



**A CRITIQUE OF REASON IN CONTEMPORARY
ARAB-ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MUḤAMMAD
'ĀBID AL-JĀBIRI**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the contemporary Arab-Islamic discourse of the critique of reason, especially as propounded by Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābiri. For this purpose, the thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the background, importance and significance of the subject under discussion; the second chapter explores the views of selected modern and contemporary Arab Muslim scholars on reason. This is done in order to locate the thought of Jābiri in the present context. Jābiri’s intellectual development is presented in Chapter three. Chapters four and five are specifically dedicated to discuss the thought of Jābiri. The study reveals that Jabiri, like most Arab scholars, holds a belief that the root cause of the crisis besetting Arab-Muslim society today basically lies in reason/mind (*al-‘aql*). He opines that this reason/mind is undergoing a crisis of structure (*azmah bunyah*). The main problem of this reason, according to him, is that it never undertakes an auto-criticism. The Arab scholars fail to undertake a critique of reason. As a result, it continues being dominated by *turāth*, and thus by *qiyās* which serves as an intellectual mechanism. The domination of this intellectual mechanism, Jābiri argues, goes back to the triumph of *bayāni* (expository) and ‘*irfāni* (gnostic) systems of knowledge in the past. The main characteristic of the *bayāni* system is that it is textually oriented and heavily relies on *qiyās*, while the ‘*irfāni* system resorts to intuition as a channel of gaining knowledge, which is irrational and empirically unproved. Jābiri does not see any hope in these two epistemes. To him, only the *burhāni* system, which developed in the Islamic western milieu, al-Maghrib and Andalusia, and which is epitomized in the personality of Ibn Rushd, can help Arabs realize their renaissance. Many of Jābiri’s views have become subjects of criticism. Many regard his reading of *turāth* is no less ideological than those whom he criticizes.

ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الخطاب العربي الإسلامي المعاصر عن موضوع نقد العقل دراسة نقدية وذلك من خلال تحليل أفكار المفكر الفيلسوف المغربي محمد عابد الجابري. لأجل هذا، فقد قسّم هذا البحث إلى ستة أبواب. في الباب الأول يتطرق البحث إلى عرض خلفية و أهمية الموضوع، ثم يذهب في الباب الثاني إلى مناقشة أفكار المفكرين الحدائين و المعاصرين عن الموضوع، و ذلك لنعرف مكانة فكر الجابري في السياق الراهن. وأما خلفيته الفكرية فقد قدّمت في الباب الثالث. وقد حاول البحث أن يقدم أفكار الجابري في الباب الرابع و الخامس تقديمًا شاملاً. فوصلت الدراسة إلى نتيجة مفادها أن الجابري، مثل كثير من المفكرين العرب المعاصرين الآخرين، يعتقد أن الأزمة التي أصابت المجتمع الإسلامي العربي في الوقت الراهن ترجع إلى حالة العقل العربي؛ وهو يرى أن هذا العقل مصاب بأزمة بنوية؛ والسبب في ذلك أنه لم يمارس نقد نفسه، و أن المفكرين العرب لم يمارسوا نقد العقل. وغياب هذا النقد يؤدي إلى سيطرة التراث القائم على القياس. ويرجع الجابري هذه السيطرة إلى هيمنة النظامين المعرفيين البياني و العرفاني على الفكر الإسلامي في العصر الذي تكوّن فيه العقل الإسلامي. والملح الأساسي للنظام البياني فيما يقول الجابري هو تركزه في اللفظ و أنه يتعلق على القياس أكثر من غيره في الحصول على العلم و المعرفة، بينما يقوم النظام العرفاني على الحدس. وهذان المنهجان عند الجابري غير معتمدين لأنهما غير عقلانيين و لا يمكن اثبات صحتها تجريبياً. بسبب هذا لا يرجو الجابري كثيراً من هذين النظامين. فعنده أن النظام البرهاني الذي تطوّر من قبل في البيئة المغربية و الأندلسية و وصل أوجهه في فكر ابن رشد، هو وحده الذي يستطيع أن يحقق النهضة العربية تحقيقاً فعلياً. هذا وقد أصبحت أفكار الجابري في العهود الأخيرة موضع نقد كثير. ويرى كثير من المفكرين العرب أن قراءته التراثية لا تقلّ إيديولوجية عن قراءة المفكرين الآخرين الذين ينتقدهم.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Abstract Arabic | iii |
| Approval Page | iv |
| Declaration | v |
| Copyright | vi |
| Acknowledgement | viii |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background of Study | 1 |
| Statement of Problem | 6 |
| Objective of Study | 8 |
| Significance of Study | 9 |
| Methodology | 9 |
| Literature Review | 10 |
| Organization of Study | 26 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2 : REASON IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ARAB ISLAMIC DISCOURSE | 28 |
| Introduction | 28 |
| The Nature of Muslim Crisis | 29 |
| Reason and Renaissance | 33 |
| Contemporary Arab-Islamic Thought on Deconstruction of Arab Islamic Reason | 55 |
| Islamic Resurgence and Revival of Interest in <i>Turath</i> | 65 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 3 : JABIRI : LIFE, WORK, AND SIGNIFICANCE | 85 |
| A Brief Account of Jabiri’s Intellectual Development | 85 |
| Jabiri’s Works | 88 |
| Significance of Jabiri’s Thought | 94 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 4 : JABIRI’S CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY ARAB REASON | 101 |
| Introduction | 101 |
| The Problem of Arab Reason | 101 |
| Hegemony of <i>Turāth</i> (Tradition) | 105 |
| Complete Historical Independence | 113 |
| The Need for Critique of Reason | 116 |
| Epistemological Critique | 120 |
| Nature and Characteristics of Arab Reason | 129 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| CHAPTER 5 : JABIRI'S CRITICISM OF ARAB SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE | 139 |
| Arab Reason as Episteme | 139 |
| Expository System of Knowledge (<i>al-nizam al-ma'rifi al-bayani</i>) | 144 |
| Gnostic System of Knowledge (<i>al-nizam al-ma'rifi al-'irfani</i>) | 156 |
| Demonstrative System of Knowledge (<i>al-nizam al-ma'rifi al-burhani</i>) | 164 |
| CHAPTER 6 : CONCLUSION | 183 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 190 |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

During the last forty years, Arab-Islamic thought has witnessed the growth and development of a new intellectual trend. This new trend is distinctively characterized by its radical critical stance towards what is known commonly known in contemporary Arab-Islamic thought as *turāth* (heritage or tradition),¹ since it is believed to be a hurdle that impeded the Arab Muslim mind, hampered its material progress and thus precluded its long-standing attempt at revival and renaissance. *Turāth* is a product of human mind; and mind is working within certain epistemological principle and using a certain intellectual mechanism (*āliyat al-fikr*). Criticizing *turāth* thus amounts to critiquing the mechanism (*āliyat al-fikr*) which produces it. More specifically the proponents of this new thinking wish to deconstruct the Arab Islamic reason as defined and conceptualized in classical Islamic scholarship as it is regarded to be responsible in producing that *turāth*.

Contemporary Arab writers usually describe this intellectual enterprise as a critique of reason (*naqd al-'aql*), an epistemological critique which goes beyond

¹ *Turāth* has become one of the most heated debated issues among contemporary Arab thinkers and intellectuals. A huge number of works has been devoted to treat and deal with this issue. The following books reflect that concern. Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1980); Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Al-Turāth wa al-Ḥadāthah* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabi); Fahmi Jad'ān, *Naẓariyyah al-Turāth* ('Ammān, Jordan: Dār al-Shurūq li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1985); Yusūf al-Qaraḍāwi, *al-Thaqāfah al-'Arabiyyah al-Islāmiyyah bayna al-Aṣālah wa al-Mu'āṣarah* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1994); Sayyid Yāsīn *et al*, *al-Turāth wa Taḥaddiyāt al-'Aṣr* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1985), and many others. It is important to highlight that Arab scholars are in dispute in determining the scope of *turāth*. They specifically differ whether to include the Qur'ān and Sunnah within its limit or not. Some consider it as part of *turāth*, but many others exclude it from this category.

critique of ideology.² Abdulwahab El-Affendi calls it archeology after archeology or a meta-archeology,³ whose participants George Ṭarābīshī claims to be psychologically infected by collective neurosis (*al-‘uṣāb al-jamā‘ī*).⁴ One may be tempted to equate this new trend with Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure and Practical Reason*, perhaps simply due to similarity of term used. Although they are not totally opposed and even share some points of similarity, they are not identical. A close examination reveals that the contemporary Arab critique of reason is closer to the post-modernist intellectual tradition as developed by philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in French than to Enlightenment philosophical legacy of which Kant stands as its prominent figure. Specifically, one writer identifies the nature of Jābirī’s scholarly work with that of Foucault.⁵ Kamāl ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, however, rather likes to maintain that the word critique devised here points to a general critical exercise which is closely connected with western philosophical tradition since Enlightenment to the present period.⁶

When attempting to expound the term critique used in Jābirī’s *Critique of Arab Reason*, Ḥasan Ḥanafī contemplates some possible meanings. He says that it can mean an “explication of the delimitations of Arab Reason and the obstacles which hamper it to go beyond the boundaries set, and the search for new principles which unleash it

² ‘Ali Ḥarb, *al-Mamnū‘ wa al-Mumtani’s: Naqd al-Dhāt al-Mufakkirah* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabi, 2000), 61. On the exposition of the notion of critique of ideology and its application in contemporary Arab-Islamic thought see Idriīs al-Hānī, *Kharā‘iṭ Aydiyūlūjiyyah Mumazzaqah*, (Beirut: al-Intishār al-‘Arabi, 2006), 35-157.

³ Abdelwahab El-Affendi, “Rationality of Politics and Politics of Rationality,” in Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 154.

⁴ See his book, *al-Muthaqqifūn al-‘Arab wa al-Turāth: al-tahlīl al-naḥḥī li ‘uṣāb jamā‘ī* (London: Riad el-Rayyes Books Ltd, 1991).

⁵ ‘Abd al-Ilah Balqaziz, “Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī: Ṣāḥib al-Mashrū‘, Ṣāḥib al-Maqālah,” in Kamāl ‘Abd al-Laṭīf (ed.), *al-Turāth wa al-Nahḍah: Qirā‘āt fi A‘māl Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2004), 68-69.

⁶ Kamāl ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, “Muqaddimāt,” in in Kamāl ‘Abd al-Laṭīf (ed.), *al-Turāth wa al-Nahḍah: Qirā‘āt fi A‘māl Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2004), 40.

from being tied.” But it also can refer to “re-description of the elements of Arab Reason through the works that composed it in diverse aspects of knowledge in culture” or to a “historical critical analysis of system of knowledge in Arab culture.”⁷

Different writers have tried to identify this recently growing scholarly trend with different names and labels: some call it liberal Islam,⁸ others name it progressive Islam,⁹ and still others identify it as neo-modernism.¹ But it is important to highlight

⁷ Ḥasan Ḥanafī, “Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi fi Mir’ah “al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd”,” in *al-Turāth wa al-Nahḍah*, 232.

⁸ The term liberal seems to have been ambiguously defined and loosely applied. Albert Hourani used it to describe the typical thought which flourished during the period of *nahḍah* advocated by people like Rifā‘ah Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwi, Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, Kawakibi, Afghani, ‘Abduh and his disciples. See his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 – 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). By adding an adjective *religious* to the term (becoming religious liberalism), Wael Hallaq devises it to depict an intellectual tendency threaded by such figures as Muḥammad Sa‘īd ‘Ashmāwi, Fazlur Rahman, and Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, who, he says, have formed what he calls as a “new phenomenon of Islam.” This “new Islam,” he maintains, is different from “religious utilitarianism” as personified by Rashīd Riḍā, ‘Alāl al-Fāsi, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf, and Ḥasan Turābi. Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214. Meanwhile, Charles Kurzman refers the term liberal Islam to “interpretations of Islam that have special concern regarding such issues as democracy, separating religion from political involvement, women’s rights, freedom of thought;” It is in “opposition to theocracy, support for democracy, guarantee of the rights of women and non-Muslim in Islamic countries, defense of freedom of thought, and belief in the potential for human progress.” Charles Kurzman, “Islamic Liberalism: Prospects and Challenges,” <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/beca/meria/journal/1999/issue3/jv3n3a2.html>, accessed on 25 September 2008; idem, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. What is problematic with Kurzman is that by such broad definition he has included within his category of liberal some well known advocates of Islamic ideas like Yūsūf al-Qarḍāwi and Mohammad Natsir. Leonard Binder defines Muslim liberals as those who hold that “the language of the Qur’an is co-ordinate with the essence of revelation, but the content and meaning of the revelation is not essentially verbal. Since the words of the Qur’an do not exhaust the meaning of revelation, there is a need for an effort beyond them, seeking that which is represented or revealed by language.” Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1988), 4.

⁹ See for instance, Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004).

¹ The term neo-modernism is⁰often associated with the late Fazlur Rahman. He is the one who coins and popularizes the term and then applies to a new type of interpretation of Islam of which he is one of its promoters. Rahman distinguishes this neo-modernist Islamic reform from the one which emerged during the eighteenth centuries which he identifies as pre-modernist revivalism, classical modernism, and neo or post-revivalism, each of which has its distinct characteristics. See Fazlur Rahman, “Islam: Challenges and Opportunities,” in Alford T. Welch and P. Cachia (eds.), *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 315-327. Many writers later seem to have accepted this categorization. In the context of Indonesia, the term is often applied to Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid. See Greg Barton, “The International Context of the Emergence of Islamic Neo-Modernism in Indonesia,” in M. C. Ricklefs (ed.), *Islam in Indonesian Social Context*, (Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991), pp. 69-82; idem, “Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia,” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 1-73.

that this new trend is far from monolithic; it is quite diverse;¹ it is not unusual sharp ¹ differences arise among the advocates of this thought. They are engaged in heated and intense debate which sometimes leads some of them to dismiss each other's intellectual merit.¹ Despite this fact, Ḥishām Sharābī (1927-2005), the late Palestinian Marxist intellectual, himself a participant of this discourse,¹ believes that all of them share some points in common: they all hold progressive orientation, secular outlook, radical perspective, and freedom from the control of fundamentalist

3

¹ Students of contemporary Arab Islamic thought have categorized present Arab-Islamic thought into several trends or schools of thought. But so far no categorization seems to be commonly accepted. Each writer has its own classification according to standards that he set. It is no surprise therefore that one intellectual can sometimes belong to different schools. While in one writer, he is considered modernist or the like, in other writers he might be perceived contrary, being called for instance as salafī. Ibrahim Abu Rabi, for instance, classifies the present Arab Islamic thought into four: Islamist with its various inclinations, liberals, nationalist, and Marxist/leftist current. See Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought* (London & Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2004), 63ff. Compare it with Nelly Lahoud's *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). Rawa' Maḥmūd presents a much broader classification in his *Mushkilah al-Naṣṣ wa al-'Aql fi al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah: dirāsāt muntakhabah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006), 199ff, compare it with Ḥasan Ḥanafī, "al-Falsafah fi al-Waṭan al-'Arabi fi mi'ah 'ām," in Ḥasan Ḥanafī *et al*, *al-Falsafah fi al-Waṭan al-'Arabi fi mi'ah 'am* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2002), 17-41 and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 181-201.

¹ For a simple illustration, we can look at the critique addressed by Jābirī against his colleague of similar ideological orientation, 'Abdallah Laroui. Jābirī severely criticizes the latter scholar particularly for his stand on tradition which calls for a complete break (*al-qāṭi'ah al-kubra*) and a wholesale adoption of western historicism. See: Idrīs Hāni, *Kharā'it Aydiyūlūjiyyah Mumazzaqah* (Beirut: al-Intishār al-'Arabī, 2006), 174ff. But Jābirī himself is not either free from the same criticism. Since he published his project, *Critique of Arab Reason*, he has become a subject of criticism among some Arab intellectuals. There are a large number of studies dedicated to a critical examination of his thought. The same phenomenon also happens among other Arab intellectuals. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd may share some attitude with Muḥammad Shahrūr regarding current phenomenon of Islamic Resurgent and classical method of reading the Qur'ān. But Zayd is not very happy with the alternative methodologies offered by Shahrūr in controversial book *al-Kitāb wa al-Qurān: qirā'ah mu'āshirah*. He is sharply critical of this work. See: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, "al-Manhaj al-Nafī' fi Fahm al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyyah (Radd 'ala Shahrūr)," *al-Hilāl* No. 100, vol. 3, March 1992, 54-61 and idem, "Limādhā Taghat 'al-Talfiqiyyah' 'ala Kathīrin min Mashrū' Tajdīd al-Islām," *Al-Hilāl*, Oktober 1991, 18-28. Abū Zayd himself attempts to propose alternative methodologies. But this alternative is also not free from criticism from other scholar of the same intellectual concern with him like Ḥasan Ḥanafī "Ulūm al-Ta'wīl bayn al-Khāṣṣah wa al-'Āmmāh: qirā'ah fib ba'd A'māl Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," *al-Ijtihād*, No. 23, 1994, 9-95. Abu Zayd himself is not silent with an intellectual project proposed by Ḥanafī. He caricatures Hanafī's reading of tradition as *talwīn al-turāth* (painting the *turāth*). Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 3rd edition (al-Qāhirah: Maktabah Madbūli, 1995), chapter two, 137-192.

¹ Among his celebrated works³ are *Neopatriarchy: a Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and *al-Naqd al-Ḥaḍārī li al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi fi Nihāyah al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1990). A review of the latter book can be read in Ḥusain Ma'lūm, "review: al-Naqd al-Ḥaḍārī li al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi fi Nihāyah al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn," *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi*, No. 147, 132-144. Ibrahim al-'Ibādī tries to explore some the thought of this figure in his article, "Ḥishām Sharābī wa Uṭrūḥah al-Niẓām al-Abawīyyi," *Qadāyā Islāmiyyah Mu'āshirah*, No. 3, 1998, 188-223.

religious paradigm and neo-patriarchy thought. Sharābī further identifies five major contemporary Arab schools of thought: they are Marxism, Freudism, Structuralism, Deconstructionism, and Feminism.¹

4

This scholarly trend began to appear in the scene at about the late 1960s, the seed of which can be traced in the writings of mostly Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, and Egypt) university professors and scholars, especially among those with Marxist proclivity like ‘Abdullah ‘Arwi (1933-), Hishām Jā‘īz (1935-), Mohammad Arkoun (1928- September 2010), Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābiri (1935- May 2010), ‘Abd al-Kabīr al-Khaṭībī (1938 -), Fatima Mernisi (1940-), Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943 - 2010), Ḥasan Ḥanafī (1935-), Maḥmūd Āmīn al-‘Ālim (1922-), and others.¹ When commenting the rise of this new class of Maghreb intellectuals, Hisham Sharabi has this to say:

The radical critics (particularly the Maghribi critics) play a role paralleling that of the secular intellectuals of the early part of Awakening (*nahḍa*), particularly the Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals. Like the latter, they project a new consciousness at odds with the dominant discourse and oriented toward modernity and change, but with this difference: the Maghribi critics offer a radical criticism while their intellectual predecessors only a conceptual compromise.¹

6

Many opine the rise of this new tendency has changed Islamic intellectual map which is known in Islamic intellectual history. If before Maghreb was simply positioned as a receiver of thought, now this position changed. It now has become a producer of thought which influences others. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this intellectual tendency is actually is not only peculiar to this region. In other parts of

¹ Hishām Sharābī, *Naqd al-Ḥadārī li al-Mujtama’ al-‘Arabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1990), 52.

¹ See: Ibtisām liKhumays, “al-Fikr al-Naqdī fi al-Maghrib al-‘Arabiyyi wa al-Fi‘l al-Thaq‘āfiyyu wa al-Ijtimā‘iyyu,” *al-Mustaqbal al-‘Arabiyyu*, No. 335, Jan. 2007, pp. 22-46; ‘Abd al-Salām Bin’abd al-‘Āli, “al-Fikr al-Maghribiyyu wa al-Taḥdīth,” *Fikr wa Naqd*, No. 31, Sept. 2000, pp. 19-27.

¹ Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: a Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 171.

Muslim world, the same scholarly trend also is also on rise. The works of Şādiq Jalāl al-‘Aẓm (1934-),¹ Yāsīn al-Ḥāfiẓ,¹ and Īlyās Marqus,¹ all of whom are Arabs⁹ in origin, perhaps can best represent this scholarly critical voice. To be fair, we have to say that the same intellectual phenomenon is also making inroad in countries like Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, and Indonesia.²

In spite of its early appearance, only in the last four decades (1980s- 2000s) did this critique of reason (*al-naqd al-‘aqliyyu*) trend gain prominence, thanks to the works of two contemporary prominent thinkers, Mohammad Arkoun and Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī. It is since the publication of their works, *Naqd al-‘Aql al-Islāmī* (Critique of Islamic Reason) and *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (Critique of Arab Reason), which were published almost simultaneously, a discourse on this theme began to command wide scholarly attention. The present study, however, is set to study only the thought of Jābirī, mainly due to the immense contribution he has made to the proliferation of this thought and the profound mark he left on development of present Arab-Islamic thought.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is a widespread belief among some circles of contemporary Arab thinkers and philosophers that the multi dimensional crisis which beset the Arab and Muslim society today is connected with reason, or more specifically with epistemology, rather

¹ ‘Aẓm is one of the Arab Marxist thinkers, originally from Syria, who holds a strong critical tendency towards religion and anything related to it.

¹ See: George Ṭarābīshī, “Yāsīn al-Ḥāfiẓ ba‘da Infijār al-Mārkisiyyah,” *Abwāb*, No. 15, Winter 1998, 116-127; ‘Abd al-Razzaq ‘Id, “Difā‘an ‘an Yāsīn al-Ḥāfiẓ,” *Abwāb*, No. 22, Autumn 1999, 60-75.

¹ This thinker is known for his work, *al-‘Aqlāniyyah al-Naqdiyyah*. Farḥān Šāliḥ, “Raḥīl Ilyās Marqus, hal min bidāyah li yaqzāh jadīdah?,” *Dirāsāt ‘Arabiyyah*, No. 7-8, May-June 1991, 144-148 and Khalīl Aḥmad Khalīl, “Ilyās Marqus, ma‘nan li mu‘ānāh, rūḥ li ‘aṣr qādim,” *Dirāsāt ‘Arabiyyah*, No. 7-8, May-June 1991, 3-8.

² Suha Taji-Farouki’s edited book, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur’an* (London: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004) perhaps can prove our claim about the growth of this new scholarly tendency in different part of Muslim world.

with politics, economics, or military. This epistemology as conceptualized and constructed by classical Arab Muslim scholars has blurred the perspective of present Arab society to correctly perceive their problems, a result of which they hence fail to offer right and adequate solutions. Therefore, unless this epistemological edifice of Islamic thought is critically revisited, and if necessary deconstructed, no renaissance would ever be realized, claimed by the proponents of this new thinking. In order to materialize this objective, some Arab intellectuals who have this concern take an initiative to construct their own cultural and intellectual reform projects. Ḥasan Ḥanafī launches *Turāth wa al-Tajdīd* (Renewal and Tradition), Ḥusayn Muruwah inaugurates *al-Naz‘ah al-Māddiyah fi al-Falsafah al-‘Arabiyyah*, Ṭayyib Tīzini comes up with *Min al-Turāth ila al-Thawrah*. In the beginning of 1980s, both Arkoun and Jābiri proclaimed their celebrated projects, which they name *Naqd al-‘Aql al-Islamī* and *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* respectively.

The purpose of this study is to attempt to throw light on the current discourse of critique of Arab-Islamic Reason. Given considerable contribution Jābiri has rendered to this discourse, we decide to devote this study only to his thought. He is among the few vocal Arab thinkers who has relentlessly pursued the path of this critical discourse till the end of his life. He has many writings on the subject to his credit. The most significant of them all is perhaps the four volume collection of *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi: Takwīn al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (Formation of Arab Reason), *Bunyah al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (Structure of Arab Reason), *al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi al-Siyāsi* (Arab Political Reason), and *al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi al-Akhlāqi* (Ethical Arab Reason). Throughout this series, Jābiri tries to critically explore the basic characters of Arab-Islamic reason and its epistemological structure as constructed by classical Muslim scholars. His survey leads him to conclude that this Arab-Islamic epistemology is problematic, and need to

be deconstructed in lexical and philosophical meanings. He then proposes a new notion of reason.

This thesis attempts to explore the critiques which Jābiri presented throughout his works against classical Arab-Islamic reason and epistemology. It also goes on investigating the methodologies he used, the logic he employed, and the philosophical foundation based on which he established his critique. All these issues will be critically examined in light of Islamic worldview and the Islamic intellectual legacy with the hope that we would be able to better assess the relevant and significant of Jābiri's intellectual enterprise to the advancement and development of the Arab and Muslim society. Critical responses addressed by some Arab scholars toward Jābiri would be brought forward when necessary. Possible influence of western philosophical tradition, especially that of postmodernist legacy, on his notion of critique of reason will similarly be examined. Finally, this thesis will try to expose the fundamental differences between the Islamic concept of reason and western secular notion of it, while maintaining the relevance and significant of the former for contemporary Arab and Muslim society especially in dealing with the challenges and problems posed by current hegemony of western civilization and globalization.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study is set to achieve the following objectives:

1. To bring into attention a current discourse of critique of reason in Arab-Islamic thought.
2. To shed light on the critiques addressed by Jābiri against the classical notion of Arab-Islamic reason.
3. To assess the influence of western philosophical thinking on Jābiri.

4. To examine the relevance and significance of this discourse to the contemporary Arab search for an authentic Arab-Islamic Renaissance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is no doubt that critique of reason (*naqd al-aql*) constitutes one of the most heated topics intensely debated in contemporary Arab Islamic thought. A cursory glance at the tremendous body of works that fuel current Arab-Islamic literature critiquing the epistemological ideas of classical Muslim scholars and thinkers already sufficiently points to a great urgency of this problem. This theme assumes a centre stage in the intellectual and cultural projects initiated by Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Ṭayyib Tizīni, Ḥusayn Muruwah, Moḥammad Arkoun, as it is of principal concern to such figures as Adonis, Fatima Menisi, ‘Ali Ḥarb, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, Abdul Karim Soroush, Muṭā’ Şafadi, Sālim Yāfūt, Abdullah Aḥmad Na‘em, Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, and other contemporary intellectual figures prominent in the Muslim world. But of many Arab intellectuals who have extensively delved into this topic, Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābiri certainly occupies a leading position. In 1980s, he initiated an intellectual and cultural reform project that he names *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (Critique of Arab Reason) to materialize his grand ambition to criticize Arab Reason. It is indeed unfortunate that despite the great attention which many Arab scholars have given to the issue, it is among the least discussed topics in present English literature. And this thesis hopes to fill this lacuna.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The nature of the study is expository and the method employed is thus descriptive. In other words, it is a library research. Following this, the views and argumentations put forward by the thinkers under discussion would be set within their context and

described insofar as our sources permit. The study then undertakes a review of source materials to allow us to systematically reconstruct the position that the thinkers take. The results obtained from this exercise are then subjected to analysis and will be critically examined. For this purpose, the study would make recourse to historical method. Its main purpose is to trace how early Muslim scholars and intellectuals have treated the problem under discussion. The study also deploys a comparative method. It is aimed at determining the originality and ingenuity of Jābiri's ideas and detecting the extent of influence of western philosophers and thinkers on him.

The data accumulated and analyzed in the research are primarily derived from the writings of Jābiri and other contemporary Arab Muslim thinkers who share a similar intellectual concern with him. These writings serve as the primary sources of our study. Reference is also made to the writings of his critics and they form as secondary sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic intellectualism seems to have an unending lure and fascination for many human minds; it continues to be a subject of intellectual speculation, curiosity and bewilderment to scholars and academia of various disciplines and diverse backgrounds. A number of scholars have made a great contribution to this field of study by producing a rich literature on the subject. To the best of my knowledge, most of these writings are more focused on classical, neo-revivalist and modernist Islamic thought while the current development of Islamic thinking remains largely neglected and unexplored, thus continues to be a virtual *terra incognita*.

Only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, interest in contemporary Islam begins to surge. Even then, sadly to say, this interest is largely occupied with what

nowadays is dubbed as “political Islam,”² a dimension that is commonly used to characterize a phenomenon known as *al-Şahwah al-Islāmiyyah*, which has been variously translated as Islamic Resurgence, Reassertion, Reawakening, and pejoratively portrayed as fundamentalism or radicalism that is inclined to violence and cruelty. This is particularly true following the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and gets an immense intensification following the tragic Sept 11, 2001. There might be some reason for this. One of which is perhaps a fear, which often times purposely created and fabricated, among western establishment that this political Islam would pose a threat that may shake interest of western powers. Not only that, it is even exaggeratedly construed as endangering the whole project of western modernity.

But Islamic Resurgent is neither monolithic nor uniform: it is heterogenic and quite complex. Although the current Islamic Resurrection contains a “political” dimension, which undoubtedly has exerted considerable impact on daily Muslim socio-political life, it would be a grave mistake to exaggerate its importance as if it represents the whole spectrum of the present Arab-Muslim society or of Islamic resurgent itself. It deserves to be addressed and given due attention, but this should be appropriate to its relative importance. For, failing to observe this will only create distortion and misunderstanding not only of the movement but also of Islam as a whole. No one could deny that the recent Islamic revival is not merely political; it is also cultural, educational, religious, economic, and intellectual. Politics is only one

² Among the books discussing this theme are: William Spencer, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the Modern world* (Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, 1995); Henry Munson, Jr, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988); Oliver Rpy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994); Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Shireen T. Hunter (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), Mir Zohari Husain, *Global Islamic Resurgent* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995); R.M. Burrell (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, 1989); Ahmad S. Moussalli (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism: Myths and Realities* (UK: Great Publishing Limited, 1998); Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Printer Publishers, 1990).

aspect of a wide spectrum of that revival. In fact, when measured from political perspective, political Islam can be said to have not really succeeded since nearly no advocate of this course, except in Iran, has succeeded in capturing political power. Its greatest impact is more discernible in socio-cultural and intellectual life than in politics.

More recently there have been several attempts to remedy this deficiency. Both western and Muslim scholars begin to embark on a new course. They begin to shift their attention by studying the intellectual contributions of such influential Muslim thinkers and scholars as Fazlur Raḥman, Syed Hossein Nasr, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, Syed Naquib al-Attas, 'Abdul Karim Soroush, Mohammad Arkoun, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, Muḥammad Shahrūr, and others. Suha Taji's edited work, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an* is example in point. This book brings into attention different positions of different contemporary Muslim thinkers of diverse backgrounds and countries of origins on various problems related to the Qur'an. Among those treated in this book are Fazlur Raḥman and Muḥammed Arkoun. The late Ṣādiq Nayhūm from Libya and Iran's Mohamad Mojtaba Shabestari, lesser known, but no less interesting, writers, are also discussed. Other scholars discussed in this book include the Egyptian Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, who is widely now known for his textual critical and literary approach of the Qur'an, Tunisian historian Mohamed Ṭalbi, and Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid. What more interesting is that the editor also includes a discussion of a controversial female intellectual who dare to speak out on behalf of her gender, Amina Wadud.

Adding to the above is *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* edited by John Cooper. Again, in this book, different authors discuss the thought of different prominent Muslim scholars of contemporary period like Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-

Būṭī, Muḥammad Ṭalbi, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, and Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābiri. The book also includes the writings of controversial figures like Mohammad Arkoun and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd.² *An Islamic Reformation?* edited by Michaelle Browsers and Charles Kurzman² along with *Islamic Thought in Twentieth Century* is another interesting piece of work worthy of mentioning, both of which can enrich our understanding of the present development of Arab Islamic thought.² This is in addition to Abdullah Saeed’s *Interpreting the Qur’an* that deals with contemporary understanding of the Qur’an which takes the late Pakistani eminent scholar, Fazlur Raḥman, as his central reference.²

It is of great surprising that of so many studies devoted on contemporary Islam and Muslim intellectuals, only few English literatures have so far ventured to address the theme of critique of reason, especially as propounded by Jābiri. This is despite of the fact that Jābiri’s “writings and ideas have been at the centre of academic debates in the Arab world since the mid 1970s.”² It is true that in recent years, some writers and scholars have made references to him, but only in the form of citations which are used either to justify or oppose a particular stand or view.² Hence while acknowledging centrality and importance of his thought, not many have made him as a central focus of their studies. Even if there are such studies, no one has yet attempted

² John Cooper *et al* (ed.), *Islām and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998)

² Michaelle Browsers and Charles Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic Reformation?* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004).

² Suḥa-Taji Faruki and Basheer M. Nafi, *Islamic Thought in Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004)

² ‘Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur’an: towards a contemporary approach* (London: Routledge, 2006).

² Walid Hamarneh, “Introduction,” in Mohammed ‘Abed al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*, trans. by Aziz Abbasi (Austin: The center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas, 1999), vii.

² One for instance can refer to such works as Nazih N. Ayyubi, *Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 1991), 10-13 and 26 and Jilani Ben Touhami Meftah, *The Arab Modernists and the Qur’anic Text* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2005).

to analyze the conceptual framework and methodological apparatus he devises, or the views of his critics.

Issa J. Boullata's *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* is perhaps among the earliest work in English which tries to study the thought of Jābiri. But this study is quite simple. The author allocates not longer than five pages for this purpose. It is more introductory and descriptive than analytical, let alone critical. Yet, it is quite significant as a prelude to understand Jābiri's thought. Boullata in this book provides a good summary of Jābiri's position regarding *aṣālah-mu'āṣirah* problem. He also explains in brief some important points which Jābiri raised in his Critique of Arab Reason. While applauding "Jābiri's contribution to the contemporary Arab debate on the heritage," as "very clear, learned, and thought-provoking," as well as "progressive and hopeful," he, nonetheless, values it insufficient to effect the change to Arab society. Boullata claims that the fruits that Jābiri produces "only benefit a small elite."² Perhaps due to its early publication, this book does not have opportunity to cover some of Jābiri's later publications.

Placing him under liberal camp in contrast to Ṭayyib Tīzini whom he considers the best representative of Marxist block, the author of *The Challenge of Modernity*,² Louay Safi, wraps up some of Jābiri's fundamental ideas. Safi rightly points out that the main purpose of Jābiri's intellectual project is "to discover the constants and variables of Arab heritage...[and] a contradictory nature of modern Arab intellect."³ Salvatore Armando advances further research by drawing a comparison with Ḥasan

² Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*. Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1990), 54-44.

² Louay M. Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity: the Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 184-192.

³ Ibid., 184 and 185.

Ḥanafī, another influential thinker of contemporary Egypt.³ A brief allusion to Jābirī's ideas is also found in Ibrahim Abu Rabi's *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World*. The author criticizes Jābirī particularly for neglecting the non-literate Arab mind and folk culture, which to him, "form a major portion of social and cultural tradition,"³ when analyzing the structure of Arab Islamic Reason. Nelly Lahoud is another writer who dedicates some passages in his book to a critical examination of Jābirī on *turāth-hadāthah* problem. In his final analysis, he found that Jābirī's view in this regard creates more problem than it solves.³ .

A German writer, Anke von Kügelgen, also allocates some pages in his article "A Call for Rationalism: 'Arab Averroists' in the Twentieth Century" to study the thought of Jābirī in relation his reception and interpretation of Ibn Rushd. This writer expresses a bit unsatisfaction to Jābirī for neglecting Ibn Rushd's important books like commentaries on Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* when studying the thought of this medieval Muslim philosopher. Jābirī, he notes, only relies on *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, *Kashf Manāhij al-'Adillah*, and *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.³

Recently, interest in Jābirī's thought seems to have been growing. This is evidence from some serious works devoted on him. Yudian Wahyudi's doctoral dissertation, *The Slogan "Back to the Qur'an and the Sunna": A Comparative Study of the Responses of Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī and Nurcholish Madjid*, which he submitted to The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University in

³ Armando Salvatore, "The¹Rational Authentication of *Turāth* in Contemporary Arab Thought: Muhammad 'Abid al-Jābirī and Ḥasan Ḥanafī," *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXV, no. 3-4, July October 1995, 191-214. A modified version of this article can be read in Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (UK: Ithaca Press, 1997), 223-240.

³ Ibrahim Abu Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 29.

³ Nelly Lahoud, *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 39-49.

³ *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 16 (1996), 114.