

New Approach in Religious Studies with Special Reference to Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri

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Abstract

Beginning from the nineteenth century, Arab-Muslim intelligentsias marched to reform their societies. Many things since then have been carried out. They put forward various proposals, advanced numerous ideas and concepts and established several institutions. Nevertheless, their condition has yet improved. In some context, it even deteriorates. Triggered by this situation, a number of Arab and Muslim scholars then embark on a new reform project. But at this time, their reform attempt is materialized in the form of intellectual and cultural project. For they believe that the basic problem and crisis beset their society lies in their understanding of *turâts*. Thus, unless this understanding is corrected, no genuine reform would be able to be materialized. Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, a Moroccan scholar, is one of the many Arab scholars who have taken this course. For this purpose, he constructed his own project which he names *Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi*. This article specifically attempts to shed light on conceptual apparatus and methods that he uses which this study finds to have originated from different schools of thought of western philosophy and social sciences, important of which is Marxism and postmodernism.

Keywords: *Turâts*, Epistemology, Conceptual Apparatus, Methodology, Critique

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Abstrak

Sejak abad ke 19, kaum intelektual Arab Muslim telah mencoba untuk memperbaharui kondisi masyarakat mereka. Untuk tujuan tersebut, banyak yang telah mereka lakukan. Mereka mengajukan beberapa gagasan dan usulan; mereka juga membangun lembaga-lembaga tertentu untuk merealisasikan ide mereka. Namun pembaharuan tersebut sepertinya belum membawa perubahan signifikan. Realitas malah menunjukkan sebaliknya. Kondisi masyarakat Arab-Muslim bertambah memilukan. Didorong oleh kondisi inilah, makanya beberapa kaum intelektual Arab-Muslim kembali mencoba menggagas proyek pembaharuan mereka. Namun kali ini dalam bentuk proyek intelektual, karena mereka percaya bahwa akar krisis ini terletak pada persoalan cara pandang orang Arab terhadap *turâts* mereka. Selama pemahaman mereka terhadap *turâts* ini tidak diperbaharui, maka pembaharuan akan sulit bisa terealisasikan. Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, pemikir asal Maroko, adalah di antara cendekiawan Arab Muslim yang berusaha menempuh jalan ini. Untuk tujuan ini, ia telah membangun proyek pemikirannya yang diberinya nama *Kritik Nalar Arab*. Artikel ini mencoba melihat perangkat konsep serta metode yang digunakannya dalam kajian, yang dalam kajian ini ditemukan bahwa al-Jabiri banyak menderivasi konsep dan metodenya dari mazhab pemikiran yang ada pada filsafat Barat, terutama Marxisme dan Postmodernisme.

Kata Kunci: *Turâts*, Epistemologi, Peralatan Konseptual, Metodologi, Kritik

Introduction

Of the last fifty years, *turâts* has become one of the most heated topics intensely debated in contemporary Arab Islamic thought. It assumes a centre stage in the works of Arab and Muslim intellectuals of various ideological and intellectual leanings. It becomes a principal concern for committed Muslims as well as for liberal and secular Arab thinkers. For the former, *turâts* is seen a source of Arab-Muslim strength from which present Arab Muslim societies can find solution to their problems. The latter, however, sees it is this *turâts* that has become a source of problem that has impeded the Arab Muslim mind, hampered its material progress and thus precluded its long-standing attempt at revival and renaissance. Their involvement in *turâts* therefore aims at delegitimizing the claims of

the former. They claim that Islamist reading of *turâts* is ideological and thus problematic. What we need is that, they claim, objective and scientific reading of *turâts* which can be done by using various conceptual and methodological apparatus available in different schools of contemporary western philosophy and social sciences. It is interestingly to note the works of these latter scholars in their later development have also become another ideological project, which is basically done to find and found justification to their alien ideas. They seemingly want to proclaim that what they preach are actually not purely western or alien in Islamic thought, but firmly grounded in its tradition.¹

Among Arab scholars who have dealt intensively with the subject, Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri (d. 2010) assumes a leading position, He has written a number of works on the subject, important of which is of course his series of which consists of *Takwîn al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (Formation of Arab Reason), *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (Structure of Arab Reason), *al-'Aql al-'Arabi al-Siyâsi* (Arab Political Reason), and *al-'Aql al-'Arabi al-Akhlâqi* (Ethical Arab Reason). Given his considerable contribution in this field, we therefore select him to be subject of the study in this article. Jabari narrates that his interest in *turâts* was initially stuck by the work of French orientalist Yves Lacoste about Ibnu Khaldun. This book, he said, has a big claim about Ibnu Khaldun where he is said as a leading Marxist figure or at least, the one who defended the thesis of historical materialism. But this sort of reading also widely spreads among Arab scholars. In this respect, he particularly refers to 'Ali Abd al-Wahid, the editor of *Muqaddimah*, who pronounced Ibnu Khaldun as a father of social and economic sciences. In other writings, this medieval Muslim scholar is also described a pioneer of modern sociology similar to August Comte. Triggered by this fact, he later decided to choose Ibnu Khaldun as a topic of his doctorate dissertation. He wanted to make a correction to this model of reading, which according to him is ideological in nature. Jabari wants to present Ibnu Khaldun as he is, free from any referential authorities. This does not mean that he declines to read or benefit from other sources available on the subject. That is not his intention. He simply wants to deal with the thought of this prominent intellectual figure as he has presented himself

¹ Louay M. Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity: The Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 173.

through his works. Jabiri accentuates that this is the very method that he applies in writing *Critique of Arab Reason*.² What concerns most this article, however, is not the ideas he propogates. It is largely occupied with the conceptual apparatus he uses in his study.

The Place of Jabiri in Contemporary of Arab-Islamic Thought

Jabiri is no doubt one of interesting figure to date. It is not easy to classify his school of thought. For, he has been in constant critical engagement with all strands of thought, classical as well as modern and contemporary. Almost none escapes from his criticism. He severely criticizes al-Syafi'i, al-Ash'ari, Ibnu Sina, al-Ghazali, al-Razi, and many others. He holds these giant intellectual figures in Islamic history responsible for the stagnation of Arab-Islamic thought. In *al-Khiṭāb al-'Arabi al-Mu'âṣir*, he mercilessly attacks almost all major modern and contemporary Arab thinkers ranging from Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Ridha, to 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, Salamah Musa, Anwar 'Abd al-Malik, 'Abd Rahman Badawi, Taha Husayn, Zaki Najib Mahmud, Michel 'Aflaq, 'Abd Allah al-Da'im, and Sayyid Qutb, denouncing them all as *salafi* and incapable of rationally thinking of reality. What surprises more is that he even criticizes such a doyen of Arab Marxist thinkers as 'Abdullah 'Arwi with whom he shares same ideological conviction. Once he was engaged in a serious debate with Hasan Hanafi, a widely known founder of the Islamic Left (*al-Yasar al-Islâmi*).³ For this stance, Fawzi Sha'bi has described this Moroccan thinker as egoistic (*fardaniyyah*).⁴ Al-Misbahi was concerned that such an attitude may lead him to believe that he is the only one to have a comprehensive and absolute view (*qawl syâmil al-muṭlaq*).⁵ This critical stance is supposed not surprising at all since critique is the crux of his thought dominating his publications and interviews. One writer describes him as, "a real

² Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, *al-Turâts wa al-Ḥadâtsah: Dirâsât wa Munâqasyât*, (Beirut : al-Markaz al-Tsaqâfi al-'Arabi, 1991), 307-308.

³ Their discussion was later published in a book called *Ḥiwâr al-Maghrîb wa al-Maghrîb*

⁴ 'Imad Fawzi Sya'bi, "al-Khiṭāb al-'Arabi al-Mu'âṣir li al-Kâtib Muḥammad 'Âbid al-Jâbiri," *Dirâsât 'Arabiyyah*, No. 1&2, Nov-Dec 1983, 147.

⁵ Muhammad al-Misbahi, "Al-Jâbiri wa al-Ḥilm al-Muzdawaj bi al-'Aqlâniyyah," in Kamal 'Abd al-Latif (ed.), *al-Turâts wa al-Nahḍah: Qirâ'ât fi A'mâl Muḥammad 'Âbid al-Jâbirî*, (Beirut: Markaz Dirâsât al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2004), 190.

living critic who hates to build a new building within existing edifices.”⁶ In the eyes of Filal Ansari, he is “neither as a theologian (an *‘alîm*) nor a liberal Muslim whose aim would be to offer critical or alternative views to the prevailing orthodoxy, nor even a modern specialist of religion.” Jabiri attempts to portray himself as transcending all existing schools, of which we are all still in doubt.

Jabiri’s Critique of Arab Reason is part of broader ambitious project recently inaugurated by many contemporary Arab thinkers as an attempt at Arab cultural revival and renewal. This is undoubtedly a challenging work since it plans to undertake a comprehensive overview of one thousand and four hundred years Arab Islamic intellectual history. However, with erudition and determination of its author, he finally managed to complete it. This is indeed one of the greatest achievements which Jabiri achieved throughout his intellectual career and an immense contribution to the development of present Arab Islamic thought. This project has been quite controversial and said to have “shaken contemporary Arab thought on all of its theoretical levels and diverse intellectual trends.”⁷ It is deemed as the latest and greatest assault in newly emerging Arab critical movement which aims at affirming rationality and removing irrationality from Arab life.

Significant of Jabiri’s Intellectual Project

Many may disagree with a number of proposition, assumptions, and interpretations Jabiri espouses throughout this work, but one hardly denies a kind of creativity and innovativeness in his dealing with the subject. He has produced some fresh and novel ideas which sometimes not only challenge a mainstream view held in classical Arab Islamic scholarship but also what is commonly believed true in modern Islamic thought and orientalist intellectual tradition. That is therefore no wonder why his work has sparked fierce debate and raised an in-depth serious question, making its author a subject of permanent criticism. A number of contemporary Arab scholars and thinkers have come to respond to various ideas, concepts, claims as well as allegations he made in his works.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷ Mahmud Rawa’, *Musykilah al-Naṣṣ wa al-‘Aql fi al-Falsafah al-Islâmiyyah*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2006), 233-234.

It is, however, worth mentioning that most criticism on him is directed either on concepts and methodologies he devised or on historical facts which he brought forward or on interpretation that he made upon certain historical facts. Concerning his interpretation, Nelly Lahoud has this to say: "Jabiri certainly gets the major names and chronology of Islamic history right but the same cannot be said about every aspect of his analysis of the events."⁸ Rarely is heard criticism on him based on religious consideration except on his latest works on history of Qur'an. He is never scandalized or blasphemed like some of his contemporaries: Fazlur Rahman of Pakistan, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd of Egypt, Mahmud Muhammad Taha of Sudan, and Muhammad Syahrur of Syria.

There are a number of possible reasons that account for this. First, it could be due to the nature of the subject he deals which belongs not to the areas considered sacred or sensitive in Islam. His entry point to present Arab discourse is Arab Islamic tradition (*turâts*) in general, and philosophy, a subject which interests not so many 'ulama. He has no direct intervention in such subjects as the holy Qur'an, theology, or Islamic law, except in passing remark.⁹ Only in the last three years does he directly engage in discussing the holy Qur'an. It is perhaps for this reason that many religious scholars do not pay serious attention to his writings. His works are read mostly by students of philosophy and by people of the same academic background with him, some of whom are his colleagues and students in the university where he is teachings. Nonetheless, one cannot deny the implication of his study in the realm of religious thought, because the very tradition which he discusses is the one that emanates and revolves around the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, although his focus is *turâts*, the implication that it has on the field of Islamic studies is inevitable.

Second, the reason likely goes to the socio-political climate of Morocco which to some extent enjoys a certain degree of freedom where different sorts of ideas could freely flow and people feel safe to express whatever ideas they have.

⁸ Nelly Lahoud, *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 45.

⁹ His interest in the Qur'an surfaces only recently when he published his *Madkhal ilâ al-Qur'ân* (2006), where he made some controversial claim about certain aspects of the history of the Qur'an.

Despite many criticisms addressed to him, most Arab intellectuals, including his critics, hold him in a high accolade and consider his work *Critique of Arab Reason* as one of the best in the last three decades. According to Hasan Hanafi, this project is one of the most widely discussed topics in Egypt and that it has exerted considerable influence on a good number of Egyptian young generations. Nearly no young man in the country turns to be an intellectual, Hanafi exaggeratedly assess, except that he already read and dialogued with *Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi*.¹⁰ "Most Arab intellectuals must have read *Takwîn al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, *al-Turâts wa al-Hadâtsah*, and *al-Khiṭâb al-'Arabi al-Mu'âṣir* and in most cases have been positively influenced by them," states another writer.¹¹ A leading Egyptian Marxist thinker, Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, when commenting the first two volumes of this project, says that they really constitute the most important and illuminating works ever produced in the subject of critique of reason, either looked from scope, comprehensiveness, profundity and deepness of their analysis of different linguistic, legal, theological, and philosophical aspects of Arab tradition, or from the brilliant conclusions he reached concerning this tradition.¹² His exposition of three epistemic systems of Islamic knowledge (*bayâni*, *irfâni*, and *burhâni*) is said to have furnished student with clear concept about what *turâts* is. He is now equipped with a chart to see where people are going about their relation to *turâts*.¹³

The work recently is enjoying a distinctive place "in the field of the thinking of the problem of tradition in contemporary Arab thought,"¹⁴ holding "a strong presence in Maghribi as well as Arab cultural sphere,"¹⁵ and becoming one of the "classic" in contemporary Arab thought.¹⁶ It has gone for several printings and been translated

¹⁰ Hasan Hanafi, "Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi fi Mir'ah 'al-Turâth wa al-Tajdîd'," in Kamal 'Abd al-Latif (ed.), *al-Turâts wa al-Nahḍah...*, 228.

¹¹ Jamal Mafrâh, "Naqd al-Jâbiri," in Kamal 'Abd al-Latif (ed.), 160.

¹² Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, "Mulâhazât Manhajîyyah Tamhîdiyyah Hal Naqd al-Jâbiri li al-'Aql al-'Arabi," *al-Wahḍah*, 51 (Desember 1988), 132.

¹³ al-Jabiri, *al-Turâts wa al-Hadâtsah*, 323.

¹⁴ Muhammad al-Misbahi, "al-Jâbiri wa al-Ḥilm al-Muzdawaj bi al-'Aqlâniyyah," in Kamal 'Abd al-Latif (ed.), *al-Turâts wa al-Nahḍah...*, 180.

¹⁵ Kamal 'Abd al-Latif, *Naqd al-'Aql am Naqd al-Tawâfuq?*, (Syiria : Dâr al-Ḥiwâr li al-Nasyr wa al-Tawzî', 2002), 7.

¹⁶ Abdou Filali-Ansari, "Can Modern Rationality Shape a New Religiosity: Mohamed Abed Jabri and the Paradox of Islam and Modernity," in John Cooper, Ronald L. Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud (eds.), *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectual Respond*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, T.Th), 156.

along with his other works into several languages like France, English, Turkish, and Indonesia.¹⁷ There is no wonder then if Jabir Anshari includes it in the list of ten influential literatures in the last twenty five years in the Arab world.

Jabiri's Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approach

What makes Jabiri's *oeuvre* intriguing is actually not so much the subject he deals. The fascination stems from the conceptual apparatus he uses, which is said to be rich and diverse, anchored in different intellectual sources and philosophical frameworks. In this regard, Jabiri is said to have made a real "epistemological revolution" (*al-tsawrah al-ma'rifiyyah*) in the study of Arab Islamic heritage.¹⁸ More specifically, he is credited for epistemological method that he uses, which is, according to Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, unprecedented that enriches method of research in contemporary Arab thought.¹⁹ A prominent Lebanese critic, 'Ali Harb, has a similar impression: "when Jabiri devised an epistemological method in critiquing Arab reason, he actually constructed a new mode of research in Arab intellectual arena."²⁰ It is to this same method as well his very staunch critic, George Tarabishi, appends the greatness of Jabiri. It is not due to its sociological or psychological nature, says Tarabishi, but rather due to his strong theoretical foundation which he establishes to this reason which enables him to elevate it from level of word (*al-lafz*) and meaning (*ma'nâ*) to that of concept. In this regard, he preceded many of the scholars who have written on the same subject.²¹ Although this methodological aspect has come to be his credit, it is this very same aspect that has become a source of problem in his study.

Throughout out his study, Jabiri has devised various concepts and theories which he borrowed from diverse western philosophical systems. Perhaps he is among Arab authors who pioneers who has

¹⁷ *Formasi Nalar Arab*, Trans. Imam Khorri, (Yogyakarta: IRCISod, 2003), being a translation of *Takwin al-'Aql al-'Arabi; Post Tradisionalisme Islam*, Trans. Ahmad Baso (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000).

¹⁸ Abd al-Ilah Balqaziz, "Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri," in Kamal 'Abd al-Latif (ed.), *al-Turâts wa al-Nahdah...*, 70.

¹⁹ Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, "Mulâhazât Manhajiyah Tamhîdiyyah Ḥawl Naqd al-Jâbiri li al-'Aql al-'Arabi." *al-Wahdah* (Dec 1988), no 51, 132.

²⁰ 'Ali Harb, *Naqd al-Naṣṣ*, (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Tsaqâfi al-'Arabi, 1993), 117.

²¹ George Tarabishi, *Nazariyyah al-'Aql, Naqd Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi (1)*, (Beirut and London: Dâr al-Saqi, 1999), 12.

devised western conceptual apparatus in reading Islamic intellectual history.

Right from the beginning of his *Takwîn*, Jabiri has shown his indebtedness to numerous thinkers. In his attempt to explain what reason is, he has made use of the concepts advanced by numerous western thinkers of different disciplines. He resorts to a Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian neurologist, and Lalande (1867 – 1963), a French Philosopher. In defining the meaning of Reason, he says that he has borrowed the idea from Lalande. But, George Tarabishi objects if Jabiri's definition stems from Lalande. According to him, Jabiri's quotation of Lalande's view is misleading and does not properly reflect what Lalande means in his original work. And that happens primarily because Jabiri does not make direct accesses to Lalande's original book. He only uses secondary source.

Some of Jabiri's conceptual apparatus can also be traced to Marxism, a school which he says, "no contemporary thought can breathe without it." This Marxist impact is clearly seen especially in his third trilogy, *al-'Aql al-Siyasi al-'Arabi* where he resorts much to works of Althusser and Gramsci. From Gramsci, he borrows the the notion of *al-istiqlâl al-târîkhi al-tamm* (complete historical independence). His acquaintance with this school of thought goes back to 1950s when he was still a university student. During this time, he already read the works of Karl Marx, Angles, Lenin, and their critics. He claims that it is this philosophy that had made a great influence upon his thought which he later used to criticizing modern and contemporary Arab discourse.

Looking as a whole, Jabiri's philosophical thinking is very much influenced and informed by contemporary French school of epistemology.²² He largely draws on a rich archive of postcolonial analysis, making an eclectic use of Bachelard, Foucault and Derrida.²³ One of the concepts which he borrows from Bachelard is that of epistemological rupture. Bachelard used the concept in two contexts, one is to characterize the way scientific knowledge splits off from and even contradicts common-sense experiences and beliefs. In this regards, he says "scientific progress always reveals a break (rupture), constant breaks, between ordinary (common) knowledge and

²² al-Jabiri, *al-Turâts wa al-Ĥadâtsah*, 288.

²³ al-Jabiri, *al-Khiṭâb al-'Arabi al-Mu'âšir*, 14.

scientific knowledge.”²⁴ Second, he devises the term to refute the prevailing view which sees science progresses in continuous and linear manner, where the latter follows the former. To him, scientific progress is characterized by rupture and discontinuity where new theory ruptures from previous theories; but such rupture takes place within the same specific field of science.

This idea soon finds significant hearing in some philosophical circles in the West, especially in France. It begins to be applied in various disciplines. Canguilhem, a historian of physiological science and himself is Bachelard’s student, deploys it to study history of ideas. It later echoes in the writings of celebrated French poststructuralist, Michel Foucault, from whom Jabiri also derives many of his concepts. In his *The Archeology of Knowledge*, the author of this book expresses his indebtedness to both Bachelard and Canguilhem. He writes:

Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogenous manifestations of a single mind or a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruption. Interruptions whose status and nature vary considerably. These are the epistemological acts and thresholds described by Bachelard.²⁵

He continues to record:

There are the displacement and transformations of concepts: the analyses of G. Canguilhem may serve as a model; they show that the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient, but that of its various fields of constitution and validity; that of its various rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured.

Louis Althusser applies it to read the development of Karl Marx’s thought. He is of view that the Old Karl Marx is not a continuation of Young Karl Marx. It is said that Thomas Kuhn’s theory

²⁴ Quoted from Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archeology of Scientific Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (London: Routledge, 1991), 4.

of paradigm shift is also influenced by Bachelard's concept of epistemological rupture.

It should be acknowledged that it is Jabiri perhaps the first Arab thinker who devises this concept in reading and interpreting Arab Islamic philosophy in particular and Islamic thought in general. He began to deploy it in a conference on Ibn Rushd held in April 1978. He later elaborated it in the introduction of his book *Naġnu wa al-Turâts* and *Takwîn al-'Aql al-'Arabi*. When he firstly appealed to the concept, it raged fierce debate and discussion among intellectuals. Waqidi records, "when Jabiri presented his proposal by using the notion of "rupture," the participants were overwhelmed by a sense of ambivalence. On one hand, there is no doubt that this proposal is novel in that it could help us understand the history of Islamic philosophy. However, on the other hand, the usage of the term does not truly reflect the philosophy of Ibnu Rusyd in an acceptable manner. That is because philosophy, in the eyes of some of them, does not take a rupture from the general problem of Arab Islamic philosophy."²⁶ No less than Hasan Hanafi, a leading contemporary Egyptian philosopher, is also dragged into this polemic. He views this idea as part of imperialist heritage which divides the Arab Muslim world into the West as scientific and rational in nature, and East, Sufistic, illuminative, and religious in character.²⁷ The severest critique that Jabiri received from the usage of this term is that he is accused as "Maghribi chauvinist, fanatic to Maghrib." He strongly denies it and says "this (fanaticism) has no foundation at all, at least in my thought, and my emotion."²⁸ Elsewhere he writes, "On what is said about my fanaticism to *Maghrîb*, all have to know that I believe that Maghrib is East (*Masyrîq*) and East is *Maghrîb*, both are inseparable. We are brothers, sons of one father, but from different mothers. We are twins, but brother."²⁹ In spite of such denial, it is indeed difficult to dismiss such an accusation as his writings affirm otherwise as can be seen throughout his discussion.

²⁶ Muhammad Waqidi, *Hîwâr Falsafi: Qirâ'ah Naqdiyyah fi al-Falsafah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'âşirah*, (T.K: al-Dâr al-Bayda, 1985), 135.

²⁷ Hasan Hanafi and Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Hîwâr al-Masyrîq wa al-Maghrîb*, (Beirut: al-Mua'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirâsât wa al-Nasyr, 1990), 7. A critique of this dialogue see: Mahmud Isma'il, *Fî Naqd Hîwâr al-Masyrîq wa al-Maghrîb bayn Ḥanaḥî wa al-Jâbiri*, (al-Qâhirah: Ru'yah li al-Nasyr wa al-Tawzî', 2005).

²⁸ Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Naġnu wa al-Turâts*, (al-Maghrîb: al-Markaz al-Tsaqâfi al-'Arabi, 1985), 261.

²⁹ Hasan Hanafi and Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Hîwâr al-Masyrîq wa al-Maghrîb*, 145.

Jabiri criticizes a common view that looks into the development of philosophy in the Muslim world as a continuation process. He refuses to consider philosophy of Ibnu Bajah, Ibnu Tufayl, and Ibnu Rusyd as extension of the philosophy of al-Kindi, Farabi, and Ibnu Sina, insisting such a view needs to be revisited. He underlies that philosophy in the East develops and breathes within a milieu dominated by theology and its fundamental problem of conciliation between reason and revelation. In such a situation, philosophy is simply assigned to defend doctrinal beliefs with rational arguments.³⁰ The socio-political and cultural setting in the West, however, took a different turn. Here theology is not dominant. Therefore, there is no anxiety as felt in the east of having to reconcile reason and revelation, and religion and philosophy. "Free from "eastern format" of Neo Platonist has emancipated the same discourse from employing science to merge religion into philosophy and vice versa, something which eastern school of philosophy was engaged in."³¹ Andalusian philosophy, claims Jabiri, is grounded on science, mathematics, and logic and this is that has molded it scientific and "secular" philosophy.³² It is this very fact, Jabiri claims, that has forced him as a historian to delink Ibnu Rusyd with Ibnu Sina. Ibnu Sina may represent the peak of philosophy in the East, but Ibnu Rusyd is neither a completion nor a continuation of him, but rather a revolution against him. Ibnu Sina is a well known Gnostic and Ibnu Rusyd revolted against it.³³ There are then two spirits of thought in Arab Islamic heritage: one is Avicennian and other Averroist. Or put it more generally, there are two schools of thought, one eastern and another western, both are epistemologically in rupture.³⁴

This rupture is first observed by Ibnu Bajah in the field of philosophy. It is then continued by Ibnu Tufayl, and generalized by Jabiri to all Andalusian and Maghribi thinkers. Ibnu Hazm is seen to have broken from eastern Islamic intellectual tradition for his strong opposition to Shi'ite and Sufi Gnosticism as well as Ash'arite doctrine that allows the occurrence of super natural (*khawâriq*) and divine grace (*karâmât*). He vehemently objected to blind imitation (*taqlîd*)

³⁰ al-Jabiri, *Naḥnu wa al-Turâts*, 173.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

³² *Ibid.*, 174.

³³ al-Jabiri, *al-Turâts wa al-Ḥadâtsah*, 262.

³⁴ al-Jabiri, *Naḥnu wa al-Turâts*, 328.

and proclaimed that, “no one is allowed to imitate someone else, living or dead, but each must perform an independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to the best of his ability.” A layman is not allowed to follow blindly a mufti, even companions of the prophets, or the founders of legal schools of thought as “all of them would free themselves of him, in the world and hereafter.” For him, knowledge can be only accessed either through reason (*al-‘aql*) or sense (*al-ḥiss*).³⁵ Ibnu Hazm is well reputed for his strong position against a Syafi‘i and jurists’ typical analogy as they compare between two things of different kind (*naw’*). To him *qiyās* is only valid on two things of the same kind.³⁶ Unlike Syafi‘i, he seeks to establish *bayān* on logic principle which rests upon logical rules and axioms like conclusion necessarily follows from two premises, moving from universal to particular, etc. He strongly opposed to the notion of rationization (*ta’līl*) upon which juristic analogy is based.³⁷

Ibnu Hazm’s thought was carried forward by Ibnu Rusyd and later accomplished by Syatibi. According to Jabiri, Syatibi has created an epistemological transformation (*naqlah ibistimûlûjiyyah*) in Arab expository juristic system. His important contribution lies in his attempt to develop three important methodological steps: deduction (*istintâj*), induction (*istiqrâ’*), and objectives of Syariah (*maqâṣid syarî’ah*). Jabiri claims this famous has been derived by Syatibi from Ibnu Rusyd: “Syatibi took this idea from Ibnu Rusyd, who had employed it in the area of doctrine, then transferred it to the realm of *uṣûl*, that is, the fundamentals of jurisprudence.” Instead of relying on text, Syatibi urged to construct Uṣûl Fiqh on principle of objectives of Syariah. By so doing, Shatibi, claims Jabiri, has established an epistemological rupture with Syafi‘i.³⁸

His interpretation of history of Islamic philosophy described is not without criticism. To say that philosophical tradition in the Andalusia is not a continuation of philosophy of the East is hardly to prove. His interpretation of Islamic legal history is also another point which raised problem. In his work *Naẓariyyah al-Maqâṣid ‘Ind al-Syâṭibi*, Ahmad Raysini challenges Jabiri’s claim. In his research, he finds that Ghazali is among the scholars which Syatibi mentions by

³⁵ al-Jabiri, *Takwîn*, 308-309.

³⁶ Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri, *Bunyah al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi, Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (2), (Beirut: Markaz Dirâsât al-Wahdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1992), 518.

³⁷ al-Jabiri, *Takwîn*, 305.

³⁸ al-Jabiri, *Bunyah*, 540.

name several times, at least about forty times. This is in addition to reference that Shatibi makes to this scholar by using personal pronoun. It is followed by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi with Syatibi much debated, then Juwayni, al-Qarafi, and Ibnu 'Abd al-Salam.³⁹ If that is the case, how it is possible for Jabiri then to claim that Syatibi has made an epistemological break with his predecessors in the East.

Apart from Bachelard, Jabiri has also made use of the concept advanced by Michel Foucault. This can be very clearly seen from his definition of Arab reason. Jabiri asserts that he understands reason in the context of his study as an system of knowledge (*al-nizâm al-ma'rifi*) similar to Foucault's episteme, that is,

the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems... the episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.⁴⁰

Jabiri makes modification to the concept and defines it (*al-nizâm al-ma'rifi*) as "a set of concepts, principles, procedures that gives knowledge in any historical phase its unconscious structure." Here he links the notion of episteme to unconscious structure of culture.⁴¹ By structure, he means the principle of permanent (*tsawâbit*) and changing (*mutaghayyir*). The structure (*bunyah*) of Arab reason means therefore the permanent and changing of Arab culture. The relationship between culture and reason becomes much clearer here.

This is, however, not to deny his intellectual indebtedness to other scholars. He admits that he has read Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume of western philosophy, as he read Plato and Aristotle, and, with great interest Ibnu Khaldun, Ghazali, Ibnu Rusyd, Farabi, Ibnu Sina, and others, and even acknowledged them as his teacher from whom he learned a lot. Yet, he maintains, what he learned from them is what he forgot. And it is this forgotten thing which he applies in his study, because it has become part of his unconscious

³⁹ Ahmad Raysani, *Nazariyyah al-Maqâsid 'Inda al-Syâtîbi*, 319 & 321.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 191.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37

epistemic construct, which he cannot properly ascribe to “which father” it belongs to.⁴²

Whether it is a standard answer among contemporary Arab thinkers or otherwise, it is still worthwhile to note that we find a similar comment given Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd when asked whether he is influenced by post modernist thinking. He states:

I cannot deny that I have read all of this literature in philosophy and social science. But I suspect very much that I could be applying certain rules. I did not elect also... Not because I ignore them, I read something and it absorbed in my mind. What comes out of this is something different. Something that is me. Of course, I learn from every source, but I am not satisfied with one kind of interpretation. Of course, you could say that there are some elements [of postmodern writers], but it is very hard to define what kind of elements are there in my writing. You could not say, “here, it is Foucault, or here it is someone else. It is very difficult, because I do not read to take principles and apply them blindly. I read to widen my horizon and to learn the different possible ways of looking at things.⁴³

Jabiri is certainly not the first and only thinker making an appeal to French philosophical tradition. A number of other North African scholars, thinkers, and philosophers also do the same. This includes a French-Algerian born scholar Arkoun, Fathi al-Turki, Muta' Safdi, 'Abd al-Salam bin 'Abd al-'Ali, 'Ali Umlil, Nur al-Din Afayah, 'Ali Harb, Hasan Hanafi, Hisyam Dja'it, Abdullah 'Arwi, Salim Yafut, 'Abd Kabir al-Khatibi, and many others. Perhaps inspired by Michel Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, Salim Yafut, the translator of the book, even comes to name his two books *Hafriyât al-Ma'rifah al-'Arabiyyah al-Islâmiyyah*⁴⁴ and *Hafriyât al-Istisyrâq* respectively.⁴⁵ In the last few years, French post modernist thinking has indeed made an in-depth penetration in North African Islamic

⁴² al-Jabiri, *al-Turâts wa al-Ĥadâtsah*, 322.

⁴³ Interview with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, June 2, 1999, quoted from Moch Nur Ichwan, *A New Horizon in Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Contribution to Critical Qur'anic Scholarship* (unpublished Master thesis, Leiden University, 1999), 126.

⁴⁴ For a detailed elaboration of Foucault's influence on contemporary Arab thought, one can consult Zawawi Bughurah, *Michel Foucault fî al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'âşir*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭalî'ah, 2001).

⁴⁵ Salim Yafut, *Hafriyât al-Istisyrâq fî Naqd al-'Aql al-Istisyrâqi*, (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Tsaqâfi al-Arabi, 1989). *Hafriyât* is a word used in Arabic to refer to archeology.

thought.⁴⁶ This is indicated at least by a substantial amount of French philosophical literatures written by Michel Foucault, Derrida, Paul Ricour, and others translated into Arabic. A number of articles and books discussing ideas and concepts developed by those scholars are also widely circulated.⁴⁷

According to Jabiri there are at least two reasons that account for this phenomenon. One is subjective referring to the fact that Maghrib was a French colony. People here are more closely attached to French culture than to Anglo-Saxon or other cultures. Second factor is objective related to the nature of French school of epistemology itself. He observes French epistemological studies are more concerned with universal historical analysis and philosophical rationalist critique than with forms. And that suits to the subject he deals: *turâts*.

Jabiri is aware of the possible criticism resulting from his usage of these foreign concepts. He first of all might be charged as being inconsistent. That is because he has been vocal in criticizing Arab Marxists and liberals for taking the west as their system of referential authority. By invoking western concepts, he himself has committed the same mistake, thus betraying the spirit of complete historical independence which he champions. He, however, refutes this critique. He explains historical independence does not mean that we have to turn or shun away from interacting with western civilization. What is needed is that we have to deal with it in critical and conscious manner that allows us to have control over it, and use it in accordance to our needs. It is not the other way around where we are absorbed and merged into the subject. He admits that concepts that originate from western social sciences are intimately related to western culture and thought, yet he believes they express general condition of human being. What is important is that how to contextualize and fit them to our circumstances and culture. If we succeed to do that, they then become ours. It is as though that we

⁴⁶ See for instance, Ahmad 'Abd al-Halim 'Atiyyah, "al-Tafkîk wa al-Ikhtilâf: Jacques Derrida wa al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'âşir", in Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, *al-Fikr al-'Arabi 'ala Masyârif al-Qarn al-Hâdi wa al-'Isyrîn*, (al-Qâhirah: Qaḍâya Fikriyyah li al-Nasyr wa al-Tawzî', 1995), 159- 199; For a detailed elaboration of Foucault's influence on contemporary Arab thought, one can consult, Zawawi Bughurah, *Michel Foucault fi al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'âşir*.

⁴⁷ In his footnote, Zawawi Bughurah provides a list of Michel Foucault's works which has been translated into Arabic and several other Arabic books and articles which discuss this figure. See Zawawi Bughurah, *Michel Foucault fi al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'âşir*, 15, footnote 1.

have invented the concepts, because they express reality of not others but of ours. In such a way, we actually have exercised an historical independence.

Jabiri further argues that the process of transporting particular concepts from its origin to another is not a new enterprise; it is a common practice observed in almost all field of sciences, especially modern human sciences. Prior to nineteenth century all sciences were bound under the rope of philosophy. However, following the vast progress and development of mathematics and natural sciences, each of these sciences separated from its origin and subsequently became independent subjects. But what is interesting to notice, says Jabiri, is that in spite of such separation, for quite sometimes they remain to copy the pattern of one another. Being the highest model of rationality, mathematics has served as a paradigm that each science wishes to follow. Physics, for instance, became an independent discipline when it formulated itself in a model similar to that of mathematics. Now physics becomes a “mathematical formulation of natural phenomenon.” Following this, it also transported some new concepts from the sphere of mathematics to its own field, using, for instance, algebra and engineering and even formulating its principles in mathematical format.⁴⁸

Sociology is another case in point. If physics takes mathematics as its model, sociology emulates physics. It is for this reason August Comte, the founder of the discipline, calls this science as “the physic of society.” But for Jabiri this discipline rather illustrates an aborted attempt of concept transformation. For it fails to contextualize the concepts it borrows to fit to the new ground where they are applied. Some proponents of this discipline go too far, treating social panorama exactly the same as that of physical phenomenon, hence failing to take into consideration peculiar dimension of human society. In other words, they have subjugated their subject for the sake of concept. In so doing, they actually deformed reality and transgressed scientific truth. In this case they are similar to Arab Marxist Salafi who imposes a certain concept to Arab society in order to explain a reality which is not its own.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri, *al-Mutsaqqafûn fi al-Ḥaḍârah al-‘Arabiyyah: minḥah Ibn Hanbal wa nakbah Ibn Rusyd*, (Beirut: Markaz Dirâsât al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1995), 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Furthermore, Jabiri explains that transforming certain concepts to the field which is not of their origin is legitimate only there is a need calling for it. For instance, in a situation where particular discipline cannot produce a certain desired results except with the help of other concept which is not its own. In this condition, appropriating foreign concepts is completely justified. Jabiri, however, quickly reminds that even in this situation, problem still persists if those transmitted concepts are not properly contextualized (*ṭabyi'ah al-mafâhim*) and made suited to the new field where they are transmitted.⁵⁰ In other words, only when they are successfully being contextualized, the process of transportation can be conducted. Otherwise, it would be considered failure. So, *ṭabyi'ah* (contextualization) holds a key position in this process.

What is contextualization meant? Jabiri explains that it is an attempt at establishing an organic link between the transported concept (*al-mafhûm al-manqûl*) and the area to which it is transmitted in a manner that it gives the new concept legitimacy and authority within the new field where it is transported. But to do this, one is required to comprehend the original sources of the concept to be transported: how is it constructed and what stages that it has gone through. In other words, one should have sufficient knowledge about historical development of the concept.⁵¹ "So what is required from what we transform, whether it relates to ideas and theories, systems and institutions, is an effort to contextualize them among ourselves, and plant them in our land in a way that makes (them) organically related to our historical reality."⁵²

Does it mean that Jabiri's usage of the concepts is purely pragmatic? Jabiri answers in negative tone. In his view, the choice of method does not lie in hand of researcher; it is determined by the nature of the subject and the objective intended to achieve. There is nothing wrong if anyone wants to create new method for his study, because principally method is nothing but simply "concepts which researcher deploys to treat his subject and the way they are applied." They may come up from any sources; they could originate from within the subject itself, purposely created, or borrowed from other

⁵⁰ Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Wijhah Nazr*, (Beirut: Markaz Dirâsat al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1992), 80.

⁵¹ al-Jabiri, *al-Mutsaqqafûn fi al-Ḥaḍârah al-'Arabiyyah*, 14.

⁵² al-Jabiri, *Wijhah Nazr*, 80.

disciplines. But what is important is that once one opts for the third choice, he should elaborate and clarify it so that readers will not misunderstand or mislead. He may add new elements to it which it does not cover before, or if he wants he can strip it from what originally it contains.⁵³ In other words, he has to deal with those concepts as *mujtahidûn* (independent thinkers) not blind imitators (*muqallidûn*), embarking from a position of "complete historical independence."⁵⁴ Here, Jabiri declares that he does not need to follow in the footsteps of Foucault in every inch of his step.⁵⁵ "I do not limit myself to the constraints present in the original framework, but often utilize them with considerable freedom...we should not consider those concepts molds cast in iron, but tools to be used in each instance in most productive way."⁵⁶ Jabiri believes that methods are basically neutral or value free. They fully depend on how we use them. They do not affect our analyses or studies, nor do they influence the conclusions we intend to reach, for we are not duty bound to follow the same limitations as they are set within their original perspective.

In this context, Jabiri seems to dismiss the role of worldview in shaping one's epistemology and methodology. Recent studies have proved how culture has an important role in constructing one's knowledge as proved by many sociologists of knowledge like Imre Lakatos, Thomas Kuhn, and others. Before his death, Abdelwahhab M. Elmessiri edited a book which carries a title *Epistemological Bias in Physical and Social Sciences* published by The International Institute of Islamic Thought (2006) where he brought various writers to prove how different elements that inherent in human like culture, religion and others indeed exert significant influence upon one's conception of knowledge

However, due to diversity of sources of the concepts Jabiri uses, it is not rarely each of these concepts and methods sometimes contradict with each other. This is what Ibrahim Mahmud notes. He questions how does he mix and blend Marx with Freud, Foucault, Nietzsche, and Bachelard? How does he combine all these concepts? We know that each of this method has concepts which distinguish

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁴ Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *al-'Aql al-Siyâsi al-'Arabi, Muḥaddidâtuhu wa Tajalliyâtuhu. Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (3), (Beirut: Markaz Dirâsat al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1992), 44.

⁵⁵ al-Jabiri, *Takwîn*, 55.

⁵⁶ al-Jabiri, *al-Khiṭâb al-'Arabi al-Mu'âşir*, 14.

it.⁵⁷ Yet it is here where the strength as well as the weakness of Jabiri lies. He can transcend the conflicting nature of the concepts, combine and modify them in a way that he wishes them to be, so that they can suit to the subject that he deals, and be applied in productive and fruitful manner. This is exactly what Mahmud Amin al-'Alim found when reading Jabiri's *Naqd al-'Aql al-Siyâsi*. Here he sees that Jabiri can free himself from fixed axioms of method of scientific research (in a way that allows him) to construct pragmatic concepts which he benefits not only from tradition of scientific methodology in contemporary western studies, while attempting to affirm and adapt them to the demands of particular Arab reality, and but also from Arab classical heritagial concepts.⁵⁸ Kamsl Abdul Latif affirms this observation and asserts that Jabiri, "applies them in much more independent." He sees that the concept in Jabiri's works, "gains a particular character; it is really related to references whose general characteristics and central connotations were already defined. However, it receives other dimensions the moment it is newly applied;" For Jabiri does not transform any concept without "taking care of the demands of conditions and situations." 'Abd Latif finally concludes that Jabiri is critically aware of the "necessity of contextualizing the concepts used in order to make them in accord with given substance particular to local history."⁵⁹

Conclusion

There is a widespread assumption held by many contemporary Arab Muslim, intellectuals, especially of those with liberal and secular inclination, that classical Islamic methodology laid down by Ulama of the past is no longer sufficient to deal with complicated problems facing present Muslim society. This insufficiency is partly, they claim, due to the nature of that methodology itself which is ideological. For this reason, these scholars call for establishing new methodologies. In doing this, they have relied mostly on methods and concepts which currently develop in contemporary western philosophy and social sciences. And Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri is one of today leading Arab

⁵⁷ Ahmad Madi, "Ghayd min Fayd Muhammad 'Abid al-Jâbiri," 85.

⁵⁸ Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, *Marwâqif Naqdiyyah min al-Turâts*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fârâbi, 2004), 79.

⁵⁹ Kamal 'Abd al-Latif, *Qirâ'ât fî al-Falsafah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'âsirah*, 110.

scholars who observes this practice. Throughout his work, he has devised various conceptual apparatus from different schools of thought of western philosophy. As the study indicates that he is heavily influenced by French scholarship of postmodernist strand and also by Marxism, although he himself claims that none of these school of thought enjoys authoritative upon his mind. Jabiri claims that he has modified those concepts to suit the subject he deals. Here, Jabiri seems to dismiss a close link between methods and epistemology, thus with worldview. Many scholars found that Jabiri does not fully succeed in his attempt at contextualizing those foreign methods. As a result of this, it is not difficult for anyone to see contradiction in his conclusion.[]

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