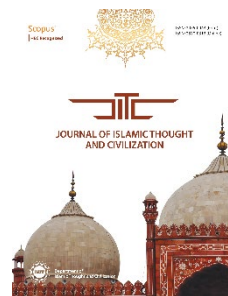
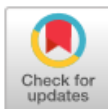



Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 16 Issue 1, Spring 2026

ISSN(P): 2075-0943 ISSN(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



- Title:** **The Concept of the Arab-Islamic Mind and the Modernization of Islamic Thought**
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- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.161.06>
- History:** Received: February 24, 2025, Revised: January 27, 2026, Accepted: February 09, 2026,
Published: May 11, 2026
- Citation:** Yergeldi, Yesdaulet., Kudaiberdi Bagasharov, & Murat Smagulov. “The Concept of the Arab-Islamic Mind and the Modernization of Islamic Thought.” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 16, no. 1 (2026): 86–109.
<https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.161.06>
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- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of
Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

The Concept of the Arab-Islamic Mind and the Modernization of Islamic Thought

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Abstract

This article comprehensively analyzes the critical challenges facing the Islamic world, focusing on ignorance, poverty, and disunity. It posits that ignorance perpetuates poverty, fostering extremism and obstructing socio-economic progress. The piece highlights the vital role of education and intellectual reform in breaking this cycle, asserting that limited access to quality education impedes meaningful societal contributions. It also explores the spiritual dimensions, suggesting a deviation from divine principles. The discussion delves into the historical and intellectual roots of the “Arab-Islamic mind,” a concept critiqued by scholars like Mohammad Arkoun and Mohammad Abid al-Jabri. These thinkers advocate for a transformative approach, integrating modern scientific methodologies and broader interpretations of Islamic teachings to address contemporary issues. The article frames this within the context of colonialism, which disrupted traditional frameworks, and the Nahda movement's unfulfilled goals. A significant portion addresses linguistic and epistemological crises, noting that the decline of classical Arabic and the rise of foreign languages in education have severed ties to Islamic heritage, leading to intellectual stagnation. The article concludes by advocating for a unified system that harmonizes Islamic principles with modern knowledge, stressing the need for collective efforts in education, language, and critical engagement with tradition to revitalize the Islamic world and foster unity and progress.

Keywords: Arab-Islamic mind, ignorance, intellectual crisis, Islamic world, Mohammad Abid al-Jabri, Mohammad Arkoun, poverty

Introduction

The main problems of the Islamic world, including ignorance, poverty, and the absence of unity, are gaining in their influence. Ignorance leads to poverty, and poverty contributes to extremism. Every person who lacks education fails to contribute to changing social conditions. If we hope to change our current situation, we must begin by correcting our own misconceptions and misunderstandings.¹ Ignorance and lack of education are major contributing factors to poverty in many parts of the Muslim world. Without access to quality education, individuals are unable to

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¹Mohamad Sarhan Ali Qasim et al., “Asaru At-Tanmiya Az-Zatiya Lil Fard Al-Muslim Fi Dau'i At-Tarbiya Al-Islamiya [The Impact of Self-Development of Individual Muslim in the Light of Islamic Education],” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 6, no. 1 (2011): 155–186.

acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their economic circumstances.²

Furthermore, from a Reformed theological perspective, it is crucial to recognize that these issues are not merely social or economic, but also deeply spiritual, reflecting a departure from God's intended design for humanity as revealed in Scripture.

According to *Al-Jazeera*, in 2021, there were a total 99.4 million illiterate individuals across all Arab countries. January 8 was named the Day of Combating Arab Illiteracy in 1970 with an establishment of the Arab Organization for Combating Illiteracy in connection with a resolution by the universities of the Arab Countries.³

While this observation alerts us to the intellectual crisis in the Islamic world, particularly in the Arab countries, it also emphasizes the disparity in intellectual conditions. A lack of awareness of literacy characterizes a segment of the Islamic sphere, while another segment possesses only a basic familiarity with written symbols.

In alternative terms, beyond proficiency in reading and writing, individuals must improve in comprehensive knowledge, in particular in those taught at the secondary and tertiary educational levels. Moreover, among those who already possess advanced degrees, their comprehension appears to be quite far from contemporary technological and scientific discourse. This discrepancy impairs their capacity to leverage the acquired expertise for progressive contributions and the development of novel products.

Ignorance contributes to backwardness, particularly in regions within the Islamic world that are afflicted by illiteracy. It is not possible to effectively engage in intellectual discourse in the face of a deficiency in education. In the absence of education, the latest advances in technology and science will elude comprehension. The ramifications of such ignorance extend to the constraints of communication and the potential of logistics, impeding access to opportunities. This echoes the reformed understanding of the “noetic effects of sin,” where sin impairs not only our moral compass but also our ability to reason and understand the world correctly.⁴

Poverty affects aspiration in Muslim communities. A struggling nation cannot extend a helping hand to another one that struggles. A nation that is initially directed toward acquiring resources and material gain, may turn to the pursuit of warfare. In regions that are afflicted by poverty, individuals simply endure the present day, lacking foresight for the future. Their concerns revolve around immediate needs of daily sustenance and basic survival, and they harbor limited expectations for the days ahead. The present state of affairs, governed by the struggle for survival, restricts the ability to nurture optimistic visions for the future. As the nation confronts its contemporary challenges, the anticipation of a brighter tomorrow remains elusive, a situation that is further exacerbated by disillusionment stemming from past disappointments. Any overarching optimism is hampered by incessant disillusion, restricting the nation's future orientation. The inability to take proactive measures in a context marred by hopelessness poses a formidable challenge. A despondent population's intellectual and emotional drain makes it particularly arduous to emerge from the abyss of hopelessness. The lack of hope in areas beset by destitution precludes meaningful initiatives. The formidable mental barrier existing in destitute communities makes it extremely challenging to break

²Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 87.

³Abdel Hafez El Sawy, “تقترب العرب بعد عقود من ادعاء المكافحة الأمية.” [After Decades of Claiming to Combat Illiteracy, the Arabs are being Devoured by it], *Al Jazeera*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.net/culture/2022/9/8/ادعاء-المكافحة-الأمية>.

⁴Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 351.

free from the shackles of hopelessness. It is necessary to address this deep-seated despair by revitalizing intellectual and emotional reservoirs. In essence, revitalizing one's intellect and knowledge liberates one from the clutches of destitution, and fostering the capacity to devise solutions to meet multifaceted challenges. The cultivation of intellect and knowledge not only facilitates an escape from destitution but also contributes to the overcoming of different predicaments, using informed problem-solving.

Some researchers have described these challenges as follows:

The problematic aspects of contemporary Islam are characterized by some scholars as “de-hermeneuticized”, in the sense of deficient in terms of inventive reinterpretation as well as in terms of production and enactment of new meanings which are actually needed to foster a healthy socio-political order. Such notions as “civil Islam” and “progressive Islam” can be considered as ventures of reinterpreting Islamic teachings in the context of the modern world.⁵

This “de-hermeneuticization” can be seen as a failure to properly interpret and apply God's Word to contemporary challenges, a central concern within Reformed theology.

Furthermore, in addressing prevalent issues in the Islamic world, standard terms such as the Arab mind and the Islamic mind have been introduced. In particular, the mentioned terms find their significance in the framework of emerging challenges on this topic. This concept has been discussed extensively under titles such as critique of the Arab mind or critique of the Islamic mind. In addition, terms like the modernization of the Arab-Islamic mind and the formation of the Islamic mind have also been encountered. The term Critique of the Islamic mind was first articulated by the Algerian philosopher Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010), whose contributions to the study of the Islamic mind are notable, with his initial works being published as long ago as 1984.

However, the concept of Critique of the Arab mind owes most to Moroccan philosopher Mohammad al-Jabri (1935-2010). His work on the subject consists of four volumes and was written over twenty years. The first volume was published in 1982.

Since 1982–1984, a unique framework has emerged in the philosophy of Islam and in particular within the methodology of the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind. Despite variations in their particular content, both critiques delve into epistemology with reference to the term ‘mind’. This involves exploring how the mechanisms of the intellect operate and how it, as the instrument of thought, contributes to its functions in practice. The objectives in the examination of reason are geared toward enhancing the quality of intellectual production.

Over the past five decades, more than seventy publications have addressed the concept of the Arab mind, while approximately twenty have focused on the Islamic mind. Additionally, several works bear titles that make reference to the Muslim mind or the Arab-Islamic mind. Furthermore, even in the absence of specific mention of labels such as the Arab mind or the Islamic mind, a plethora of contributions can be found on this topic. For instance, Jabri's four-volume work Critique of the Arab Mind and George Tarabishi's five-volume response, Critique of the Critique of the Arab Mind are notable examples.⁶ Additionally, there are works like Burhan Ghalyun's Conspiracy against the Arab Mind: The Hardships of Arab Intellectuals, Fuad Zakariya's (1927-2010) An Appeal to the Arab Mind, Abdullah Al-Arawi's Concept of Mind, Rafael Patai's Arab Mind, Hasan Saghbty's Modernization of the Arab Mind, Majid Mustafa Saeed's The Issue of Orientalism in the Arab Mind, and Arkoun's From Ijtihad to the Critique of the Islamic Mind.

⁵Asfa Widiyanto, “Knowledge Society Versus Post-Truth Society,” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 18, no. 4 (2022): 86.

⁶Mohammed Sayed Rassas, “Jūrj Ṭarābīshī: Sīra Fikriyya [The Intellectual Life of George Tarabishi],” *Majallat al-Faisal*, nos. 513–514 (2019): 12.

Through numerous works, the term 'the Arab mind' and similar concepts have been shaped by a range of thinkers. Most of these works have sought to assess the Arab-Islamic mind critically, identifying the aspects that make it distinct. In this broad spectrum, we find Jabri's Critique of the Arab Mind and Arkoun's Critique of the Islamic Mind. These authors are the focus here due to their comprehensive analysis of the intellectual conditions in the Islamic world and the precise solutions that they propose. Later researchers shared their opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of these projects, both theoretically and practically. However, it would be an oversimplification to designate these two scholars as the sole architects of the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind, as numerous contributors have also treated this topic, providing additional insight not covered by these two seminal works.

Here, we examine the diverse perspectives of scholars on the emergence of the concept of the Arab Mind. We explore the factors that contributed to the formation of the concept. To ensure objectivity in addressing our expanding topic, we take into account viewpoints of researchers working in various contexts, drawing on Russian, Turkish, English, and Arabic works. This article forms an introduction to the Arab-Islamic mind.

This article undertakes a conceptual and historical-analytical study to comprehensively examine the emergence, development, and intellectual implications of the "Arab-Islamic mind" concept. Our primary aim is to analyze the critical challenges facing the Islamic world through the lens of this concept, focusing on the historical-intellectual factors that led to its formulation and the underlying epistemological ruptures it highlights. We achieve this through narrative literature analysis and historical-intellectual reconstruction of scholarly discourse. The selection of key thinkers, such as Mohammed Arkoun and Mohammad Abid al-Jabri (1935-2010), is based on their foundational contributions to this debate, their influence, and their representativeness of diverse perspectives, drawing from a linguistically and geographically varied body of work.

It is important to clarify that this study is not an empirical investigation; it does not present new empirical findings or primary data. Instead, it offers an analytical synthesis of existing scholarship to illuminate the causes and nature of the intellectual crisis, rather than solely describing its historical manifestations. Throughout this analysis, a Reformed theological perspective serves as a framework for critical evaluation, aiming to provide alternative or complementary insights into how these factors have shaped the Islamic understanding of God, humanity, and the world. This approach allows for a nuanced engagement with contemporary Islamic thought, exploring themes central to the Reformed tradition such as reason, revelation, and societal development.

2. Methodology

This study is a conceptual and historical-analytical investigation that employs narrative literature analysis and historical-intellectual reconstruction to examine the concept of the "Arab-Islamic mind." Our approach is non-empirical, focusing instead on a critical engagement with existing scholarly discourse and the historical evolution of ideas.

The selection of authors and perspectives is guided by their centrality to the debate, their significant influence in shaping the discourse, and their representativeness of diverse intellectual positions within the Islamic world and among its critics. Key figures such as Mohammed Arkoun and Mohammad Abid al-Jabri are central to this analysis due to their foundational contributions and comprehensive critiques of the intellectual conditions in the Islamic world. To ensure a broad and objective understanding, we incorporate a linguistic and geographical diversity of scholarly works, drawing on Russian, Turkish, English, and Arabic sources.

Throughout this analysis, a Reformed theological perspective serves as the primary normative framework for critical evaluation. This involves assessing how historical and intellectual factors have shaped Islamic understanding of God, humanity, and the world. This lens aims to provide alternative

or complementary insights, critically engaging with underlying assumptions and conclusions through the principles of Scripture and Reformed theology, recognizing God's sovereignty over history. This approach allows for a nuanced engagement with contemporary Islamic thought, exploring themes central to the Reformed tradition such as reason, revelation, and societal development.

3. Selecting and Defining the Topic: Objectives and Responsibilities

Islamic philosophy addresses a range of complex issues. However, in the university context, the study of Islamic philosophy often focuses on the philosophers of the Middle Ages. Later philosophers and their contributions are frequently overlooked. To fill this gap, we here delve into, among the most extensively explored issues in contemporary Islamic philosophy, the Arab-Islamic mind. We explore this matter through examining the works of scholars who have extensively delved into this pivotal topic. This exploration is particularly relevant from a Reformed theological perspective, as it allows us to understand how contemporary Islamic thought grapples with issues of reason, revelation, and societal development - themes central to the Reformed tradition.

Our chosen approach to this topic, identifying its origins and catalysts, will provide a great benefit for scholars in this field. Over the last five decades, researchers and intellectuals all over the world have published more than one hundred publications addressing the themes of the Islamic mind and the Arab mind. These contributions have played a crucial role in shaping and refining these concepts, making it imperative to look at them in their historical context. Furthermore, understanding the historical and intellectual context of these discussions allows us to engage in meaningful dialogue and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the Islamic world today, informed by the insights of Reformed theology.

Identifying the genesis of any term, understanding, or concept entails the examination of the many factors that have contributed to its formulation. These factors range from cultural and societal dynamics to political events and the evolution of scholarly dialogue. This article delineates the multifaceted factors that influence the development of the Arab mind and the Islamic mind. Our objective is not only to understand these factors from a historical and sociological perspective but also to evaluate them considering Reformed theological principles. This includes examining how these factors have shaped the Islamic understanding of God, humanity, and the world, and how a Reformed perspective might offer alternative or complementary insights.

In undertaking this task, we are guided by the Reformed conviction that all truth is God's truth. Therefore, we approach the study of the Arab-Islamic mind with humility and a willingness to learn, while also critically evaluating its underlying assumptions and conclusions through the lens of Scripture and Reformed theology. This approach allows us to fulfill our responsibility to engage with the intellectual currents of our time in a way that is both faithful to our theological heritage and relevant to the contemporary world.

4. Critique of the Islamic Mind

Arkoun's original approach distinguishes him from contemporary thinkers. This distinctiveness is also evident in his critically acclaimed project, the Critique of the Islamic Mind. In this noteworthy project, Arkoun criticizes the understanding of Islam and the use of reason in its application. For Arkoun, contemporary Islam operates under the influence of revelation, having religious figures and *faqih*s (jurists) as authorized representatives. However, this form of intellect, which is exclusively guided by religious figures and legal authorities, is inherently one-dimensional. Put differently, it is characterized by religious authoritarianism. This critique raises important questions about the relationship between reason and revelation, a central theme in Reformed theology. While Reformed thinkers affirm the authority of Scripture, they also emphasize the importance of reason as a God-

given gift that enables us to understand and interpret His revelation.⁷ By contrast, Arkoun advocates for a more expansive approach, taking inspiration from the Western humanist sciences and their structured methodologies. He urges the Islamic world to go beyond the stereotypical 13th-century methods to embrace new ideas and keep pace with contemporary developments, influenced by Western scientific and research methods.

With this, Arkoun introduces new forms of intellect, namely the Future Intellect and the Independent Intellect, to reform the application of the classical Islamic mind in the contemporary era. This novel intellect is developed to align Islam with contemporary scientific methodologies.⁸ Unlike traditional patterns of thought that are deeply rooted in Islamic history, this intellect does not adhere to rigid systems of conventional thinking. It refuses to be confined by antiquated scholarly norms and is open to reconsidering previously established ideas and concepts in Islamic history. It promotes a more diverse perspective, encouraging various interpretations and viewpoints on a given issue, diverging from the rigid intellectual frameworks established in Islamic history. This emphasis on intellectual freedom and diversity resonates with the Reformed emphasis on “semper reformanda” - the idea that the church must always be reforming itself in accordance with the Word of God. However, a Reformed perspective would likely caution against a wholesale adoption of Western methodologies without critically evaluating their underlying assumptions in light of Scripture.

Arkoun advocates for developing a comprehensive understanding of the Quran that integrates various scientific disciplines, shaping a new worldview. Given that the existing framework is dogmatic and orthodox, it is imperative that it be reevaluated from a fresh perspective. This is the essential task that Arkoun sets out upon, using an innovative approach.

Arkoun’s project seeks the comprehensive reevaluation of Islamic thought and its transformation into a new paradigm, with a modernized system of its interpretation. While Reformed theologians would likely agree with the need for ongoing theological reflection and engagement with contemporary thought, they would emphasize that true reformation comes through a return to the foundational truths of Scripture, not through the adoption of a new paradigm that is detached from the historic Islamic faith. A truly Reformed “modernization” of Islamic thought would involve a critical engagement with its core theological claims in light of an Islamic worldview.

5. Critique of the Arab Mind

Jabri used the term Arab mind instead of Islamic mind to avoid contributing to an ideological critique of religion. With his term, he focused explicitly on epistemological criticisms. This distinction is important to consider from a Reformed perspective, as it highlights the relationship between faith and reason, and the potential pitfalls of separating them too rigidly. Reformed theology emphasizes the importance of both faith and reason, recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive but complementary aspects of a unified worldview.⁹

For Jabri, the knowledge found within the Islamic world can be classified from an epistemological standpoint into three categories, as follows:

- Bayan (exposition)
- Irfan (gnosis)

⁷Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *The Just Balance [al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm]*, trans. D. P. Brewster (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1993).

⁸A. Khaled and A. Miloud, “Maḥmūd Al-Aqīl Al-Islāmī Lada Mohammad Arkoun [The Concept of the Islamic Mind of Mohammad Arkoun],” *Majallatul Maurus* 08, no 01 (2020): 69.

⁹Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 256.

- Burhan (evidence or demonstration)

Here, bayan refers to means of understanding and explaining. It encompasses religious and theological knowledge, as well as the linguistic sciences of the Arabic language. The study of religion and the Arabic language contributes to the theoretical interpretation (tafsir) of the Holy Qur'ān.

The bayan system includes religious disciplines such as tafsir (interpretation), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Hadith studies, and study of Arabic, including *nahw* (grammar), *sarf* (morphology), and *balagha* (eloquence). According to Jabri, *fiqh* holds a special place among these disciplines: it is the most distinctive science within Islamic knowledge. For example, just as Ancient Greek civilization is characterized by philosophy, and contemporary European civilization by the technical sciences, Islamic civilization is distinguished by its *fiqh*; the word refers to the legal system of the Islamic world. This unique feature has had a marked impact on the cognitive system of Muslim Arabs.¹⁰ This emphasis on the distinctiveness of Islamic knowledge resonates with the Reformed understanding of the importance of recognizing different cultural and historical contexts in theological reflection. However, a Reformed perspective would also emphasize the universality of God's truth and the need for cross-cultural dialogue and learning.

The second knowledge system is called *irfan*. According to Jabri, *irfan* is a separate system of knowledge encompassing the methodology of the acquisition of knowledge, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the world. Irfan predates Islam, in particular in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, but it later became intertwined with Arab-Islamic civilization. In Sufism, *irfan* is referred to as *kashf* (unveiling) and *ilhām* (inspiration). However, Ismaili thought considers the prophet and the *wali* (saint) to be similar terms. True knowledge is only to be obtained through the Imam. Most Shi'ites reject the use of analogy (qiyas) and observation (*nazar*) in the understanding of God, considering it insufficient to the task of realizing the existence of God. According to Jabri, the Ikhwan al-Safa also contributed to the interruption of intellectual work in the Islamic world, in particular by impeding the logical development of thought.¹¹ This concept of “*Irfan*” raises questions about the nature of religious experience and its relationship to revealed truth. Reformed theology, while acknowledging the role of experience, emphasizes the primacy of Scripture as the ultimate source of authority for faith and practice.

The third knowledge system is called *burhan*, referring to natural forces that humans rely upon to acquire knowledge. It incorporates the five senses, experimentation, and experience, applying logical analysis to them. Unlike other methods, which may compare different types of information, *burhan* specifically refers to what is obtained due to its own method. Expounding this, Jabri highlights the special significance and role that reason plays in a unique way.¹² This emphasis on reason and empirical observation aligns with the Reformed appreciation for the natural world as God's creation and the importance of scientific inquiry. However, Reformed theology would also caution against a purely rationalistic approach that neglects the role of faith and revelation in understanding reality.¹³

According to Jabri's perspective, intellectual and other achievements across the Islamic world are closely tied to these knowledge systems. In particular, this occurred due to the failure of the *burhan* system to perform its intended function. When the *burhan* system ceased its independent functioning, scientific development stagnated in the Islamic world. The present, restricted role of

¹⁰Muhammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Bunyat al-'Aql al-'Arabī [The Structure of Arab Reason]* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009), 13–20.

¹¹Ibid., 251–259.

¹²Ibid., 383–388.

¹³Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 69.

burhan implies a reluctance in the Islamic world to engage in scientific experimentation, conduct logical analyses, scrutinize the world with diligence, and advance natural sciences. *Burhan*'s role is notably restricted, acting primarily as a subordinate to *irfan* and *bayan*. It was once employed simply to reinforce the doctrines that were introduced by *irfan* and *bayan*, augmenting their evidentiary foundations. Thus, *burhan* was sacrificed to the first two, getting overshadowed and marginalized.

Thus, deviating from genuine knowledge and limiting itself to deceptive sophistry and exclusively religious subjects, the Islamic world, beginning within a certain restricted period, hindered its own progress, and regressed. Ceasing to use precise tools developed through verified scholarship and rational thinking, it has not provided any substantial contributions for an extended period. Conversely, the adoption of a worldview that disregards reason has proven to be counterproductive.¹⁴ This analysis resonates with the Reformed critique of both rationalism and fideism, advocating instead for a balanced approach that integrates faith and reason in the pursuit of knowledge. A Reformed perspective would likely attribute this decline not simply to the failure of "*burhan*" but to a deeper spiritual and theological crisis that resulted in the marginalization of reason and a distorted understanding of God's revelation.

In critiquing the Arab political mind, Jabri relies on concepts such as *qabila* (tribe), *aqida* (dogma), and *ganima* (spoil). Thus, Jabri establishes a foundation for his examination, offering insights into the structure of the Arab-Islamic mind and its fundamental aspects. These concepts highlight the importance of social and political structures in shaping intellectual development, a theme that is also relevant to Reformed social thought, which emphasizes the importance of just and equitable social structures for human flourishing.

6. How and when did the Concept of the Arab-Islamic Mind Emerge? What Contributed to its Development?

This section will analyze four different perspectives on the emergence and development of the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind. Each perspective offers valuable insights into the complex interplay of historical, political, and intellectual factors that have shaped this concept. From a Reformed theological perspective, it is crucial to examine these factors through the lens of God's sovereignty over history and His purposes for humanity. We must ask not only how these factors shaped the Arab-Islamic mind, but also how they relate to God's overarching plan.

6.1. First Perspective

In his article "Mohammad Abid al-Jabri and the project of the Arab mind" Abdul Ali Karkub posits the following:

Various ideological frameworks emerged in the Arab world, including Morocco, and their central subject revolved around the question of further development. However, each approach pursues distinct paths and solutions, resulting from the uniqueness of the various methodologies they adopt. Notable examples in this realm include Abdulkabir al-Khatib's Double critique, Abdullah al-Arawi's Historical critique, and they collectively, along with Mohammad Abid al-Jabri's Critique of the Arab mind, form a paradigm of epistemological critique. In his work, Jabri goes beyond seeking a renaissance, delving into questions of identity, morality, and political orientation. His primary objective is to identify what factors contribute to the stagnation of our intellectual progress, shedding light on why our rationality has succumbed to a dysfunctional trajectory, and proposing avenues to revitalize a dynamic intellect.¹⁵

Abdul Ali Karkub mentions numerous projects that are aimed at the revitalization of the Islamic

¹⁴Al-Jabri, *Bunyatu Al-Aql Al-Arabi* [The Structure of Arab Reason], 477–480.

¹⁵Abdul Ali Karkub, "Mohammad Jabiri Hayatu, Muallafatuhu, Mamatuhu [Life, Works and Death of Mohammad Jabiri]," *Al-Hiuar Mutamaddin* no. 4456 (2014): 2.

world. He emphasizes that, among these projects, many are focused on criticism. Among these, the critique of the Arab-Islamic mind is not merely a critique but rather a project intended to identify the factors that hinder the development of the Islamic world, leading to concerns regarding its progress.

The most substantial among these defeats occurred in 1967 and led to the sorrow of all Arab nations. Following the 1967 defeat and the later introduction of a range of modernization projects, three major intellectual streams emerged, with a specific focus on testing reason and rationalism. These were Mohammad Arkoun's Critique of the Islamic Mind, Mohammad Abid al-Jabri's Critique of the Arab Mind and Mutagh Sifdi's Critique of the Western Mind.¹⁶ This historical context is crucial for understanding the development of the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind. The 1967 defeat can be seen as a watershed moment that exposed the deep-seated challenges facing the Arab world and prompted a period of intense intellectual introspection.

From this moment, the critique of mind became the most prominent topic among Muslim intellectuals, and in the seventies, it became the most extensively discussed topic in these circles in terms of its consequence for opinions, politics, economics, and social development. Arab intellectuals initially acknowledged the urgency of the question, explicitly crediting the critical significance of the matter in the Arab mind, which they blamed.

Ali Harb states:

Currently, in recent publications, books, conferences, and various forums, Arab intellectuals and thinkers greatly criticize mind. Arab mind, as a subject, is being critically examined, and discussions revolve around its functionalities, its potential advantages, the challenges it poses, and the possibilities and dilemmas inherent in its dynamics. Some of these contributions can be exemplified. Fuad Zakariya's publication, *An appeal to the Arab mind*, demonstrates the author's unwavering confidence in the potential of the approach to reason to engage and revive the intellect. Conversely, in his *Mind Killed by Conspiracy*, Burhan Ghalyun, who championed the Arab mind, expressed feelings of regret about its confinement, suppression, and even demise. It is crucial to recognize works that, in this thematic framework, assign culpability to the Arab mind. Several writings by Jabri and Arkoun can be grouped with these.¹⁷

The earliest phase of this discourse began after the 1967 defeat, when the "critique of the Arab-Islamic mind" emerged as a distinct intellectual project. In this context, the phrase "critique of the Arab mind" aptly captures the debates and developments that crystallized around the shock of 1967. It was acknowledged that the issues that are addressed are not exclusive to Arab nations but extend throughout the Islamic world. This perspective highlights the role of historical events in shaping intellectual discourse. It also raises questions about the relationship between political and military realities and the development of theological and philosophical ideas. A Reformed perspective would emphasize the need to interpret such events in light of God's sovereignty and redemptive purposes.

6.2. Second Perspective

The second perspective approached the critique of the mind in the context of the post-independence period, after the withdrawal of the colonial powers. It maintained that:

Upon their withdrawal, the colonizing nations were resolutely convinced that they had bequeathed an Arab mind that was impractical. The colonizers departed only after thoroughly comprehending the Arab mind and dominating it. They left behind them in their wake a stagnant

¹⁶Hasan Ḥanafī, *al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā min al-Turāth al-Qadīm [Heritage and Renewal: Our Position on Ancient Heritage]*, 4th ed. (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1992), 42.

¹⁷Alī Ḥarb, *Naqd al-Naṣṣ [Critique of the Text]* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2005), 69.

Arab world, populated by unemployed, unproductive Arab youth who were mere imitators of Western culture. Those who spoke in favor of the West were, unfortunately, unaware of what the West had done in Algeria, Tunisia, the Arabian Peninsula, and all over the world. What did we do? We opposed this through appeals to Islam. However, conflicting opinions emerged within the Islamic Ummah, where each faction endorsed a different school of thought and ideology. Those who worked to improve society promoted values like justice, tolerance, love, and the humane qualities. Unfortunately, the colonizers were convinced that upon their departure, they had left behind an unworkable Arab mind, and the *Ummah* was subsequently left with individuals who were ignorant of their history. A foreign nature was instilled throughout the Arab and Islamic world.

Have we critically examined the outcomes and reasons for our defeat in 1967? How were specific studies conducted? Where were the relevant discussions held? Did we not engage in reading or pursuing thorough investigation? What benefits were derived from Western perspectives and their methods of research? Unfortunately, depression and decline did not entirely fall on our military; instead, it was directed toward the Arab mind (In other words, it was not our military forces that suffered defeat but the Arab mind).

What, therefore, do we need to do? We must find our path. We should not require the orientalist to come and write out our history for us. Instead, we should write it ourselves, delving into our own situation, and find solutions to our problems ourselves. The Arab world can only go on and stand tall if it writes its own history, with its own hands.

The Arab mind both looks forward (to the future) and reflects on the past. It needs confidence in itself. However, we fail to accept the fact of a diversity of opinions and surpass the colonized culture.¹⁸

This perspective highlights the impact of colonialism on the Arab mind and the subsequent struggle for intellectual and cultural independence. From a Reformed perspective, colonialism can be seen as a manifestation of the human tendency towards domination and exploitation, a consequence of the Fall. The call to "write our own history" resonates with the Reformed emphasis on the importance of understanding our own historical and cultural context in light of God's providence. It also underscores the need for intellectual self-determination, free from the imposition of external ideologies.

In this article, Abdulaziz Badrul Qattan provides insight into the intellectual state of the Islamic world, in particular in the Arab world, over the past century. He illustrates how the colonizing countries disrupted the Arab mind and Arab cultures. Qattan notes that several generations of different nations have been shaped by the influence of the colonizers, rendering them unaware of their history and culture. It is important here to note that this acceptance is not limited to the Arab nations.

According to Qattan, due to the diverse ideologies that play in the Islamic world, it has taken one step forward and two steps back in relation to global development. Therefore, he calls for a standard theory, whether of the Islamic mind, the Arab mind, or the Muslim mind, rooted in overarching principles of the Islamic Ummah. This call for a unifying intellectual framework raises important questions about the nature of truth and the possibility of finding common ground amidst diversity. A Reformed perspective would emphasize the need for any such framework to be grounded in the truth of God's Word, which transcends cultural and ideological differences.

Qattan's article critically assesses the strategies employed by certain reformers to address the

¹⁸Abd al-'Azīz Badr al-Qaṭṭān, "Ḍayā' al-'Aql al-'Arabī bayna al-Istishrāq wa al-Taghrīb [The Arab Mind Lost between Orientalism and Westernization]," *Al-Akhbar*, April 5, 2017, <https://al-akhbar.com/Opinion/228840>.

crisis by appealing to Islam. He appears to be calling attention to two specific facets of the current situation:

First, proponents of Islam face challenges where they do not adhere to appropriate methods. There is a notable disparity in education between the pre- and post-colonial periods. Those who were educated in the colonial era have a good understanding of the natural sciences, engineering, and technology. However, many have little religious knowledge due to their Western education. For their part, those who lacked educational opportunities during the colonial period are far from formal education. They may need to be made aware of even basic concepts, and quite a few cannot read or even distinguish letters. This disparity in education highlights the complex legacy of colonialism and the challenges it poses to the development of a unified intellectual and spiritual vision. Reformed theology emphasizes the importance of education that integrates faith and learning, equipping individuals to engage with the world in a holistic and transformative way. Second, some individuals attribute the underdevelopment of their nation to Islam and call for it to be abandoned.

In the 1920s, with proponents of reform, there were also critics who opposed reforms of Islam and rejected the religion. According to the Arab writer Ismail Mazkhar, Islam is incapable of fostering independence in the Arab mind. To preserve their distinctiveness, Arabs must forsake religious consciousness (their religious heritage) and embrace European rationalism, materialism, and the whole of European culture, as it is geared more toward development than Islamic culture.¹⁹ This rejection of Islam in favor of European rationalism reflects a tension between faith and reason that has been a recurring theme throughout history. A Reformed perspective would critique both the uncritical embrace of secularism and the rejection of reason, advocating instead for a worldview that integrates faith and reason.

According to the perspective of the second view, the concept of the Islamic Arab mind gained prominence in the context of a renewed interest in seeking a new path of development after the Muslim nations achieved independence. One illustrative example here is Fayez Abdullah Sayegh's (1922-1980) *Understanding the Arab Mind*, published in 1953.

6.3. Third Perspective

The need for reform in the Islamic world appeared more evident as it came to interact with the West directly. Mukhetdinov and Arkan are exponents of this perspective:

Beginning in the mid-19th century, concerns arose among Muslim intellectuals regarding the relationship between their society and the West. Global colonization posed a significant challenge to Islamic civilization. Technologically advanced and self-interested superpowers engaged in extensive colonization, using both military and diplomatic means. By the conclusion of the 19th century, most Islamic states had succumbed to colonization. After World War II, influenced by the USSR, the colonial powers withdrew from their colonies. However, the challenges that were introduced by colonization persisted. The resolution of these issues would have a crucial role to play in shaping the future of Islamic culture.²⁰

Let us observe this issue in the context of the development of Islamic civilization at present. First, we focus our attention on the notable intellectual contributions of Jabri in the late 20th century.

¹⁹Evgenia Antonovna Frolova, *Istoriya Arabo-Musul'manskoi filosofii: Srednie veka i sovremennost'* [*History of Arab-Muslim Philosophy: Middle Ages and Modernity*] (Moscow: Institut Filosofii RAN, 2006), 186.

²⁰Damir Vaisovich Mukhetdinov, "O Budushem Musul'manskoi Mysli: Razmyshlyaya nad Trudami K. Ernst i M. Al-Jabiri [About the Future of Muslim Reason: Thinking about Works of K. Ernst and M. Al-Jabiri]," *Islam in Modern World* 13, no. 2 (2017): 26, <https://doi.org/10.22311/2074-1529-2017-13-2-25-40>

Mukhetdinov's article engages with Jabri's perspective, exploring and elaborating on his perspectives.²¹

According to D.V. Mukhetdinov, the Islamic world faced significant challenges, beginning with the 19th century. First, The Western assault on the East was enabled by technological and industrial superiority, which made the Islamic world easily conquerable. Second, Europe's military strength surpassed that of the Islamic world, forcing the Islamic nations to submit, as they lacked comparable weapons. Third, certain countries were occupied following the use of diplomatic means, without war. From these trends, the Islamic world was substantially weakened.

We cannot fully agree with D.V. Mukhetdinov, who attributes the decline of the Islamic world solely to the ascendancy of the West. The Islamic world resisted the West during the Crusades. We need, therefore, to seek out the causes of the defeats of the Islamic world within that world itself. This is an important point. While external factors like colonialism undoubtedly played a role, internal factors within the Islamic world also contributed to its decline. A Reformed perspective would emphasize the importance of self-examination and repentance, recognizing that both external and internal factors are ultimately under God's sovereign control. In spite of the withdrawal of the colonial powers and the independence of the Islamic world, everyone can agree that the crisis that arose during the colonial era needs to be resolved. The outcomes of the future trajectory of the Islamic world hinge on swiftly resolving these persistent challenges.

Atilla Arkan, a Turkish researcher, delves into this discussion with vigor. He initiates his article "Çağdaş İslam Arap Düşüncesi ve Cabiri" (Contemporary Islamic Arab thought and al-Jabri) in this way.

Until the conclusion of World War I, the Ottoman Empire held a leadership position in the Islamic world. Following the Ottoman defeat in 1699 and the Treaty of Karlowitz, efforts to revitalize and advance reformation in the Islamic world took a different direction. Before 1699, the Ottoman Empire had initiated a major project, aiming to create an improved system, known as Kanunu Kadime dönme (Return to Old Laws). The objective of this project was to identify and rectify shortcomings and weaknesses in political, social, and educational systems, seeking to forestall them. However, after 1699, there was a radical shift in the situation of the Ottoman Empire. As Ibn Khaldun (1322-1406) observed, "The defeated tend to imitate the winners," and the Islamic world became more closely aligned with the Western world and its modes of thought. This had never previously occurred in the Muslim world before, as, until that point, the Islamic world had been able to rely upon a state and its army. This shift led to crises across various domains.

Imitation of the Western world commenced with a focus on the military, as the Ottoman state prioritized military advances. Progress in this area produced shifts in the equilibrium of global power. The defeats of the Ottoman state compelled it to turn toward the West. From an economic perspective, the impact of the technological revolution taking place in the West gained prominence. Economic advancements and the scientific-technical nexus were acknowledged to be significant sources of strength. Francis Bacon's maxim, "Knowledge is power" concisely captures this relationship.

Social structures in the West underwent a significant transformation due to the Industrial Revolution and the use of science to extract wealth and power from nature. Following this, a shift emerged in the political framework that gave rise to changes in the rule of law, equality, human rights, and democracy. These changes reduced the role of religious powers, leading to the decline of their authority. This shift also played a crucial role in the emergence of new perspectives on religion.

The introduction of new Western intellectual and philosophical ideas substantially impacted the Islamic societies that encountered them. Beginning with the 17th century, intellectuals and thinkers

²¹Ibid., 28.

in the Islamic world began to engage with Western thought and grappled with the challenge of assimilating Western influences. They recognized the imperative need to fully comprehend the West while safeguarding the historical position of Islam. However, the pace of Western cultural assimilation, propelled by its tremendous power, posed a significant and continuing challenge to the preservation of the cultural distinctiveness of the Islamic world.

Mohammad Abid al-Jabri (1935-2010), a prominent figure in contemporary Islamic philosophy, explores these matters. He is one of those intellectuals who has sought to evaluate and analyze Muslim traditions of thought.²²

This historical overview provides further context for understanding the development of the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of Western influence created a complex dynamic that continues to shape the Islamic world today. From a Reformed perspective, this historical trajectory can be seen as part of God's providential plan, even using the rise and fall of empires to accomplish His purposes. The challenge for contemporary Islamic thought, from this perspective, is to engage with modernity in a way that is both faithful to its own heritage and open to the truths that can be found in other cultures.

In his article, Arkan associates the intellectual crises that have led to the concept of the Arab mind in the wake of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The rise of Western influence is tied to Ibn Khaldun's dictum that "advanced civilizations dominate less developed nations". Arkan contends that the ascendancy of Western influence did not manifest itself abruptly but arrived in a progressive fashion. Initially, it was given material substance through military means, in terms of submission to the military prowess of the West. Following this, it unfolded on the economic front, followed by the scientific and technological perspectives. Atilla Arkan's analysis of this matter adopts a historical perspective when it is juxtaposed with the orientations of other attentive Arab writers, in particular Abdulaziz Badrul Qattan and Ali Harb. Nonetheless, Abdulaziz Badrul Qattan and Ali Harb are more relevant to us, as their emphasis does not fall on the overall intellectual crisis in the Islamic world but specifically on the birth and development of the concept of the Arab mind. This is because discussions of reason and rationalism have maintained their distinctiveness in the Islamic world. While the decline of the Islamic world is linked to the 17th and 18th centuries, the actual expression "critique of the Arab mind" emerged later, only surfacing in the latter half of the 20th century, showing a relatively recent conceptualization.

Atilla Arkan discusses Jabri exclusively, likely due to the widespread knowledge of his criticism of the Arab mind.

Atilla Arkan identifies the emergence of scientific and ideological progress where knowledge and a balanced blend of conservatism and progress flourish. However, these matters are often sidelined in many contemporary Muslim nations due to other, more pressing issues. Such contexts hinder the development of science and philosophy. Arkan attributes the initiation of this complication to the decline of the Ottoman Empire.

6.4. Fourth Perspective

According to the Russian scholar E. A. Frolova, the critique of the Arab mind emerged in response to the *Nahda* (Renaissance) project's limited results and its failure to generate a strong, sustainable successor. Although the *Nahda* marked certain advances in the nineteenth century, it acquired its fuller shape and momentum in the twentieth century.

Let us elaborate on the term *Nahda* using some pointers provided by Frolova. Mohammad Ali

²²Atilla Arkan, "Çağdaş İslam Arap Düşüncesi ve Cabiri [Contemporary Islamic Arab Thought and al-Jabri]," *Ortadoğu Yılığ* (2010): 478.

Basha (1769-1849) sent a delegation to Europe to bring Western knowledge to the Arab world. This delegation was led by Rifa'a at-Tahtawi (1801-1873) who traveled to Paris and studied with Western scholars, contributing to the intellectual enrichment of the Arab world. The vision for this concept leads to the progress of Arab nations toward a collective state. Even Christians living in Arab countries were on board with the idea of a Nahda and helped create a new vocabulary in Arabic. They contributed significantly to the flourishing of Arabic literature in this period. After Rifa'a at-Tahtawi arrived in Egypt, he established the Alsun, a school of foreign languages. Scholars actively supported the idea of the Nahda in this period, and their participation produced various reform initiatives. Prominent figures, such as Mohammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Afghani, played significant roles. However, contemporary Arab intellectuals like Hasan Shafai note that the actual outcomes that were expected from the Nahda movement have not been fully realized. This observation is substantiated by the current state of the Islamic world. Despite the transmission of Western knowledge to the Islamic world, there has been little progress in the development of Muslims as a whole.

Taking a closer look at the second half of the 19th century, we can see that the concept of *Nahda* focused on intellectual life. Its primary aim was to prioritize reason and knowledge in the Arab context. In this period, a fundamental shift was seen toward the provision of rational assessment to all societal institutions. Moreover, there were discussions regarding the necessity for rational reforms internal to the Islamic faith. The initiatives of Kemal Atatürk, particularly the steps he took in altering the approach toward religion, had a crucial role to play in promoting secularism in Turkey. The dismantling of the Islamic caliphate led to the exclusion of religious figures from the spheres of politics and government.

Elsewhere in the Islamic world, Islamic reformists tried to align religion with contemporary demands. However, in spite of the changes and development that sparked, neither of the two predominant paths were comprehensively adopted. Therefore, during the second half of the 20th century, the state of Islam and the need for reformation were again emphasized.

New perspectives emerged with the question of the Nahda. If, during the 19th century, the word Renaissance primarily referred to an awakening of the people from stagnation and an enhancement of the nation's essence, in this context, the term maintains its original meaning but is also expanded to include a revitalization of the foundations of the society established through the Prophet Mohammad, with the intention of restoring the unbroken continuity of Muslim identity in an era that has not deviated from the ideals set forth by the Prophet.

Two actions are thus proposed for Islamic culture. The initial orientation involves the critical evaluation of economy and science to prevent the attainment of the advancements seen in the West. The second proposal is put forward to uphold the fundamental framework of society through the rehabilitation of Islamic culture.

Jabri elucidates fundamental questions on the issues discussed in the last decade in his book *Contemporary Arab Discourse* (Al-ḥiṭāb al-'Arabi Mūāsir, 1982).²³

This perspective introduces the concept of Nahda as a key factor in the development of the critique of the Arab mind. The Nahda, as a reform movement aimed at revitalizing Islamic thought and society, can be seen as a parallel to the Reformation in Christian history. Both movements sought to address perceived stagnation and corruption by returning to foundational texts and principles. However, the Nahda's limited success raises questions about the nature of true reform. From a Reformed perspective, true and lasting reform must be grounded in the faithful preaching and application of God's Word, leading to both spiritual and societal renewal.

²³Evgenia Antonovna Frolova, *Arabskaya filosofiya: Proshloe i nastoiashchee [Arabic Philosophy: The Past and the Present]* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2010), 370.

Like her fellow researchers, Frolova initially addressed the genesis of the concept of the Arab mind before delving into the specifics of it. As noted, while other scholars concentrated on its political and economic dimensions, Frolova offered insight into the scientific history that was associated with the concept and its emergence. The Nahda discourse, which took hold in the 19th century, remained an important topic. In its idea, the Nahda parallels the technological revolution in 17th-century Europe. However, the assessment of the effectiveness and success of the Nahda initiative remains challenging. As observed for the concept of the Arab mind, the project associated with Nahda was not realized.

The above mentioned researchers agree that Jabri's approach was vital for addressing the issues discussed here. In particular, Frolova refers to the concept of the Arab mind as Jabri's concept. On Frolova's view, the language factor strongly influences the intellectual crisis taking place in the Islamic world, a claim that appears to be valid. This is primarily due to the loss of influence of classical Arabic and the absence of any shared language across the Islamic world, which has resulted in substantial challenges to the creation and development of knowledge.

An epistemological rupture is the transformation of connections between epochs, in particular of knowledge, through which a subsequent generation either comes to reject or incompletely comprehends the assertions made by the earlier generations. However, this refers to more than a localized disruption between two generations. It instead forms a more comprehensive understanding that delves into the perspectives of the latter group to grasp the foundation that was laid earlier. An absence of linguistic tools could cause such a disjuncture. If these tools were available, they would enable the reinterpretation of past events, the revival of tradition, and the possibility that a unique cultural framework was constructed drawing on that heritage. These elements produce negative effects on the intellect and on the Arab mind in particular. The acquisition of one's own scientific legacy and history from external sources further complicates this issue. The proliferation of foreign schools in Arab countries also contributes to the complexity of this issue.

The concept of "epistemological rupture" is crucial for understanding the challenges facing contemporary Islamic thought. It highlights the importance of maintaining a connection to one's historical and intellectual heritage. From a Reformed perspective, this resonates with the emphasis on tradition, not as a static set of doctrines, but as a living conversation across generations.

Engaging with Jabri's contributions, Frolova describes the fundamental aspects of the epistemological crisis, indicating that the linguistic factor is a distinct element. Here, the tool of language is not confined to a specific historical period. However, the contemporary Arab mind faces challenges in comprehending language as a conduit for the transmission of a scientific and cultural legacy, in understanding the valuable books that are integral to the Islamic heritage.²⁴

Due in part to the diminished role that Arabic plays in the Islamic world, Arab intellectuals currently publish their research in languages other than Arabic, and this poses a challenge for Arab readers. One factor contributing to this shift is the growth in research centers and departments in the Western world focusing on Islamic studies. This development has provided a fresh perspective on the study of Islam, but it also arouses concern regarding its impact on the Arab mind and awareness.²⁵

Indeed, many intellectuals, including figures such as Jabri and Arkoun, publish largely in French and English. It is also common for Arab thinkers to initially compose their works in a foreign language and later have it translated into Arabic by a professional translator. This trend, rooted in the

²⁴H. Al-Idrīsī, *Muḥammad al-Jābirī wa Mashrū' Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabī* [*Al-Jabiri and His Critique of Arab Reason*], 2nd ed. (Beirut: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra, 2016), 45.

²⁵Tayyib Tizini and Muhammad Marzuqi, *Āfāq Falsafa 'Arabiyya Mu'āshira* [*Horizons of Modern Arabic Philosophy*], 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2001), 36.

intellectual foundations of the West, is to accelerate epistemological rupture.²⁶ Language is a means of preserving tradition and fostering a deeper understanding of its essence – it is not confined to any particular period but remains timeless. Proficiency in a language undoubtedly facilitates unimpeded comprehension for scientific and cultural heritage, supporting the reinterpretation of phenomena in the context of contemporary life.

The emphasis on the language factor highlights the importance of linguistic continuity for maintaining a coherent intellectual tradition. From a Reformed perspective, this can be related to the importance of the original languages of Scripture (Hebrew and Greek) for understanding God's revelation. While translations are essential, a deep engagement with the original languages can provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of the text.

In addition to these considerations, a fundamental factor contributing to epistemological separation is the widespread illiteracy found in the Arab world. As noted, Al-Jazeera's official data indicate that over 90 million illiterate people live in the Arab world. Even those who have basic literacy cannot be designated as educated, due to their limited knowledge. Further, many who have had formal education have received their instruction in a foreign language, beginning with their early schooling. They attend an English, French, or Canadian school and pursue university studies either in the West or in institutions in Arab countries that are modeled on Western ones, which is particularly prevalent in urban settings. This exposure to other languages is known to contribute to deficiencies in language proficiency.

The incorporation of Western curricula into educational programs only exacerbates the causes of the epistemological break. This phenomenon persists beyond a single generation.

7. Synthesis and Analysis

We can categorize the factors that influence the development of the critique of the Arab-Islamic mind in four groups:

First, the decisive factor for the investigations of the Arab-Islamic mind was the defeat by Israel of the Arab nations in 1967. Second, the necessity of addressing the issue of a mind arose following the departure of the colonizing powers. Third, the call for reform became more apparent as conflict with the Western world escalated. Fourth, the project of a critique of the mind emerged following the failure of the Nahda project to yield results.

These four factors, while distinct, are interconnected and point to a complex web of historical, political, and intellectual forces that have shaped the contemporary Islamic world. From a Reformed perspective, it is important to recognize that these factors are not merely the product of chance or human agency alone, but are ultimately under the sovereign control of God. He uses even historical defeats, colonial legacies, and intellectual crises to accomplish His purposes.

At the same time, the intellectual crisis observed in the Islamic world is not merely a historical or social phenomenon but stems from profound epistemological shifts that have fundamentally altered the nature of knowledge, authority, and truth. While historical factors—such as the Arab defeat in 1967, the legacy of colonialism, the ongoing confrontation with the Western world, and the unfulfilled promises of the Nahda project—provide crucial context, a deeper examination reveals underlying intellectual ruptures that explain why this crisis persists.

Our analytical synthesis indicates that the intellectual crisis in the Islamic world is rooted in several interconnected foundational shifts.

²⁶Abdulaziz Al-Wahabi, "Qiraat Fi Fikr Duktur Mohammad Abid Jabiri [Research of Ideas of Dr. Mohammad Abid Jabiri]," *Journal "Bayan"* no. 71 (2013): 94.

First, fragmentation of knowledge has generated a worldview crisis. A primary cause of the enduring intellectual crisis is the fragmentation of knowledge, largely influenced by the dominance of a secular Western epistemological paradigm. Islamic epistemology is confronted with contemporary challenges like the secularization of knowledge, disciplinary fragmentation, and an intellectual identity crisis within Muslim societies.²⁷ This stems from a Western paradigm that separates knowledge from divine values, creating a dichotomy between religious and worldly sciences.²⁷ Historically, a unified approach under *tawhīd* integrated religious and worldly sciences, but modern influences have led to a fragmentation that impedes progress.²⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas highlights this as an “Identity Crisis or the Worldview crisis,”²⁹ where the foundational Islamic worldview no longer consistently underpins intellectual and societal endeavors, leading to intellectual, cultural, and spiritual decline.³⁰ Al-Attas, along with others, posits that the root problem lies in knowledge and education being interpreted through a Western worldview, necessitating the “Islamization of knowledge” as an epistemological and methodological response to secular knowledge.³¹ This involves establishing an Islamic epistemology that critiques modern epistemology as positivistic, ideological, materialistic, reductionistic, and mechanistic.³²

Second, the crisis of authority and the decline of *ijtihād* have contributed to intellectual stagnation. The intellectual stagnation is also linked to a “crisis of authority” in the Muslim world over the past two hundred years, set in motion by the challenges of Western domination and globalization.³³ This crisis involved a breakdown in how authoritative religious knowledge was established and sustained, a system that began to falter around 1800.³³ During colonial rule, the exit of Muslim elites from madrasas led to a stagnation of Islamic scholarship, hindering the tradition of Islamic rationalism.³⁴ This disruption in the mechanisms of intellectual authority limited the capacity for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), leading to intellectual incompetence and an over-reliance on

²⁷A. M. Ismatulloh and Ahmad Roqib, “Islamic Epistemology: The Integration of Knowledge and Contemporary Challenges from an Islamic Scholarly Perspective,” *ISRG Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature* 2, no. 6 (2025): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17678277>

²⁸Mahmudin Mahmudin, Zayyadi Ahmad, and Abdul Basit, “Islamic Epistemology Paradigm: Worldview of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Syed Muhammad Naqueb Al-Attas,” *International Journal of Social Science and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2021): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v2i1.41>

²⁹Nyam Huringiin, “Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’ Critique of Secularism,” *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 1 (2022): 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v27i1.4801>

³⁰Mohammad Muslih, “Integrasi Ilmu dan Agama menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas dan Ian G. Barbour [Integration of Science and Religion according to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ian G Barbour],” *Jurnal Penelitian Medan Agama* 13, no. 1 (2022): 20–25, <https://doi.org/10.58836/jpma.v13i1.11740>.

³¹Muhammad F. Maulana, “Islamization versus Deislamization of Language: A Case of Indonesian Vocabularies,” *KnE Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2018): 473–483, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i4.1957>

³²Aminudin Ma’ruf et al., “Can Al-Faruqi’s Islamization Deal with Islamic Economics? Revisiting Al-Faruqi’s Islamization of Economics,” *Tsaqafah* 19, no. 2 (2023): 405–428, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v19i2.9337>; Husni Husni and Walter Hayden, “The Epistemology of Ta’ḍib in Islamic Civilizational Discourse: Reviving and Reconstructing Contemporary Muslim Scholars’ Views,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 181–197, <https://doi.org/10.22452/jat.voll9no1.14>

³³Francis Robinson, “Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 339–354, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186309009705>.

³⁴Masooda Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism: Logic, Metaphysics and Mysticism in Modern Muslim Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 112, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108756273>.

taqlīd (imitation), which further stifled dynamic inquiry and the ability to adapt to evolving realities.³⁵ The imposition of an external epistemology through colonial conquest contributed to this crisis, creating intellectual dissonance.³⁶

Third, a persistent dichotomy between faith and reason has emerged. The introduction of modern Western thought reignited the "age-old question of how reason and belief should coexist" in Muslim societies, creating a significant intellectual clash.³⁷ The widespread secularization of "religious sciences" in Europe led to an association of the "religious" with the "irrational."³⁸ This often led to an uncritical adoption of Western secular rationalism by some, while others defensively denied the autonomy of human reason. The rationalization of any religious tradition can be harmful, as it risks eliminating the spiritual core of that religion. This inability to coherently integrate faith and reason has prevented critical self-assessment and creativity, sometimes leading to a defensive posture that stifled innovation. The need to bridge the gap between a modernizing Europe and a perceived stagnant Islamic West also contributed to this intellectual tension.³⁹

Fourth, epistemological disconnection has been reinforced by linguistic barriers. The linguistic factor exacerbates this epistemological crisis by creating a disconnect from historical and intellectual heritage. The decline in the use of classical Arabic has resulted in a critical lack of understanding of fundamental Arabic terms essential for Islamic studies.⁴⁰ The role of classical Arabic has been reduced due to foreign languages, slang, and local dialects, with many institutions neglecting its importance.⁴¹ This marginalization of the Arabic language and its cultural role leads to a tragic separation from the instrument of Islamic legitimacy.⁴² This loss of a shared intellectual medium, combined with widespread illiteracy and the adoption of foreign languages in education, impedes the critical reinterpretation of tradition and the construction of a unique cultural framework drawing on Islamic heritage. The penetration of colonial powers into the Arab world is cited as a principal cause of this weakening.⁴¹

A society in crisis prompts an examination of its intellectual trends. However, when the question involves the intellect itself, introspection into the mind becomes necessary. Scholars studying the latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century increasingly seek to identify the

³⁵Louay M. Safi, "The Critical Path," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 17, no. 2 (2000): 5–10, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v17i2.2059>.

³⁶Farhan Mujahid Chak, "Critiquing the Modern Western Theory of Knowledge and Insights into a Qur'anic Epistemology," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 29, no. 4 (2012): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v29i4.312>

³⁷Zia Ul Haq, "Modern Western Thought and Islamic Reformism: Intellectual Challenges, Prior Discourse, and Future Prospects," *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): 308, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030308>

³⁸Stefan Wild and Issa J. Boullata, "Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought," *Die Welt des Islams* 31, no. 2 (1991): 263–264, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1570587>

³⁹Nabil Matar, "Confronting Decline in Early Modern Arabic Thought," *Journal of Early Modern History* 9, no. 1–2 (2005): 51–78, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570065054300266>

⁴⁰Heni Verawati and Uswatun Hasanah, "The Modern Reform of Arabic Learning Paradigm and Its Contribution toward the Development of Islamic Studies," *Al-Lisan* 6, no. 1 (2021): 71–84, <https://doi.org/10.30603/al.v6i1.1866>.

⁴¹Mohamed A. Ali, "Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing: The Arabic Corpora in Online Translation Software," *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences* 3, no. 9 (2016): 59–66, <https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2016.09.010>

⁴²Ghazi I. Alfataftah and Ahmad G. Jarrar, "Developing Languages to Face Challenges of Globalization and Clash of Civilizations: Arabic Language as an Example," *Journal of Education and Learning* 7, no. 4 (2018): 247–253, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n4p247>.

origins and persistence of the crisis in Islamic thought through the lenses of the Arab mind and the Muslim mind. This inquiry investigates how and why the intellectual crisis emerged and what contributes to its reproduction in contemporary contexts, while also explaining the continual evolution of the intellectual landscape. Within this framework, the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind—extensively examined in Islamic philosophy—constitutes a significant and evolving field of inquiry drawing on multiple perspectives.⁴³

Several scholars, including Frolova, as noted earlier, emphasize the linguistic factor as a major cause of the disconnection between the Islamic world and its historical legacy, thereby contributing to the intellectual crisis. Hasan Shafai strongly supports this position. Addressing the language problem, Shafai asks: “Why do individuals proficient in other languages find it challenging to learn Arabic?!” This observation applies not only to the intellectual elite but also to the broader population, although he places particular responsibility on the elite for neglecting “aged books.”⁴⁴

Shafai proposes bridging the gap with *turāth* (Islamic heritage) through sustained efforts comparable to those invested in learning foreign languages, with a particular emphasis on mastering classical Arabic. Indeed, insufficient proficiency in classical Arabic remains a pressing challenge for both the Arab world and the wider Islamic world.

However, more than linguistic reform is required to modernize Islamic thought. While language is indispensable, genuine and lasting reform, from a Reformed perspective, necessitates a return to the authoritative source of truth—God’s Word. A renewed Islamic intellectual tradition must therefore be grounded in a sound understanding and application of the Qur’an, interpreted according to its internal logic and historical context. Another important approach within the framework of the Arab-Islamic mind can be found in the writings of the Egyptian scholar Mohammad Imara.

In *Halil Islamu huwa al-Hall?* (*Is Islam the Solution?*), Imara addresses several issues closely related to this discussion, engaging with the thought of Taha Hussein and situating his analysis within the broader discourse on the Eastern mind.⁴⁵

In the first section of his well-known work *Al-Hayat al-Aqliya (Intellectual Life)*, Imara introduces and elaborates on the concept of the *Mu’min* (believing) mind. According to this perspective, the Islamic world possesses abundant material, intellectual, and spiritual resources, including natural wealth, arable land, economic assets, and scholarly expertise. For Imara, the central problem is not scarcity but the absence of a coherent and efficient system capable of mobilizing these resources. Developing such a system requires sustained scholarly effort and intellectual rigor. From a Reformed perspective, the most effective system for societal flourishing is one grounded in the principles of God’s Word, which provides comprehensive guidance for economic, political, and social life and affirms God’s sovereignty over all creation. Within this vision, the concept of the Arab-Islamic mind can serve as a foundation for intellectual exchange and reform, provided that such a system is developed in accordance with God’s will rather than solely on human reason or pragmatic considerations.

8. Conclusion

The examination of its nature, causes, and potential solutions, reveals a multifaceted problem. Scholars who focus on this crisis consistently seek to identify factors that contribute to its persistence and possible avenues for improvement. Jabri and Frolova’s group particularly emphasize the

⁴³Abdulla Musa, “Ishkaliya Aqlaniya Fi Fikr Arabi Muasir [Problem of Rationalism in Modern Arabic Thought],” *Alzahir: Journal “Insaniyat”* no. 14-15 (2001): 3-4.

⁴⁴H. El-Shafai, *Essay on the Renewal of Religious Discourse* (Cairo: Dār Quds, 2016), 59.

⁴⁵Muhammad ‘Imāra, *Hal al-Islām huwa al-Ḥall? Limādhā wa Kayfa? [Is Islam the Solution? Why and How?]* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1995), 23–24.

language factor. This perspective appears justifiable, as nearly one-third of the Arab world is illiterate, and the use of local dialects instead of the shared classical Arabic exacerbates the language problem. The language diversity resulting from the various dialects further complicates this issue. The prevalence of foreign schools and educational institutions in the Islamic world exacerbates the situation by diminishing the role of Arabic and its practical uses. The divergence from a shared written language before the colonial period and the progress to using different written standards entirely during colonization introduced further obstacles to unity in the Islamic world.

The loss of Arabic from daily usage has presented a significant challenge to the understanding of literary works written in modern Arabic.⁴⁶ Moreover, losing the *turāth*, the thousand-year heritage of the Islamic world, would be an even greater tragedy. Once deprived of this ancient legacy, the Arab world would inevitably develop into a nation that is disconnected from its historical roots, like a tree that has been severed from the earth, without explicit means of referring to its Islamic foundations. Thus, concerted efforts by the Islamic world to bridge this gap could significantly alleviate these difficulties and aid in overcoming the intellectual crisis. According to M. Imara, the establishment of a common system is essential for restoring the Islamic world. The crisis in the Islamic world is not rooted in any material or spiritual factor but rather in the absence of a single system that can facilitate the optimal use of existing resources.⁴⁷

The primary contribution of this study lies in its analytical synthesis of the "critique of the Arab-Islamic mind," moving beyond a mere description of its historical manifestations to explore its deep epistemological roots. By systematically categorizing the historical-intellectual factors—the 1967 defeat, post-colonial challenges, escalating confrontation with the West, and the Nahda's unfulfilled promises—this paper uniquely connects them to underlying epistemological ruptures: the fragmentation of knowledge, the crisis of authority and *ijtihād*, the dichotomy of faith and reason, and the epistemological disconnect caused by linguistic barriers. Furthermore, the novel application of a Reformed theological perspective as a primary normative lens offers a distinct critical evaluation, highlighting spiritual dimensions and underscoring the need for a God-centered worldview in addressing the intellectual crisis within the Islamic world.

From a Reformed theological perspective, the "proper system" envisioned by Imara is understood to be one that is ultimately rooted in God's revealed truth, which guides all areas of life, including intellectual, social, and political spheres. Just as the Protestant Reformers sought to reform Christian thought and practice by returning to the authority of Scripture, a genuine and lasting revitalization of Islamic thought, when viewed through a Reformed lens, would similarly require a critical re-engagement with its foundational texts and principles in light of divine revelation. Critiques of the Arab-Islamic mind can thus be seen as a pathway to exploring and understanding the necessary components of such a system. The challenges and their solutions are intricately embedded in this conceptual framework. If scholars and intellectuals collectively agree on the contemporary application of this system, its implementation may become more feasible. The frequent discussion of this topic among scholars and researchers in the Islamic world, where this concept forms as a platform for addressing issues and identifying solutions, has led to significant optimism in the Islamic world.

This article, adopting a Reformed critical lens, suggests that the aim to harmonize Islamic principles and values with contemporary knowledge requires a deep examination of the underlying epistemological frameworks. While the objective to uplift the *Ummah* through education and science to overcome poverty and foster unity is commendable, a Reformed perspective would emphasize that

⁴⁶Fuad Zakariya, *Khiṭāb ilā al-'Aql al-'Arabī [Appeal to Arabic Reason]* (Cairo: Dār al-Muḥarrir al-Adabī, 1998), 19.

⁴⁷Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-'Aql al-'Arabī [The Formation of Arab Reason]* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'Arabiyya, 1983), 312.

true and lasting transformation is ultimately rooted in a God-centered worldview that recognizes His sovereignty over all creation. It is through such an understanding, grounded in revealed truth, that genuine intellectual and societal flourishing can be achieved.

Authors' Contribution

Yesdaulet Yergeldi: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, resources, software. **Kudaiberdi Bagasharov:** conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. **Murat Smagulov:** conceptualization, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

This research was funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. AP19575240).

Generative AI Disclosure Statement

The authors did not use any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research.

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