

Reconstructing Muslim Heritage through Muslim Philosophy: Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri's Intellectual Project as a Case Study

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Abstract

This paper highlights the tremendous efforts of Muslim philosophers in renewing, critiquing and reforming the Islamic thought in a way that makes it able to match the rapid changes of the contemporary world and to liberate the Islamic thought from the shackles of the early Islamic interpretations that date back to the 7th century when Islam emerged and the Qur'an was revealed. This is what has become known as Muslim liberal thinking or Muslim revivalism which can be defined as an intellectual project that aims to achieve to fundamental objectives: deconstructing absolutist religious readings, and reconstructing a new line of thinking the Islamic heritage which adopts pluralistic approaches. This paper, thus, critically reviews the work of the Moroccan Muslim philosopher Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri, mainly through his two books *Binyat al- 'Aql al- 'Arabi* (the structure of Arab reason)¹ and *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*.² This paper argues that Al-Jabri's scholarship serves Islam in various ways as it reshuffles the Arab thought through the advocacy of reason, being convinced that the occultation of the latter has resulted in the decadence of the Arab/Islamic/political thought and the rise of religious and political authoritarianism in the Muslim world.

Key words: Muslim heritage, thought, Muslim philosophy, Mohamed Abed al-Jabri, reason.

Introduction

A number of notorious events have provoked the outburst of Islamophobia which became normalized and persistent in the Western world starting from the 9/11 unfortunate event to the recurrent emergences of terrorist groups. The development of Islamophobia-related ideas has nurtured mainly two major ideas. The first is the legitimization of attacking the Islamic thought and Muslim believers that are both held responsible for the spread of violent and extremist acts and ideas that threaten the well-being of Westerners and non-Muslims in general. This belief advocates for the reproduction of the same violent reactions which is a shallow solution that has proved its inefficiency. The second is the need for the Islamic thought to be reformed and renewed to be apt to better cope with the cosmopolitan, globalized and much diversified world.

This paper is interested in highlighting the tremendous efforts of Muslim philosophers in renewing, critiquing and reforming the Islamic thought in a way that makes it able to match the rapid changes of the contemporary world and to liberate the Islamic thought from the shackles of the early Islamic interpretations that date back to the 7th century when Islam emerged and the Qur'an was revealed.

A number of works have studied the emergence of Islamic revivalist perspectives across the Muslim world and its importance in fighting back the rigid Islamic thought. Mohamad Abu Bakar (1981); Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (1997); Jon Armajani (2004); Sarah Glynn (2010); Sarah Islam (2012); and others have tackled this issue in their scholarly works. This is what has become known as Muslim liberal thinking or Muslim revivalism which can be defined as an intellectual project that aims to achieve to fundamental objectives: deconstructing absolutist religious readings and pointing out to their limited and "exclusionist" vision, and reconstructing a new line of thinking the Islamic heritage which adopts pluralistic approaches to the religious text and not only the theological approach.

¹ Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Binyat al- 'Aql al- 'Arabi* (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1982)

² Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought* (London: IB Tauris, 2008).

Before the outburst of Islamophobia, Muslim liberal thinking came as a response to the challenges facing the Islamic world vis-à-vis modern problems. This wave of scholarship aimed at deconstructing tradition, which can be defined as the imitation of the early recipients of the revelation, that was the reason behind the decline of the Islamic civilization. Colonialism, the formation of the Israeli state in 1948 and the Arab defeat of 1967 have incited the rise of this scholarship which aimed at reconstituting the Arab thought based on the rational line of Islam and Islamic interpretations, although it never eclipsed the conservative revivalist line.

This paper is interested in critically reviewing the work of the Moroccan Muslim philosopher Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri, mainly through his two books *Binyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (the structure of Arab reason)³ and *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*.⁴ In what follows, I will highlight how Al-Jabri's scholarship serves Islam in various ways as it reshuffles the Arab thought through the advocacy of reason, being convinced that the occultation of the latter has resulted in the decadence of the Arab/Islamic/political thought and the rise of religious and political authoritarianism in the Muslim world. Aljabri criticizes the Islamic thought for having prioritized the literalist reading (*al-bayan*) and the Gnostic reading (*al-'irfan*) over the demonstrative rational reading (*al-burhan*). By doing so, Aljabri extends his criticism to the political thought in the Islamic world which is informed by these two readings. Influenced by Ibn-Khaldoun, historicity is an integral part in his scholarship as he applies modern criticism in reference to Islamic history.

To do this, I will examine Al-Jabri's criticism of the three systems of thought: *al-bayan*, *al-'irfan* and *al-burhan*. For Al-Jabri, the first two approaches are the reason behind "the resignation of the Arab reason." It is equally important to shed light on Al-Jabri's advocacy of the return to the Muslim heritage which is a counter-discourse to the accusation of the liberal thinkers for reflecting the Western thought. Therefore, this paper will also focus on how Al-Jabri, as a Muslim liberal thinker and philosopher, studies the acts of the prophet's Companions and their implementation of implement *ijtihad* - which can be defined as the intellectual effort to reinterpret religious texts – to avoid falling prey of the imitation of tradition.

The three lines of the Islamic thought: *al-bayan*, *al-'irfan*, and *al-burhan*

As Anouar Majid says, "a Muslim doesn't have to be 'secular' to believe in the universal virtues⁵ of social justice and the inviolability of human dignity."⁶ It is within the politics of inclusion that non-secular Muslims join the line of defending more democracy especially that as Majid adds "the secular worldview [...] was the product of Enlightenment thought and a classical liberal philosophy whose goal was nothing less than the recalibration and redefinition of human morality to adjust to a new calculus that excluded traditional religious commitments." This product which caters for the individual more than anything could not be easily assimilated in the collectivist Muslim world in which religion and politics are intertwined. The second reality is that the problem of Muslim women is not mainly a problem of the "us" versus "them"; it is more about a problem of the "us" versus "us", Muslim women versus patriarchal Islamic foundational discourses.

Mohamed Abed Aljabri, one of the Moroccan Muslim liberal thinkers, gained reputation as an Arab philosopher for his criticism to the Arab reason (*al-'aql al-'arabi*). His contributions reflect only one facet of the heterogeneous Muslim liberal thinking which, in general, holds a reformist revivalist vision toward the Islamic heritage. Aljabri's philosophy aimed at reshuffling the Arab thought through the advocacy of reason. The occultation of the latter resulted in the decadence of the Arab/Islamic/political thought and the rise of political authoritarianism.

The Islamic thought and political thought are intertwined areas of research as they are constantly influencing and shaping each other. Aljabri criticizes the Islamic thought for having prioritized the literalist reading (*al-bayan*) and the Gnostic reading (*al-'irfan*) over the demonstrative rational reading (*al-burhan*). By doing so,

³ Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Binyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1982)

⁴ Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought* (London: IB Tauris, 2008).

⁵ By universal virtues, Majid means the universal rights that do not violate or disregard the particularities of countries like freedom of speech or the right to life, etc. Majid says this in relation to the power struggle between the leftist mullah in Iran and the conservatives of the right wing over the reform policies of the popularly elected president.

⁶ Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions*, p. 19.

Aljabri extends his criticism to the political thought in the Islamic world which is informed by these two readings. Influenced by Ibn-Khaldoun, historicity is an integral part in his scholarship as he applies modern criticism in reference to Islamic history.

This section will, thus, examine Aljabri's criticism of the three systems of thought: *al-bayan*, *al-'irfan* and *al-burhan*. For Aljabri, the first two approaches are the reason behind "the resignation of the Arab reason." It is equally important to shed light on Aljabri's advocacy of the return to the Muslim heritage which is a counter-discourse to the accusation of the liberal thinkers as representators of Western thought. Therefore, this section will also focus on the example of the Companions who used to implement *ijtihad* (the intellectual effort to reinterpret religious texts) to respond to the challenges they faced at that time.

The literalist approach deals with how meaning is communicated through different linguistic structures which differ in terms of clarity and connotation. Meaning can be communicated implicitly using comparisons, metaphors, tropes and other stylistic features. In other words, this approach focuses on how words transmit meaning. In his book, *Binyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (the structure of Arab reason), Aljabri criticizes this approach for separating the words from the meaning that it comes to convey. This separation, according to him, hinders the true understanding of any text as words and meaning are not separate.

Contrary to the principles of the literalist approach, Aljabri claims that the Arabic grammar, *an-Nahw*, does not only demarcate the rules of the language but also its "reason". In this vein, Aljabri refers to Sibawayh, an influential linguist and grammarian of Arabic, who set the first foundations of the Arabic language in his pioneering work *al-Kitab* (the book). For Sibawayh, grammar is not only about the rules that help read and write in a language correctly but it also delineates the rules of thinking within the Arabic language. In Arabic, as in all languages, a correct reading of the text ushers into the meaning that the writer points out to. Without deciding about the meaning, a correct reading cannot be attained.⁷

Aljabri believes that the literalist approach produces a subjective -understanding about Islam because it is deeply rooted in the Arab world. It is, according to Aljabri, influenced by the Arabic geography, culture, society and modes of thinking. For example, the sand in the desert, which characterizes the Arabic geography and nature, is "separate" the same way as words and meanings are separate in the literalist approach. In addition to separation, there is also "stagnation". Everything is stagnant in the desert except for some occasional surprising changes like storms or unexpected rains.⁸ This environment explains why separation is a key feature both in the Arabic language and in the Arabic culture and equally why the literalist approach represents the framework of the Islamic creed and foundational texts.⁹ The literalist approach settles in the unconscious of the Arab reason.

Besides the Arabic geography, the literalist approach¹⁰ is also subject to the authority and power of the Arabic language itself in the sense that it interprets the sacred scriptures in line with the linguistic features and structures of Arabic. For Aljabri, this is one of the pitfalls of the literalist approach as it produces subjective interpretations unable to represent all the believers bearing in mind that not all believers are Arabs or Arabic speakers.

⁷ Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Binyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1982), pp. 45-47. The translation mine.

⁸ Ibid, p. 142.

⁹ Ibid, p. 147.

¹⁰ On the shortcomings of the literalist approach, read Mustansir Mir's "Some Features of Mawdudi's Tafhim al-Qur'an" (1985), and Ziauddin Sardar's *Reading the Qur'an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred text of Islam* (2011) in which he criticizes the literalist approach and its promoters like Sayyed Qutb who criticizes the rational approach for "having gone too far." Sardar wonders: "how, without recourse to reasons, are we to check harsh, arbitrary and absurd interpretations of the Qur'an?" (p. 7).

Talking about the authority of the Arabic language which decides for the meaning of the sacred texts, Aljabri inquires:

Was the Quran revealed in Arabic to keep its content forever incarcerated within the Arab world? Or was it revealed, in contrast, in Arabic to trespass the world of ignorance (*al-jahiliyya*) in which they lived and open up on an enlightened one?¹¹

These questions aim at going beyond and deconstructing the limits of the Islamic literalist interpretations and suggesting other approaches which are more inclusive of various disciplines for a better and more open understanding.¹² Islam is for all and not only for Arabs. Equally, interpretations are meant to address and enlighten all the believers and not only Arabs. The universality of Islam contradicts the subjective inputs of the literalists.

Raza Rumi, in his article "The Prospects for Reform in Islam," criticizes the literal approach in reading Islam and considers it one of the chief reasons behind the ebb of the Islamic world. He believes that the literal approach locks the Islamic interpretations in the ninth and tenth centuries ignoring the fact that interpretations should go hand in hand with the overall changes that touch upon the various facets of life.¹³ However, across history there has been a permanent and fierce resistance to revivalist and reformist readings of the texts.

The Mutazilites, for instance, were criticized and fought for attributing rationalism to their Islamic theological framework. For them, if the text contradicts reason, it is the latter which wins over. The Islamic scholar and theologian Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali criticized the Mutazilites' excessive use of rationalism because the divine text supersedes the capacities of human reason and thus the latter is unable to understand certain texts.¹⁴ The Mutazilites were not only criticized but also persecuted to prevent any "different" reading from gaining influence.¹⁵

The nineteenth century Egyptian jurist, theologian and liberal reformer Mohamed Abduh was considered an infidel for having challenged the medieval interpretations of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* and for his inclination towards applying reason while indulging in the interpretative endeavors. In addition to this, he believed strongly that the imitation of tradition generates deterioration. Rather, the only way to develop Muslim societies, for Abduh, is to adopt free and independent thought. Criticising Sharia has always challenged mainstream religious authority and resistance has been always fierce.¹⁶

The literalist approach is subject to many pitfalls which fossilize a true understanding. However, this approach is not the only one that is responsible for the fossilized production of religious knowledge. The esoteric or the gnostic approach has also shaped the religious knowledge. Aljabri defines it as "an ensemble of religious currents that believe in deepening the spiritual life in order to achieve a true knowledge of God and religious issues."¹⁷ As it is agreed upon, this approach targets the inner spiritual side of the believer. In other words, the esoteric approach represents "forms of thought that detail internal mental processes."¹⁸

¹¹ Ibid, p. 248.

¹² For this, see Abdullah Saeed, *Reading The Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013) in which he argues for the implementation of new approaches to modern debates. He explores the importance of the theological, legal, socio-political and philosophical backgrounds on the Qur'anic meaning.

¹³ Raza Rumi, "The Prospects for Reform in Islam," retrieved on 10-11-2017, from <https://www.hudson.org/research/11172-the-prospects-for-reform-in-islam>. No page.

¹⁴ See Avital Wohlman, *Al-Ghazali, Averroes and the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009). He analyzes al-Ghazali's and Averroes' contrasting interpretations of the Qur'an through the discontinuities and interactions between theology and philosophy.

¹⁵ Raza Rumi, "The Prospects for Reform in Islam."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aljabri, *Binyat*, p. 253.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

Contrary to the literalist approach which deals with words and follows the literal meaning of the Quranic verses, the esoteric approach rejects all that is material and manifest and believes in the mysterious and the hidden. Truth can be achieved by the soul only. Luc Benoit and Robin Waterfield state that:

Neither reason nor our experience can guarantee truth for us because our experience is entirely historical and human, and too short, too recent, too immature, too limited, in a universe that has known states different from ours, which have nothing common with what we know as experience.¹⁹

This citation reveals that the esoteric approach revolts against the obvious, the reasonable and the concrete. The only reliable source of knowledge is that which is attained through the soul and the abstract. All that is human can be misleading, erroneous, unreliable and incomplete.

Aljabri thinks that there is a close relationship between esoterism in Islam and esoterism in the ancient era. The roots of the Islamic esoterism date back to the hermetic esoterism. Hermeticism or hermetism, both used interchangeably, appeared as early as early as the 2nd century even though literature gives different dates. Roelof Van Den Broek provides a tentative definition of hermetism in the following words:

In both movements, there is a strong interest in knowledge, gnosis, of the divine world and in the final bliss of the soul. The Greek word, *gnosis*, means “knowledge”, indeed, but the knowledge proclaimed by the gnostics and the hermetics was not obtained by the accepted rules of methodical reasoning but by divine revelation. [...] Those who had gnosis knew the way to God, for our visible material world to the spiritual real of divine being; its final goal was to know or to “see” God , which sometimes went as far as becoming united with God or being in God.²⁰

One can deduce from this definition that western hermetism that dates back to the ancient era is, indeed, what esoterism is about. Aljabri criticizes Islamic esoterism for building their thoughts on swaying grounds and for depending overtly on the spiritual. Plotinus, a Neoplatonic philosopher, attacks the gnostics in one of his treatises for rejecting “the visible creation and the earth on which we live and their idea that there is another, new earth to which the Gnostic will ascend.”²¹

Indeed there is a lot in common between hermetic esoterism and Islamic esoterism. The most common point is their diversion towards the spiritual and the transcending state. These common points led Aljabri to claim that Islamic esoterism has brought nothing new or special. Rather, they merely took the original ancient esoterism and applied it to Islam. Thus, Aljabri refutes the claim that the esoterics emanate their knowledge from the Quran.²²

In his endeavor to analyze the esoteric experience from a purely rational perspective, Aljabri deems this method one of the chief reasons behind the “resignation of the Arab reason.” First, the esoteric believes that s/he holds an absolute knowledge over secrets and that these secrets, no matter how mysterious they are in the present time, can be unraveled in the future.²³ Second, esoterism is the result of the incapability of facing reality and so its adepts find refuge in mythology and legends that have roots in the ancient Persian religions

¹⁹ Luc Benoit and Robin Waterfield, *The Esoteric Path : An Introduction to the Hermetic Tradition* (Hillsdale NY: Sophia Perennis, 2003), p. 13.

²⁰ Roelof Van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Gnosis and hermeticism from antiquity to modern times* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 1.

²¹ Ibid, p. 2.

²² Aljabri, *Binyat*, p. 314.

²³ Ibid, p. 314.

adopted by the hermetics.²⁴ Third, the esoteric vision on the world leads to the illusion of being a divine creature that can be united with God in a total absence of limits related to time or space or even nature.²⁵

While arguing that esoterism is based on myths, Olav Hammer states that:

In esoteric texts, the admiration of mythic wisdom is linked with the belief in two or more layers of religious truth. The overt meaning of the myth becomes the mere trappings with which believers in exoteric doctrines content themselves, while deeper truths need to be revealed by an interpreter with the requisite insights²⁶

Excessive reliance on myths intermingled with Islam produces supernatural religious knowledge which deviates from the rational line that Aljabri and Muslim liberal thinkers advocate and that produce reasonable interpretations and understandings. Neither the literal approach nor the esoteric one contributes to keeping religion in pace with modern issues and times. They both freeze religious knowledge either depending on words or mythical admirations.

The conduct of the prophet's companions: the primacy of *Ijtihad*

To argue against readings which hinder the advancement of the Islamic knowledge, Aljabri refers to the example of the Companions' conduct. Referring to them is a powerful point in Aljabri's criticism because liberal thinkers are usually accused of excessive advocacy for the Western models. Talking about the importance of emulating the model of the Companions of the prophet, Aljabri explains the reasons behind his choice in the following quote:

What is needed now is to view these men as having established for themselves certain authoritative referents to address the new developments in their ages, on the one hand, and, on the other, to regulate *ijtihad* and define its rules [...]. If such means do not match the development of learning and knowledge, they become impediments which fossilize that knowledge, thus fostering imitation (*al-taqlid*) and killing the spirit of *Ijtihad*.²⁷

The quote refers to how the companions, as the first recipients of Islam, have devised for themselves certain tools to manage the situations they came across at their times. *Ijtihad* and continuous interpretations are ways to create a sort of compatibility between the changes that occur at the levels of society, politics, economy, etc and Islam as a directive divine message. On the contrary, the closure of *ijtihad* and the archaic imitation (*taqlid*) of situations that happened in the past cannot but usher into unsolved modern problems. However, adapting the divine message of Islam to the different historical periods and acknowledging its particularities demonstrates the capability of Islam in coping with these changing particularities.

The innovative and brave *ijtihad* of the companions of the prophet is the chief reason behind Aljabri's incisive call for "the deferment of previous interpretive judgments and for resorting directly to 'the conduct of the Companions'".²⁸ Resort to *ijtihad* stemmed from the dire need to deal with the problems of their society after the death of the prophet especially that the Qur'an is not a political text and did not set the ground for the details of ruling the Muslim nation. Also, the prophet did not name anyone to rule the nation after him. According to Aljabri, this is a clear and direct invitation to Muslims to institutionalize their own worldly affairs themselves based on *ijtihad* and the rational line of approaching interpretations.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid, p. 378.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 177.

²⁷ Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought* (London: IB Tauris, 2008), pp. 4-5.

²⁸ Ibid, p.5.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

Abu-Bakr, the first Caliph after the death of the prophet, had to deal with the case of some Muslim tribesmen in some parts of the Arab peninsula who refused to pay *Zakat* (Islamic alm tax). Umar Ibn al-Khattab believed that they should not be fought because there is a clear hadith saying: "I was declared to fight them until they declare there is no God but Allah, and when they say it, they attain to sanctuary from me in their lives and property". Following the literal meaning of the text, those tribesmen, even though they rebelled against a certain religious custom, can be dispensed of troubles because they declared Islam as their religion.

However, Abu-Bakr was of the opinion of fighting them. He stated that after the hadith the prophet added the phrase "except in what truth demands?" and truth includes paying *Zakat*. Umar's point of view was religious while Abu-Bakr's was political aiming at protecting "the state" from dissidence. This is an example in which the Companion did not abide by the literal meaning of the text despite its clarity and preferred to use *ijtihad*. According to him, it is the public good which has to be met and so the situation needs a different treatment.

Another case where Umar refused to apply the text literally is when the land of Iraq and Syria was conquered. Umar refused to divide it among the victorious of the Muslims. In order to observe the public good, Umar preferred to impose a tax. He said: "if we are to divide the land and the property of Syria and Iraq, how are we going to provide for the towns and the forts? What is going to be left for prosperity and the widows in these countries of Syria and Iraq?"³⁰

The problem of *ijtihad* lies in the decision taken by religious authorities on whether to apply it or not to.³¹ There is common methodology in deriving Islamic ruling. First, religious scholars derive Islamic rulings when the text provides clear information. Second, they resort to analogy (*al-qiyass*) which is based on comparing between situations at hand and situations mentioned either in the Qur'an or the *Hadith*. Third, religious scholars base their decisions on the intents of the Islamic law (*maqassid*).³² The latter finds its roots in verse 90 of the Bee Sura (*surat an-nahl*): "God commands justice, goodness, and generosity towards relatives. And He forbids immorality, injustice, and oppression. He instructs you, so that you remember".³³ In this regard, Mohsine Ahmadi affirms that "What is worth highlighting here is that Aljabri "creates new dialectic spaces in which Muslims can produce dynamic responses to the challenges of modernity from *within* their religiosity and politics."³⁴

Ijtihad based on *qiyass* and *maqassid* seems progressive and can strongly highlight the compatibility between the foundational texts and modern issues. However, how feasible is it to apply these two types of *ijtihad*? How free are religious authorities to apply *ijtihad*? The methodology of deriving rulings does not directly address the issue of applying *ijtihad* even in the case of the existence of a clear text. What happens to a fixed text that no longer responds to a modern issue? The problems of *ijtihad* are related to these questions among others.

Scholars like Nelly Lahoud criticize Aljabri's for his over-insistence on historicity and of going back to Tradition.³⁵ We can understand that Aljabri and other Muslim liberal scholars of renewal go back to Tradition in order to gain some acceptance as it would render their work more convincing for the Muslims they are addressing. Other scholars, like George Tarabeshi, criticize him on the basis that modern philosophy does not exist in the Arab world first because it refuses modernity and second because of the absence of any theological

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Wael B. Hallaq's outstanding article "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16:1 (1984). Hallaq tackles the issue of "the closure of the gate of Ijtihad" and its repercussions on contemporary Muslim thought.

³² Ahmad Abarjigui, "Manhaj al-Ijtihad 'inda as-Sahaba wa at-Tabi'in" (the methodology of ijtihad according to the Companions and the followers), retrieved on 02-03-2017, from <https://www.akhbarona.com/writers/256298.html>.

³³ Translation retrieved on www.helloquran.com, retrieved on 11-09-2017.

³⁴ Mohsine Ahmado, "State and Religion in al-Jabri's Political Thought," in *Islam, State and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World*, ed. Zayd Eyadat et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 180.

³⁵ Zaid Eyadat, et al., *Islam, State and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 7.

revolution.³⁶ This criticism, though, sounds Orientalist/Eurocentric as it denies the Arab world philosophical contributions especially that philosophy is not alien to Arabs.³⁷ In the absence of alternatives, modern philosophy remains a powerful tool adopted by intellectuals to reread, question and deconstruct the Islamic thought and by extension the political thought.

It is, indeed, crucial to highlight the problems surrounding the codification of the *Sharia* as Aljabri does along with all the readings and approaches responsible for this decadence. However, it is more important to question the reasons behind the insistence on freezing this codification and on considering it as divine as the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. The reasons are highly political as a number of Muslim states of today derive their legitimacy from the sacred texts and from certain religious schools and interpretations. Allowing thinkers to lay their intellectual inputs –which challenge literalist fixed readings - is extremely threatening to the very existence and primacy of these political authorities. Raza Rumi refers to the example of Mohamed Bin Abdelwahhab who politicized the Salafi doctrine for instance.

Conclusion

This paper's primary goal was to highlight the eclipsed thought of Muslim liberal thinkers and philosophers. Their modes of knowledge production are characterized with openness to a multiplicity of scientific disciplines and approaches to the religious texts. Despite their efforts, their intellectual inputs are eclipsed in favor of the conventional and rigid religious readings. Scholarly works on these liberal thinkers help shift attention from the rigid interpretations which advocate rather for imitation and tradition to readings which free the Islamic heritage from monopoly and from stagnation.

Mohamed Abded Al-Jabri does not only criticize the classical and canonized readings of the religious texts, but also refers to the ideological and political motives behind some of them which pushed for the production of biased religious knowledge. Not only this, Al-Jabri tries to reconstruct the Islamic thought through giving primacy to the rational line of interpreting religious texts which cannot but cater for the different needs of Muslims in the contemporary world. Al-Jabri's and other Muslim philosophers' motivation behind the reconstruction and the restructuring of the Islamic heritage is the strong conviction that today's world cannot be subject to the interpretation of first recipients of the Qur'anic revelation back in the 7th century. Hence, the development of an intellectual and epistemological project is of much importance to Muslims and the Islamic thought.

Muslim revivalists' scholarships are, though, not free from limitations. They are in constant need of retrieving the religious legitimization of their intellectual project. The religious legitimization helps them achieve two results. First, it helps them escape the accusation of aligning to the Western mode of thinking. Second, it helps them secure the circulation and the acceptance of their ideas among the intellectual Muslim readers. However, the search for legitimization and the need to give primacy to the rational reading without violating the precepts of Islam leads to the production of, sometimes, subjective interpretations.

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