Between Modernity and Post-Modernity: The Islamic Left and Dr. Hasan Hanafi's Thought: A Critical Reading

By Kazuo Shimogaki (Japan: The Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, International University of Japan, 1988) 177 pp.

Kazuo Shimogaki's working paper, number fourteen in the IMES series, is a critical essay of *The Islamic Left*, a so-far one-time-only privately produced journal. Three of its five articles are written by Ḥasan Ḥanafī, a professor at Cairo University, and a summary/translation of Ḥanafī's first and most important article. The essay itself abounds in grammatical and typographical errors, while the summary/translation is done very well. There is enough evidence that Shimogaki has a sharp mind, and I anticipate eagerly future works.

Unfortunately, Shimogaki's subject matter is not very enlightening, even though many reasons are given for the study of *The Islamic Left*. Ḥanafī is located firmly in a reformist tradition with al Afghānī and 'Abduh. He has all the prejudices of an Egyptian Arab,[1] indulges in endless analyses of the "reality" of the Muslim world (with the smug conviction that his gaze is universal), revels in a knee-jerk hatred of Sufism,[2] and makes his case for technological boosterism. He also takes for granted the "backwardness" of the Muslim world, as if the prime accomplishment of western civilization (which is the creation of nuclear weaponry—what else has engaged the wealth and brain power of the United States as much?) was bungled by Islamic civilization.

Shimogaki attempts to reform Ḥanafī in light of postmodernity, but his own understanding of postmodernity is sketchy (in other words, very postmodern). Seeing postmodernity teleologically, Shimogaki writes that Ḥanafī "has not yet reached the newest thought movement in the West,

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[1]According to him, Egypt is "the center of the Islamic world and the heart of Arabism." Ḥanafī uses the metaphor of the Islamic world as a bird, with the east wing being Asia, the west wing being Africa, and Egypt its body.

[2]*The Islamic Left* rejects Sufism and treats it as an enemy" (p. 124) and then its author proceeds to list those revolutions of which he approves: the Qarāmiṭah, the Mahdīyah, the Sanūsīyah, all of which were Sufistic in nature. He could have listed the Sokoto caliphate, 'Abd al Qādir in Algeria, Imām Shamīl, all of them Sufis, as well as the myriad rebellions and peasant revolts led by charismatic Sufi leaders,

postmodernity" (p. 3). Perhaps, then, Ḥanafī could be improved upon with some postmodern insight.

Typical of Ḥanafī's worldview is the modern disparagement of ritual. The pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) becomes reduced to a kind of "international conference," and the other pillars suffer similar fates. One can only recall the tremendous outpourings of deep understanding imparted by centuries of traditional Muslim scholars. The treatment of the *fiqhī* disagreements (*ikhtilāf*) concerning *tayammum*, for example, by Ibn al 'Arabī (1165–1240) spans a hundred pages and discloses wonderful truths and insights surrounding each detail involved. Ḥanafī criticizes a "word-for-word" approach to the Qur'an. In contrast, Ibn al 'Arabī's treatment of scripture is to adhere utterly to the literal (and literally "literal," with his deep analysis of each letter of a particular verse) texts (*nuṣūṣ*) and to treat each scholarly opinion as worthy of consideration, discovering truths in different positions that one begins to suspect their original authors had not perceived.

Ḥanafī seeks an explicit return of Mu'tazilī positions, attributing "decadence in the Islamic world" as coming from a "predominance of Sufism" coupled with Ash'arī positions (p. 55). As Shimogaki is trying to introduce postmodernism into his critique, one wonders why the Mu'tazilah and the Ash'arī positions are not subjected to a postmodern analysis. From what I gather, Ḥanafī's endorsement of Mu'tazilī positions dovetails with modern thinking. Although Newton was an alchemist, his contribution to a mechanical world is similar to the Mu'tazilī position that the universe can be described by rational laws. It is a short move from a universe where God—the clock-maker—watches Man discover laws of nature to a universe where God is dead and Man plays around with his new toy.

Such modern Muslims as Ḥanafī are often attracted to Mu'tazilī thought, since it gives Reason and Rationality big capital "Rs," these two being firmly in the domain of Man's control. Ash'arī thought, in contrast, tends to put God in the driver's seat, and such Sufi scholars as Ibn 'Arabī take such verses as "Each day he is upon some task" (55:29) and "You did not throw when you threw, but God threw" (8:17), and "No indeed, but they are in confusion as to a new creation" (50:15) to describe a magical and wonderful world where, as Abū Bakr said, "I have never seen anything without seeing God before it." Ironically, those modern Muslims who are so enthralled by the West ought to recognize soon that had they stayed "behind," in "orthodox" Ash'arism, they would now be ahead, what with scientists like Bohm and Prigogine, thinkers like Berman and Bateson, and Feyerabend and Roszak "discovering" a universe which is not mechanical, not predictable, and not manipulatable.

Shimogaki again passes up the opportunity to inject postmodern analysis into his critique when Ḥanafī talks of the need to view man as man "in order that Muslims transform their civilization from the old divine phase to a new human phase, and that they transform the pivot of civilization from the knowledge of God to [the] knowledge of man" (pp. 59-60). To do this, Muslims "have to restore man as distinctive and independent, existing by his essence, and spreading in all places without a center" (p. 60). This utterly repugnant concept ignores the traditionalist and perennialist insistence that Islamic civilization is not man-made, and that if Islamic civilization were to end tomorrow, human beings could not start it up again. To argue otherwise is to deny the divine origin of the Qur'an, the entire prophetic project, the moment of *tensile*, and the absolute—not relative—location of truth in *al ḥaqq*: God.

But beyond this idiocy, Shimogaki does not identify Foucault's own discussion of Man. As Foucault says (and it is hard to abbreviate his thought):

> The first thing to be observed is that the human sciences did not inherit a certain domain . . . which it was then their task to elaborate with positive methods and with concepts that had at last become scientific . . . . The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, anything like man; for man did not exist (any more than life, or language, or labor); and the human sciences did not appear when, as a result of some pressing rationalism, some unresolved scientific problem, some practical concern, it was decided to include man (willy-nilly, and with a greater or lesser degree of success) among the objects of science . . . they appeared when man constituted himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known.[3]

This concept of Man, for which Ḥanafī holds out, is precisely the problem with modernity and arises from a disciplinary, carceral complex of power-knowledge that could quite easily be classified as Pharaonic—is this evidence of Ḥanafī's "Egyptian" background?

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[3]Michel Foucault, T*he Order of Things*, 344-5.

The power of western civilization comes from engaging each individual in an efficient, effective bureaucratic mechanism[4]; although an "iron cage," such an assemblage offers great potential power for the ones who can harness it. When one reads the hadith and the stories of travellers, the qualitative differences between our societies are vast: where we cannot build our own houses without governmental permits, bank loans, and lawyers; where we cannot heal ourselves, but must submit to aggressive and invasive medical procedures; where we cannot educate our own children but must send them to public schools actually designed to transfer children's obedience from their parents to the state; we find traditional Muslims implementing the Shari'ah by themselves, without the fiat of state powers or amirs or caliphs; we find the *qāḍī* guiding disputants to harmony (the process of *ṣulḥ*) instead of locking up criminals; we find people following wealth freely instead of nation-states setting up enclaves of super-rich citizens and dirt-poor foreign laborers.

What Foucault does with this modern engagement of the individual is locate a turning point, in typical Foucaultian fashion, in a little-known book by J. P. Frank titled *System einer vollstaendigen Medicinische Polizei,* written in 1779. Foucault explains that Frank's work is the first public health program, where the "care for individual life is becoming at this moment a duty for the state."[5] At the same moment, "the French Revolution gives the signal for the great national wars of our days, involving national armies and meeting their conclusions or their climax in huge mass slaughters."

We get a "reason of state" that subjects individuals to the sovereign state (one can begin to see why an "Islamic state" is a misguided concept; a gloss on the phrase is something like "We want a corporate entity that is not a creation of God and therefore is beyond His powers; which is sovereign, meaning that it answers to no one but itself; which is Islamic, meaning it answers to God; but since they are incompatible, we will stick to a modern nation-state, which legitimizes its Pharaonic character by the use of Islamic facades"). Foucault says that "from the state's point of view, the individual exists insofar as what he does is able to introduce even a minimal change in the strength of the state, either in a positive or in a negative direction."[6] Therefore, "What the police see to is a live, active, and productive man. Turquet employs a very remarkable expres-

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[4]Marshall Hodgson has some interesting ideas about this Great Western Transmutation in his *The Venture of Islam*.

[5]Michel Foucault, *The Political Technology of Individuals*, 147.

[6]Ibid., 152.

sion: he says 'the police's true object is man.'"[7] And it is this man as the true object of "our" attention that is Ḥanafī's dream project.

Shimogaki does see that Ḥanafī's criticism of European man only satisfies "anti-European sentiments." I was impressed with Foucault's discussion of "man" as an object of study, which Shimogaki seems to know, where he says that:

> If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility . . . were to cause them to crumble . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.[8]

For me, this idea suggests a moment of hope, where Islam might be universally "remembered," not reformed or revived.[9]

Shimogaki does a good job of criticizing Ḥanafī's "elemental" (as opposed to "relational") approach, his superficial reading of al Ghazālī as the prime cause of irrationalism and Islamic decadence, his rejection of Sufism as external to Islam, and so on. He hopes that by developing a *tawḥīdī* approach, which is "relational," that Muslim scholars would rediscover a new scope for study in a *tawḥīdī* worldview and that there might be some interaction with postmodernists in the West.

Finally, Shimogaki's conclusion is that *The Islamic Left* is a form of resistance, however flawed, working from a quote from Foucault that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exterioritiy in relation to power" (p. 103). Shimogaki misreads this central tenet in Foucault's work. What Foucault is drawing attention to is the complicity of the victim and the oppressor, the intimate relationship power creates between the dominator and the dominated. The more I think about it, the more I begin to believe that this insight of Foucault is derived from his personal life, immersed as he was at one period in the S-M homosexual bars in San Francisco. From what I understand, the "victim" who is tied up and abused is very much controlling his abuser, egging him on, revelling in forcing his torturer to beat harder. If this is so, one might speculate that, yes indeed, there is a small but vocal portion of the Muslim world in some kind of

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[7]Ibid., 156.

[8]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

[9]See "Remembering Islam: A Critique of Habermas and Foucault," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (1988): 13-36.

twisted power play, at once affirming Mulims' inferiority and western superiority, saying that we revel in the fact that you need us on the bottom so that you can be on the top.

I applaud Shimogaki's use of postmodern thinkers, but these are strange bedfellows indeed. And I realize once again that those vocal Muslims who are so enthralled by the military whip of the West, so impressed by the engorged size of its missiles, so shocked at its uncovered women, are intertwined with their enemy, locked in a strange and ugly embrace. Thank God for those many traditional Muslims who refuse to play the game, who live the sacralized Islamic life of *wudū'* and *'umrah*, of recitation and *du'ah*, of *ṣadaqah* and neighborliness, showering neither hate nor love on the western world, sacrificing neither this world nor the next, and not blaming themselves for the sad plight of so many Muslims today: "Those who, when hit with a disaster, say 'Verily we are God's and to Him is our return'" (2:156).

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