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PEDOMAN TRANSLITERASI

Arab Latin

ا = a

ب = b

ث = ts

ج = j

ح = h

خ = kh

د = d

ذ = dz

ر = r

ز = z

س = s

ش = sy

ص = sh

ض = dl

ط = th

ظ = zh

ع = ‘

غ = gh

Arab Latin

ف = f

ق = q

ك = k

ل = l

م = m

ن = n

و = w

ه = h

ء = ‘

ي = y

Untuk Madd
dan Diftong

آ = â (a panjang)

إِي = î (i panjang)

أُو = û (u panjang)

أَو = aw

أَي = ay

ISI

TRANSLITERASI

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INDEKS

SELF-CRITICISM TO ARAB AND MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS

Fachrizar Halim*

Book Title: Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967
Arab Intellectual History
Author: Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi
Publisher: Pluto Press, London, 2004
Thickness: 215 pages

Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History is written as a self-criticism addressed to Arab and Muslim intellectuals, especially those who reside in the West. The Arab intellectuals or Muslims alike, who have received Western education and have decided to live in Western countries in the first half of twentieth century, have actually benefited from their modern secular education. The liberalization of U.S. immigration laws in 1965 for non-European immigrants has even enlarged the number of Arabs and Muslims who have trained in the best institutions in the U.S. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the number of Arab intellectuals who reside in the West is estimated to double, as the result of the emergence of a second generation. However, the large number of educated Arab people does not always fulfill the promise of transformation of the social conditions of the Arab World. Far from being 'organic intellectuals', to use Gramsci's

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favorite term, who would transform Arab societies from imperialism and Western hegemony, and the impact of dependency on the so called ‘globalization,’ most Arab thinkers in the West as well as the elite in the Arab world have been party to Western capitalist interests which aim to control the Arab World. By no means denigrating the works of Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi, Edward Said, Ghada Hashem Talhami, Halim Barakat, or the feminist Leila Ahmad, to mention some brilliant Arab intellectuals, most Arab thinkers in the West seem to have forgotten the social conditions of the Arab world that have been in acute crisis since the mid nineteenth century or from the time colonialism stepped into the Arab world. Pseudo modernization—to say that there has never been any modernization as it emerged from the middle class as in Europe, but was initiated mainly by the elites—has kept Arab intellectuals in the West completely in the dark and unable to offer radical solution to the crises of the Arab world. As an Arab intellectual living in the West, the author, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, invites his fellow Muslims, or more generally Arab intellectuals to answer the very basic question: why have we failed to produce a critical and constructive Islamic thinking or knowledge to wrestle with the multitude of problems facing Muslims in any of the world’s advanced capitalist societies (xiii)?

Abu-Rabi` sorrowfully describes the condition of Arab intellectuals in the West as “in a state of intellectual and religious disarray” (xiii). The massive influence of cultural policy and ideology of the advanced capitalists of the Western countries have blunted the spirit of criticism in Arab thinkers. In politics, especially after the tragedy September 11, 2001, Arab intellectuals in the West are trapped in what Mahmood Mamdani tries to dispel as “good Muslims and bad Muslims.”¹

¹Mahmood Mamdani Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War and The Roots of Terror New York: Pantheon Books, 2004..

The first category refers to secular intellectuals who support the establishment of the Western model of democracy, which Arab intellectuals in the West cheerfully supported; the later refers to those wrongly categorized as ‘fundamentalist,’ anti-democratic and condemned by all Arab intellectuals. In academia, most students from Arab countries are more interested in science, politics and economics rather than in philosophy and in critical studies. As a result, it is very rare to find a critical thinker among Arabs, except for some well-known, like Edward Said, whose dedication to critical studies needs to be passed on to the young Arab generations. On the other hand, the emergence of ‘Islamization of knowledge,’ backed up by some Arab and Muslim intellectuals such as Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi as an effort to reclaim the glory of Islamic civilization in the past, is correctly questioned by the author as hardly compatible to the problematic issues facing people of the contemporary era.

Abu-Rabi` realistically argues that in order to overcome the dependency of the Arab world on capitalism and the complicated idea of modernization and whole cultural package within it, Arab intellectuals must look at the thinkers who have been involved in that discussion, thinkers such as Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Max Horkheimer, Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas. Due to his position as one who subscribes to the critical theories of those thinkers, the author points his finger at us, his audience, to say that “an amalgamation of the Islamic radical discourse with the Western critical method is critical” (xiii). The entire body of this thick book, then, is both depiction of how the author analyzes the Arab world in his theoretical construct and also an evaluation of the works of the contemporary Arab thinkers who, unfortunately, are not well studied in Western academia. For the last, this book seems to be high praise for those Arab intellectuals who have written in Arabic and some of whom were persecuted, exiled and martyred in their effort to overcome

the crisis in the Arab world. It is also in this sense that this book has its point as a self-criticism addressed to Arab intellectual in the West that, unlike their fellows in the Arab countries, they do not have enough passion to produce the original thought that might transform the whole Arab world. This is the disheartening fact of Arab intellectuals in the West; even though they have been given freedom in every single way, they do not use it properly. At the same time, Arab intellectuals in the old world have to be silent, exiled, or imprisoned by the elite in their country. That is why the author is right to say that the Arab intellectuals have been defeated, as in his dramatic words, “all shades and colors.”

Few would deny that since colonialism brought the idea in nineteenth century, modernity continuous to be a vague concept in most Arab countries and Third World. In this book, Abu-Rabi` tackles in a logical way the very complex problem of modernity faced by Arab societies. The nineteenth century intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din Afghânî or Muhammad ‘Abduh encountered modernity in the best way they could. Nineteenth century thought, however, did not have a comprehensive formulation on how to accept modernity within specific Arab communities. Yet, the nineteenth century intellectuals, as seen in the case of Muhammad ‘Abduh, did not exactly know whether they were dealing with Christianity, modernity, or capitalism (66-67 and 104). Some of them spent their time trying to reinvent metaphysical and ethical issues formulated by medieval intellectuals such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and al-Fârâbî (67). As they looked back at the classical works of the Arab intellectuals, the nineteenth century intellectuals realized that their environment under colonialism and a capitalist economic system was different than that of the medieval era. Modernization brought by Europeans into the Arab world had a tremendous impact not only on the system of knowledge, but also on faith as well. Quoting Samir Amin, Abu-Rabi` is correct

to say that “reason was no longer attached to matter of faith” (67). It was at this moment that many Arab intellectuals found that the congruency of reason and faith as a product of Islamic civilization had expired, so to speak.

After realizing that modernization had had a tremendous impact on the social foundation of Arab societies, politics, and religious life, Arab intellectuals began to respond to modernity in a serious way. In the level of ideology and politics, the responses to colonialism produce at least four colors of movement: Islamist, nationalist, liberalist and Marxist. In response to particular issue in religion, Arab intellectuals were busily involved in the discussion of ‘secularism.’ The debate surrounding secularism was more influential as an idea, rather than as a practical movement. That is to say, secularism was not a single movement, but had an influence on all four previous movements, both in politics and in intellectual analysis. What divided every color or branch of the broad Islamist movement, for example, was the acceptance or rejection of secularism. This same debate divides the anti colonial movement into Islamist, nationalist, liberalist and Marxist, with the choice between theocracy in which God has the ultimate rule (sharî‘ah) and democracy, where man and reason decide the rule and religion is separated from the state.

The entire situation described above shows that the first half of the twentieth century was the era when Arab intellectuals responded to modernity in a more serious way and sometimes with bitterness. One must agree with the author that what we call Arab thought in this era is the natural product of the problem of modernity, including capitalism, imperialism, science and progress. “It is almost hard to find a major contemporary Arab thinker who has been able to escape the problematic of modernity,” the author concludes in his brief words (91). Even the call to implement sharî‘ah in the post-colonial era, referring to the work of ‘Âbid al-Jâbîrî with whom the author seems to

agree, is a direct result of Western intervention in the Arab world, which has no historical precedent in Islamic history. That is to say, Arab discourse has not completely freed itself from modernity.

What are the fruits of ‘modern’ Arab thought since the nineteenth century? It is precisely in answering the question that this book has its significance as self-criticism. After briefly explaining the color of Arab thoughts from the Islamist, the nationalist, the liberalist, and the Marxist as written in the second part of the book, Abu-Rabi` convincingly argues that Arab intellectuals have not yet found a viable formulation of modernism which is based on the social conditions of the Arabs. The author said in his sarcastic words; “the Arab discussion of modernity is guided more by confusion than by anything else” (197). The author also laments that many Arab and Muslim intellectuals “have taken modernity for granted without delving into its violent and cruel beginning” (197). One of the ‘benefits’ of colonialism and capitalism in the Arab world is the shaken situation where many Arabs realized that they live in a backward condition and all people seem to agree that this crisis needs to be overcome. However, implementing modernity, which is Eurocentric in nature, without considering the social condition of the Arab societies, is not a good choice. The author suggests, “modernization cannot be effective without a modernist consciousness and modernist values” (151). It is in this point that the Arab’s liberal and Marxist movements have failed to implement their ideal goals into the Arab people.

While modernism in Europe has been the natural process of the society, modernism in the Arab world is absorbed by the Arab bourgeoisies and the intellectual elite. In relation to secularism, the author refers to the work of Sâdiq Jalâl al-‘Azm, who argues that secularization in the Arab world has been “slow, informal, pragmatic, and full of half measures” (113). He then adds his own conclusion: “the Arab secularist movement failed

to produce hybrid secularism or its own version of independent ‘Arab secularism’” (95). In addition to the case of Islam, or more specifically, the power elite who use Islam to legitimize themselves, modernism is often misunderstood as a threat to ‘Islam,’ which is nothing but fear of the authority being delegitimized by the masses. All these themes become even more complicated after the Arab defeat and the erosion of Nasserism in 1967 marked by American interests as a new hegemonic power in post-colonial era. The need for oil and its derivatives have polarized the Arab world into a ‘strange polarization,’ as “the old world” and “the new world” (105), “one more or less educated but poor (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon), and the other less educated but richer and more modern” (151).

As one who has great concern for the decline of the Arab world, Abu-Rabi` succeeds in putting himself into the main contemporary discussion of Arab intellectuals about the question of secularism, and politic and economic globalization of the United States in the Arab world. It is important to emphasize here that the works of Antonio Gramsci, to mention one of his mentors in critical theory, have a great influence on the way Abu-Rabi` tackles contemporary issues of the Arab intellectuals. To the best of my understanding reading this book, it seems also clear that Abu-Rabi` admires the works of the liberal nationalist Constantine Zurayk and the Arab Islamist Râshid al-Ghannûshî, especially on the issue of modernization and the establishment of a democratic system. It is actually hard to find an explicit statement of Abu-Rabi` proving that he admires the works of those thinkers. In this book, Abu-Rabi` elucidates a wide range of Arab intellectuals, not only Constantine Zurayk and Râshid al-Ghannûshî, but also other Arab thinkers such as Muhammad al-Ghazâlî, ‘Âbid al-Jâbîrî, Fu‘âd Zakariyya, Mahdî ‘Âmil and Abdallah Laroui. However, after reading this book carefully, one would agree that both

Zurayk and Ghannûshî are well appreciated in this book. I would say that Gramsci plays as important role as a critical mentor, while Zurayk and Ghannûshî play roles as the spiritual and the intellectual mentors of Abu-Rabi`.

Although Zurayk and Ghannûshî are discussed in two different chapters in the second part of this book, it is not difficult to discover the parallels between of Abu-Rabi`'s point of view and the two mentors. Abu-Rabi` obviously adopts the thoughts of Zurayk, particularly on the appreciation of Western values in order to achieve renaissance and to overcome the backwardness of the Arab world. From his point of view, Zurayk is the one who trusts science and its ability to modernize the Arab world. However, Zurayk also points out that religion, particularly Islam, has significant power in helping to achieve progress in politics and in Arab civilization. As a nationalist, Zurayk combines the spirit of religion with the idea of nationalism and describes Islam as "a spiritual movement which aims at resurrecting the inner forces of the nation and at realizing its intellectual and spiritual potentialities in order that the nation shall contribute its share to the culture and civilization of the world."² For Zurayk, Islam and nationalism are a perfect combination that would define the character and future direction of the Arab nations. In addition, Zurayk suggests that the Arab nations should be able to use methods and ways developed by Western reason. Zurayk rightly marks that there are two kind of West, the one which is positive and emancipator in nature and the one which is exploitative and destructive. Zurayk emphasizes that Arabs must be able to emulate the Western scientific spirit and discipline and at the same time must be wary of the Western capacity toward exploiting others (300-308).

²This passage is also quoted by the author in this book in page 300.

All those ideal thoughts, with some criticism, have been internalized in the thought of Abu-Rabi`. There are at least three lines in which his points of view are parallel with that of Zurayk. *The first* is about the appreciation of Western intellectual achievements. Abu-Rabi` and Zurayk share the opinion that the West is the most advanced civilization, and that in order to lessen the negative and exploitative impact of Western modernity, Arab masses and intellectuals alike should learn from Western critical thinkers. For Abu-Rabi`, even an Orientalist such as Bernard Lewis is a kind of the blessing in disguise for a scholar of Arab studies. Abu-Rabi` and Zurayk are the secularists who are convinced that religion and nationalism are not contradictory, but should parallel as an ideology. Arab people should be able to combine Islamic terminology and Western solutions; put in more specific words, there should be dialog between nationalism or Arabism and Islamism. Only through that combination would the Arab people be able to define themselves as they are, not as the “Other” as defined by the West, that is to say. *The second* idea parallel with that of Zurayk is that there must one single common vision of Arab secularism, an institution that can bring Arabs into unity before emulating the high advance of Western capitalism. Yet, the secular vision must be protective of religion and the rights of religious people must be guaranteed as well. *The third* idea Abu-Rabi` shares with Zurayk is that Arab people should have self-honesty and self-criticism. As I already mentioned in the first paragraph, this book constitutes a self-criticism by Abu-Rabi` toward Arab intellectual traditions. For him, Zurayk is correct in saying that both the intellectual class and the masses must proceed hand in hand in finding the sacred way of transforming Arab societies. The intellectual is not the only class that has philosophy and power to change, because the masses have the same world view, as illustrated in the work of Paulo Freire, Ali Shari‘ati, and Pierre Bourdieu. However, the author seems to

lament that Zurayk develops his primary concern only in intellectual ideas, not in political life, as if the intellectual life is the only means of salvation for the crises of Arabs.

The other thought that seems inspiring to Abu-Rabi` is explained by Râshid al-Ghannûshî. Ghannûshî, a Tunisian Islamist, is conspicuous in certain way among Arab thinkers, and Abu-Rabi` seemingly buys his ideas. One of Ghannûshî's prominent ideas is the concept of equality. In revealing the concept of equality and freedom, Ghannûshî exhibits some verses of the Qur'ân as the basic source. The notion of "no coercion in religion" is the basic Qur'anic principle that means all citizens in the Islamic state constitute one political ummah, regardless of religious denominations. The concept of ummah does not necessary mean that all the members are Muslim. Ghannûshî explains that the Prophet had showed how religious pluralism could be the expression of one single ummah through Madina constitution. Sharî'ah, as the law divinely inspired with its focus on the common good of all people, cannot be discriminating in nature, or contain two basic laws as shown by some salâfi thinkers, the earlier Mecca period and the later Madina period. According to Ghannûshî, the message of the Qur'ân is comprehensive and considered as the highest degree of theological text.

In relation to the discussion of democracy, Ghannûshî has been criticized by many Islamist thinkers, particularly his idea that democracy is the only means of political authority. Ghannûshî, unlike many Islamists such as the members Jihâd or Jamâ'ah al Islâmiyyah in Egypt as two examples, believes that toppling power is not the primary task of Muslims. For him, the main purpose of his political struggle is how to bring people to live under the supreme law with all communities protected by shâri'a.

What Ghannûshî offers on the topic of the relation between religion and state in the contemporary era, like many other salâfi

movements, has not yet been fully implemented because of the resistance of the status quo. Although the Islamist movements flourishes almost in every corner of Arab land as an alternative movement since the Arab defeat in 1967 and the doubt of nation state and communism, there is only one country that could implement the idea of the Islamist; that is Sudan and its ideolog Hasan al-Turâbî. Abu-Rabi` is right to reconsider 'Âbid al-Jâbîrî's criticism on the itchy question of why the contemporary Islamist could not establish an Islamic solution. In Jâbîrî's thought, all the blunders establishing sharî 'ah are rooted in early political Islam. Quoting Jâbîrî, Abu-Rabi` writes there are three areas that early political Muslim thinking failed to bequeath a strong political system as a ready made solution: "(1) it did not establish clear mechanisms for the appointment of the caliph, nor did it canonize the appointment of successor; (2) it did not specify the duration of the rule of the caliph; (3) it did not specify the functions of the caliph; in a sense, these functions were open-ended" (276). These three points are the area where Arab people and Muslims must engage in order to create a new political imagination that is suitable to contemporary life. That is to say, the discussion of religion and politics and on Islam and secularization is crucial for all Arab people.

Unfortunately, the discussion and the exercise of the new vision were suspended after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. This disastrous moment more and less brought with it tremendous impact on all Islamist movements, not only in the Arab world, but also in the whole Muslim world. The attack on the world's icon of economic and military power gave the United States and its allies, Western countries and Muslim worlds, a reason to attack the Islamist movements.³ The

³See, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, "Introduction" on Montasser Al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, trans. Ahmed Fekry and Sara Nimis (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 13.

American war on terrorism finally devastated Islamists of all shades and colors as happened in Afghanistan and currently in Iraq, and even in Southeast Asia in countries like Indonesia and Filipina. Many Islamists, who have nothing to do with the attacks on American interests, have become and continue to be the victims of vengeance simply because they are Islamists. That is why, for some Marxist like Sadiq Jalal al-Azim, the attack on the twin towers is another stage of the crisis of Muslims. "Is the violence that some factions are practicing, especially Al-Qaeda," he says, "a sign of prosperity? No, it is a sign of a crisis."⁴ In addition, the failures of local power elites to deal with the Islamists in those countries also make the new solution seem to be impracticable. Far from being inclusive, the power elite in Arab and Muslim countries are allergic to the Islamist opposition, and they put the prominent Islamist thinkers in jail. Râshid al-Ghannûshî of Tunisia and Abu Bakar Ba'syir of Indonesia are some of the examples that show how Islamists end in exile and jail.

Arab academic life that has been weakened by the government is the other reason for the death of political imagination. Prominent institutions like Al-Azhâr, Ummul-Quraa, and Dâr al Hadîth al-Hassaniyah have only taught Islam as dogma, rather than as a critical tradition. "Very often," the author says, "these students and their professors have not been accustomed to thinking about the rapport between religion and society, but are taught to think instead about how to impose faith or dogma upon society"(9). As a result these institutions cannot produce critical generations who could create a new vision of modern Islamic movement. The Arab or Muslim world, in this kind of situation, will continue to suffer a lack of

⁴News Article by Al-Jazeera posted on January 27, 2004 at 10:43:22: EST (-5 GMT) from <http://www.splmtoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=574> Downloaded on September 16, 2004

intellectual exercise unless the status quo or the power elite change their policy and provide a healthy academic atmosphere for their intellectuals.

Abu-Rabi` is apparently right in addressing this self-critical book to those Arab and Muslims who reside in the West. The hope of building a new consciousness about how to be religious or Muslim and 'modern' is seen to be more possible in the atmosphere of Western academia, rather than in Arab countries. The Arab and Muslim in the West must enter a new step in discussing Islamic tradition; they must move forward from theorization into the establishment of criticism of Islamic thought and practices. Arab intellectuals should take advantage of the bulk of the academic materials on Middle Eastern studies and Islam produced either by Orientalists or Muslim scholar, given that those materials are unavailable in Arab institutions.

This book, last of all, is necessary not only for Arab or Muslim intellectuals who reside in the West, but is valuable also for students and intellectuals studying in other parts of the Third World: Sub continental or South Asia and Southeast Asia alike. The issues and the critical analysis of the topics in this book may be useful as a grand theory on the study of Islam and the relation between religion and politics in the contemporary era. In my view, students and intellectuals from other the whole Third World have the same problems as the Arabs, especially in the lack of intellectual discourse. Students from Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Third World countries who learn from Arab institutions, which supposedly bring a new consciousness upon their completion of study, unfortunately tend to keep the rusty traditions of Arab institutions and its Islamic thought. At the same time, those who learn in Western institutions tend to be trapped in secular theories without any effort to be critical of their academic sources. The ideas of the intellectuals who are described in this book, such as 'Âbid al-Jâbîrî, Râshid al-Ghannûshî, and Muhammad al-Ghazâlî, can be good examples

of how any effort to find a new vision of modern Islam should always include both Western intellectual advances and the past glory of Islamic civilizations. The disheartening fact is that those intellectuals are not well studied even in the Arab world. Students from the Third worlds, sadly enough, are only familiar with French or German philosophers, American anthropologists, and classical ideas of Muslim thinkers, without trying to look to alternative ideas from contemporary Arab or Muslims intellectuals. I myself argue that appreciation of both American and European advances in thought and contemporary Arab thought would create a new arsenal in the study of religion and political science, and the whole Third World's areas of studies.●