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**Critique of the Arab mind—Muḥammad al-Ġābirī.
Rationalistic tendencies in modern Arabic philosophy**

Muḥammad al-Ġābirī, a contemporary Arabic philosopher, was born in Morocco in 1936. He has been teaching at the University of Muḥammad the 5th in Rabat since 1967. In 1988 he was granted a UNESCO award for developing Arabic culture. He is also the author of philosophy setbook titled *Durūs fī al-falsafa li-tullāb al-bākālūriya* (Lessons for Students in the Final Grade). The first work which let Muḥammad al-Ġābirī be known in the circles of Arabic philosophers as well as get recognised in Europe was the book called *Naḥnu wa-at-turāt* (We and the Heritage). In the preface, the author introduced main concepts, which were developed in his later publications: *Al-Ḥiṭāb al-‘arabī al-mu‘āṣir* (The Modern Arabic Discourse), 1982; *Iškāliyyāt al-aṣāla wa-āl-mu‘āṣara fī āl-fikr al-‘arabī al-ḥadīṭ: širā‘ tabaqī am mu‘kil taqāfi* (The Issue of Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Arabic Thought), 1985; *Naqd al-‘aql al-‘arabī al-mu‘āṣir* (Critique of the Arab Mind), 1984-1990.

Muḥammad al-Ġābirī’s theories are well known and discussed in the whole of the Arabic world. The philosopher belongs to the wider intellectual movement clearly rationalistic and secular, formed in the last decades of the XX century. The era called the age of “Unsettled Spirit” started in the 1960s. It is worth remembering that the 1950s and 1960s were the time of the apogee of ‘Arabism’ when Arabic countries, one by one, regained their independence and began a rapid economic development. It was also then that the idea of Panarabism was being realised as well as the time of an “affair” with socialism. The crisis began after 1967 defeat of the Arab forces by the Israeli army, which was understood as a moral punishment by Arabs. Only then they realised that the road they were taking was leading to nowhere and their power was an illusion. The crisis was intensified with the death of ‘Abd an-Nāṣir, the president of Egypt. Another factor that divided the Arabic commonwealth was oil.

Since then finding logical reasons for their own weakness as well as establishing a new way for the Arabic world have been the main subject of the Arabic thinking. Its secularism is an alternative against contemporary fundamentalist movements. It does not mean rejecting their heritage but understanding it from a different point of view. At the same time it advocates a “golden middle” between following blindly foreign patterns and casting them off completely as alien to the Arabic world. Unfortunately, such ideas remain closed in the academic circles while populist slogans gain support in the streets.

The mistakes of the forefathers and their consequences

Muḥammad al-Ġābirī engages in three main issues:

- historical factors in the collapse of Arabic culture
- the analysis of the contemporary Arabic thought
- aims of Arabic philosophy.

Having investigated the history of the Arabic philosophy Al-Ġābirī concluded that the fall of the culture was caused by the erroneous system of thinking which was developed over the ages. He blamed it mostly on *mutakallimūn*. Since the 11th century they started going away from the reality, mainly because of the analogy principle. The reality, on which they based and drew conclusions from, was an artificial creation and it represented pre-Islamic relations. Al-Ġābirī considered Arabic language with its fossilised structure as one of the factors that slowed down the development of culture. That is why he describes it as “standing outside history”. He also accuses Islamic mystics of the downfall of the Arabic culture. He thinks that mysticism achieved great poetic heights but because of its uncontrolled nature it lost its cognitive values (*qīma ma‘rifīyya*). Therefore it can be used only to create new metaphors.

On the other hand philosophers are considered as progressive by Al-Ġābirī, although he immediately narrows down the definition. He divides the Arabic philosophy into the Eastern and the Western school. In the former he includes Al-Kindī, Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā’, in the latter Ibn Bāġġa, Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rušd and Ibn Ḥaldūn. Only those who represent the second group he calls progressive since they are turning towards “the approaching”. The philosophers from the East are charged with the lack of realism, especially Ibn Sīnā’ and his esoteric sense of reality. Together with Al-

Fārābī whom Al-Ġābirī evaluates slightly better, they form a unity grounded in epistemological theories of emanations. Al-Ġābirī considers the Eastern attempts to blend religion and the philosophy as the major mistake. According to him, science, which is “Greek metaphysics read through glasses of religion”, became a judge over religion. Such affinity has not proved right either for religion or science. This tendency has been attributed to historical and political influences, such as a constant threat to the unity of power and fight between various schools and parties.

As far as the Western philosophers are concerned, Al-Ġābirī praises them for their critical rationalism and realism. It was in Andalusia that the idea of dividing philosophy from religion was born: thus “Avicenna was defeated by Averroes”. The critical treatises by Ibn Rušd and his commentaries on Aristotle influenced Medieval Europe and laid the foundations of secularism—the road which Ibn Sīnā’ and the stagnated Arabic world avoided. Al-Ġābirī considers himself the follower of the Western philosophy.

Fossilised heritage

For Al-Ġābirī contemporary Arabs are squeezed in their heritage as if in an armour which blocks their development. Imprisoned by the language, considered to be holy, and an old-fashioned systems of mixed thoughts, superstitions and dogmas, they have lost their ability to think. Thus all attempts to counteract against the downfall of the Arabic culture are in vain. The contemporary thinkers suppose that they will find ready-made answers to the modern problems in the idealised past of their ancestors. On the basis of this criterion Al-Ġābirī divides reformist movements into three groups:

- religious *salafīyya*
- orientalist *salafīyya*
- Marxist *salafīyya*

The first group is criticised for escapism into religious dogmas. Its supporters think that the spiritual factor is the main force of development. Al-Ġābirī does not support the “idea of returning to the roots” as it is caused by disillusionment with the present and fear. He advocates it, however, as long as it helps to counteract against the degeneration of the traditions.

The second group is accused of negating their own tradition as well as attempting to plant foreign cultural models in the Arabic soil. Such a procedure undeniably leads to the loss of cultural identity. Besides Al-Ġābirī

points that this group analyses the Arabic history from the orientalist point of view. For orientalists the Middle East was and still is only a bridge between the Ancient and the Christian culture. As such it serves only as a tool for finding their own roots.

With the last group the philosopher felt a deep affinity for some time. However, at the beginning of the 1980s, he finally rejected the Marxist way of understanding the Arabic heritage.

The lack of choice—taming the past

Since al-Ġābirī criticises both those thinkers who rejected tradition and those who proclaim the return to the roots, the question may arise: What should be chosen then? The philosopher claims there is no point to ask such a question. He thinks there is no possibility to choose between tradition and the modernity. It is a problem for ideology and politics only and thus Al-Ġābirī believes that the past and the present should be re-defined. Without that the Arab will be no more than “the creature of the past”, who lacks the necessary distance to deal with his own heritage. The thinker aimed at creating this distance and a new quality being “creature with the past”. A new way of looking at the past is vital in order to overcome it (*tağāwuz*). The tries to put the Arabic history in order with the help of critical voices from the Arabic circles. He calls it “the time of a new formula” (*‘aṣr tadwīn ḡadīd*) and defines it as follows: “The success of reforming of the Arabic mind as well as the triumph of the Islamic thinking depends of our ability to come back to Ibn Ruṣd’s rationalism and Ibn Ḥaldūn’s historical conscience. Such tendencies are necessary if we want to re-define our relations to our heritage and create within it a new space for creativity—the creativity of the Arabic mind in the culture which developed it. Without such a critical approach to our past we will not be able to form the space for Arabic rationalism” (*Iṣkāliyyāt al-aṣāla wa-al-mu‘āṣara fī al-fīkr al-‘arabī al-ḡadīd: ṣirā‘ ṭabaqī am mu‘kil ṭaqāfī*, p. 314).

Although Al-Ġābirī never uses the word “secularism” it is clear from his concept that the division into religion and since is necessary for the cultural development. He claims that such a split has been rooted in the Arabic tradition: in the Umayyad times a conflict of interests between “those who give orders” and “those who know the Quranic law” emerged for the first time. Nowadays it is impossible to re-create a Muslim community based on

that from the Prophet and Rightly Guided Caliphs as it is impossible to turn the wheel of history backwards. However, Al-Ġābirī discards the term “secularism” because it implies the division between the state and the church; in Islam though there has never been an institution that resembles the Christian hierarchy. So the philosopher avoids the label and speaks about rationalism and democracy as ideas present in the Arabic-Muslim tradition, not imported from the Western World.

To sum up, the criticism of the Arabic mind as done by Muḥammad al-Ġābirī can be considered as creative, with the aim of initiating its new quality. However, the questions arise: How many supporters of these ideas will be ready to turn the blade of criticism towards themselves? How many will look for the reason of the cultural stagnation in their circles? How many will change their way of thinking to face the ghosts of the past? It is much easier to turn the back from the disappointing present or totally reject the burden of the past. Nevertheless none of those solutions promise to be successful in the future.