuinely accepted by the dominant powers. Their acceptance may remain elusive, if not impossible, as the three dimensions of the tripartite structure of the "Muslim Question" interlace. Even substantial intellectual transformations, such as Islamization's recent shift to "integration of knowledge" (*al-takāmul al-ma'rifī*), are unlikely to be received positively by Tibi and those who align with his critique. This is due to at least two reasons. First, from their viewpoint, the Islamization of knowledge is an indigenist reformist endeavour that inherently challenges and resists hegemonic Western paradigms of knowledge. Second, they fail to recognize the Islamization of knowledge and Muslim thought and practice broadly as dynamic and evolving systems rooted in their wider social and geopolitical contexts. Thus, their critique not only underestimates the depth of these efforts but also perpetuates a static and reductionist image of contemporary Muslim thought and its potential to engage with modernity on its own terms.

Based on the current discussion, it becomes clear that the critique of the Islamization of knowledge is more than a mere intellectual dispute. Rather, it underscores a broader ideological confrontation between two epistemic paradigms: one rooted in secular, Western rationalism and the other in a synthesis of faith and intellect. While Tibi's critique dismisses the reconciliation of these two realms as untenable, one can perceive the Islamization of knowledge as a movement that aims to develop a model that transcends such binaries. Through its emphasis on, for example, the integration of knowledge, the movement does not reject modernity but pains to engage with it in ways that keep learning at the intersection of the spiritual and the rational. Like other intellectual traditions, it is, of course, not immune to mistakes and missteps as it evolves and navigates the challenges posed by both internal critique and external pressures. However, it is not intrinsically resistant to modern knowledge systems but can engage with them in ways that provide an alternative vision for Muslim intellectual and cultural reform. Therefore, the study of Muslim intellectual movements must account for their adaptability and fluidity. By ignoring these possibilities, critiques like Tibi's ultimately perpetuate a static, exclusionary view of what seems to constitute valid knowledge and modernity, thus limiting the range for a productive dialogue between diverse intellectual traditions.

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