

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY
MOROCCAN THOUGHT: THE POLITICAL READINGS
OF °ABD AL-SALĀM YĀSĪN AND MUḤAMMAD
°ĀBID AL-JĀBRĪ

Juan A. Macías Amoretti

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

This article considers the dual roles that Islam and democracy play within political theories of the most representative ideological trends in Morocco: political Islam as conceived by the Islamist leader °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn (b. 1928) and Arab nationalism by the rationalist philosopher, Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī (b. 1935).

Introduction

The perspectives from which Moroccan elites and intellectuals have analysed contemporary Moroccan politico-religious thought are wide-ranging, and these perspectives are mirrored in the consequent evolution of ideologies. The long, structural crisis that has affected the country, especially since the 1970s and 1980s, has contributed to an increasingly intense reflection among political thinkers, who have tried to tackle thorny subjects linked to contemporaneity, both from diverse standpoints, as well as through different methodologies. There has been a general tendency for this reflection to express itself in the notion of ‘being’.¹ In terms of identity, this is typically associated with ideas of being Arab, being Muslim and/or being Moroccan. Such philosophical reflection has important political implications.

This article takes an analytical approach to two of the ideological trends that have marked—and continue to mark—the intellectual debate embedded in contemporary political thought in Morocco: that of political Islam by the *shaykh* °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn (b. 1928), and that of Moroccan-Arab nationalism by the rationalist philosopher, Muḥammad

¹ The problem of ‘Being’, in philosophical terms, related to the problem of identity within Arab-Islamic thought can be found in the origin of contemporary thought in Morocco, especially in some of its most important philosophers. See, for example, Muḥammad °Azīz Laḥbābī, *Min al-ka’in ilā l-shajs*, (Cairo: Dār al-ma°ārif, 1962).

°Ābid al-Jābrī (b. 1935).

According to the Moroccan scholar Muḥammad Shaqīr,² Moroccan political thought presents a series of particular features that characterise it. The first of these features is its pragmatic nature, which is an immediate consequence of the narrow relation of a certain thought with an author beyond fixed or previously established trends. This pragmatism puts a burden on the exercise of interpreting a mode of thought because, in several cases, the personal circumstances of an author have a decisive influence on his conceptualisation. Nevertheless, the thinking is considered coherent because it is adapted to historic and socio-political circumstances, and is linked to questions of political leadership.

To a certain extent, this was an answer to the existing diversity of trends present in a Moroccan context that were manifested through the shaping of a series of very different political organisations, the tools that might put into political practice the theory expressed in the works by the various thinkers. In this sense, it should be noted that both, °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn and Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī, have taken part in political action (*°amal siyāsī*) through the organisations to which they belong: al-°Adl wa-l-Iḥsān and the PFSU respectively.³

Another particular feature of contemporary Moroccan thought is its discussion of particular politico-religious concepts. The principal axis of this debate pivots around the epistemological search for key concepts within a setting of reflection in which the choice of language and conceptualisation are not arbitrary, but rather are conscious choices that, in most cases, imply a disjuncture with the past.

Since these are defining trends of a particular thought structure in contemporary Morocco—and bearing in mind the interpretation of Islam as a basic methodological foundation, even in a rationalist thinker as al-Jābrī—it is necessary to mention the influence of *taṣawwuf* and *salafiyya*, and especially when discussing Yāsīn's works. Obviously, both represent long-term trends that stand out from one another, and are even in conflict. This is the result of a particular historical path, as well as of a political

² Muḥammad Shaqīr, *Al-Fikr al-siyāsī l-Maghribī l-mu'āṣir*. (Casablanca: Afriqiyā l-sharq, 2005), 27.

³ Al-Ittiḥād al-Ishṭirākī li-l-Quwwāt al-Sha°biyya (Popular Forces Socialist Union, PFSU)

interpretation (it could be even called ‘non-interpretation’ in some cases)⁴ of contemporary socio-political contexts that are quite particular, but that in Morocco are shaped by the omnipresent political and religious legitimacy of the *makhzen*.⁵ However, both *taṣawwuf* and *salafīyya* have played important roles in contemporary Moroccan political thought putting a burden on particular characteristics of an ‘Islam’ that has become apparent in every field: cultural, religious, social and, above all, political.

‘Abd al-Salām Yāsīn: democracy versus ‘shūrā-cracy’

Any approach to the ideology of political Islam in Morocco must take account of the contribution of ‘Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, who is undeniably considered the main axis of Islamist thought in the country, the most representative of its thinkers, and one of the better-known Islamist leaders in the Arab-Muslim world. The interest in Yāsīn lies, inter alia, in his charisma which has enabled him to develop and put into practice his own conceptual system that can be called *minhājī* through an associative and activist structure of the *Jamā‘at al-‘Adl wa-l-Iḥsān* of which he is founder, leader, guide and ideologist.

‘Abd al-Salām Yāsīn combines epistemological elements of Sufi knowledge with a conceptualisation of the purest *salafī* orthodoxy, thus shaping a methodological framework that is explicitly developed in his concept of *minhāj* (‘path’ or ‘road’). As for the Sufi element of his thought, this is related to spirituality as the collective, individual and vital dynamics of the Muslim individual. On the other hand, *salafī* thought in

⁴ This ‘non-interpretation’, as Moroccan sociologist Abdessamad Dialmy argues, concerns the role of some Sufi brotherhoods in Moroccan politics. By refusing to take part in political debates, especially in the colonial and pre-independence period, some of them contributed to legitimising established power. See Abdessamad Dialmy, ‘L’Islamisme marocain entre révolution et intégration’, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 110 (April–June 2000), 5–27.

⁵ The *makhzen* (Arabic: *al-makhzan*) etymologically means ‘storehouse’. Its political meaning is related, in the medieval Maghrib, to the Public Administration under the control of the Sultan. Nowadays, it refers to the set formed by the Monarchy and the State establishment, whose networks touch all levels in contemporary Morocco: institutional, economic, social and political. The concept and its wider implications in Moroccan political culture in terms of political clientelism have been analysed by Hind ‘Arūb, *Al-Makhzan fī-l-thaqāfa al-siyāsiyya al-Maghribiyya* (Rabat: Al-Najāh al-jadīda, 2004).

Yāsīn becomes evident mainly in his radical positioning with regard to his political orientation and to modernity in general.⁶ Therefore, this is another temporal element that affects the political interpretation of his texts and the way they are inserted within historical and contemporary Moroccan political thought.

The essence of the thought system formulated by Yāsīn with what could be called '*minhājī* methodology'. This methodology is the frame within which the discourse of Yāsīn, as well as the political and social action of the *Jamā'at al-ʿAdl wa-l-Iḥsān* is developed. The concept of *minhāj*, which is the title of his most important work, *al-Minhāj al-nabawī*,⁷ summarises the dynamism leading the dialectic relationship between present and future in Yāsīn's thought. *Minhāj* is a dynamic concept that etymologically expresses movement, given that a path leads from one place to another and, in order to walk along that path, it is necessary to move forward through it. Even if we consider it in theological terms as 'right guidance' related to Quranic *ṣirāṭ*, Yāsīn uses the concept of *minhāj* with a very clear meaning of 'forward movement' in political terms. It also expresses the methodology itself since *minhāj* refers to 'method' or 'programme'. Thus, the selected term is key not just to understanding which path to tread, but also the way of doing so. As Yāsīn states:

We prefer the word *minhāj*, Quranic and Prophetic, to denote with it not only the method (*minhāj*) that links scientifically the truth in the Quran and the *Sunna* with the life of Muslims, but also to express the strict observance of what God orders in His Book and the loyalty to the Prophet's *Sunna* in an individual and collective, private and public, spiritual, moral and daily, religious and social, political and economic way: in one word, in a 'divine' (*rabbānī*) way. However, this does not mean that we intend to build an organisation that remains static and dreamy looking into our glorious past, under the aegis of Muḥammad and of the *Rāshidūn* Caliphs, but one that intends to establish, generations after them, the virtuous Caliphate of God and his Prophet on Earth. In this way, education (*tarbiyya*) and *jihād* will be the elements to which to turn with the intention of restoring the Caliphate following the prophetic method (*minhāj al-nubuwwa*) after substitute and tyrannical government in power for long centuries'.⁸

As for democracy, Yāsīn expounds a theory according to which it is

⁶ See ʿAbd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Al-Islām wa-l-ḥadātha* (Oujda: Al-Hilāl, 2000).

⁷ See ʿAbd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Al-Minhāj al-nabawī: tarbiyya wa-tanzīm wa-zaḥf*, 4th ed. (S.I: Dār al-afāq, 2001).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

understood as a system of social and political organisation that, although established along specific 'human' (*basharī*) lines, allows the State to rule in peaceful coexistence with its institutions.⁹ Therefore, this is a wide theory that accords with the broad definitions of this concept in the West. According to Muḥammad Ḍarīf, this first theoretical approach to democracy outlined by Yāsīn must be observed on a strictly pragmatic level (*bragmāṭī*), as there is no contradiction at all between this definition and Islamic premises, except for the human origin of legislation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in this concept it could be possible to embed rights and freedoms that, being in line with Islamic tradition, are recognised as universal and democratic values. Yāsīn adds, however, that these are made on condition that a) 'man is not revered as the *god* of the system' b) an Islamic government proceeding from God is guaranteed, and that c) it acts always according to premises of Islamic law, with special attention to the use of the *shūrā* as the fundamental political institution and moral horizon.¹¹

On the other hand, in the second theory Yāsīn offers, he reveals an aspect he considers fundamental to democracy in general: from his point of view, in the democratic system there is a complete negation of God and of the Islamic religious principles as communal, individual and vital foundations. These are merely reduced to another 'matter' (*amr*) within the system. Thus, from a basic level that concerns the same principles of the democratic system (*mabda'ī*), there is a clear and unavoidable identification of democracy and laicism, expressed in a pointed way: *lā dīmuqrāṭiyya illā l-lā'ikiyya* ('the only democracy is a secular one'), at least when referring to the Western democratic system and its delegates in the Islamic world.¹²

The identification of democracy with secularism remains present in all Yāsīn's work given that laicism is assumed to be an inherent characteristic of democracy and thus inseparable from its theoretical and practical development. Therefore, if we bear in mind this epistemological

⁹ °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Al-Shūrā wa-l-dīmuqrāṭiyya* (Casablanca: Al-Ufuq, 1996), 43.

¹⁰ Muḥammad Ḍarīf, *Al-Islāmiyyūn al-Maghāriba: ḥisābāt al-siyāsiyya fī-l-ʿamal al-Islāmī, 1969–1999* (Casablanca: Manshūrāt al-majalla al-Maghribiyya li-ʿilm al-ijtimāʿ al-siyāsī, 1999), 113.

¹¹ See °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Al-Shūrā*, 11.

¹² °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Ḥiwār maʿa al-fuḍalāʾ al-dīmuqrāṭiyyīn* (Casablanca: Al-Ufuq, 1994), 62.

rapprochement, then, according to Yāsīn, the democratic system cannot be exported to Muslim countries as it stands without distinguishing democratic practice in Western countries from traditional social and spiritual values present in the Islamic culture. Furthermore, these values must become apparent in the political field as well.¹³ Thus, *shūrā* appears as a recurring and basic point of reference being generally understood as follows:

Shūrā is the word used within the Qurʾān to convey ‘consultation’ (*al-istishāra*), that is, the effort of interpreting, adapting and understanding in order to put into practice the revealed Law (*al-Sharīʿa al-munzala*) that man has no right to amend.¹⁴

The *shūrā*, from a political point of view, is a type of mutual consultation between ruler and governed people which affects all aspects related to society, politics, culture or economy that are key factors in the development of a Sunni Muslim nation, always having the *Sharīʿa* as its legislative foundation and as its horizon. At a discursive level, *shūrā* is understood as two dimensional: one dimension being reason (*ʿaql*) and the other, revelation (*waʿī*). From the approach of the Muslim as a conscious individual who has also been endowed with reason, and who is necessarily inserted into the heart of the *umma*, *shūrā* is understood as an individual and communitarian commitment. Once again, theology and politics come together in the conceptualisation drawn by Yāsīn, who, when introducing his formulation of the *shūrā*, starts from a strictly religious field in order to set out the political connotations of the term. Thus, the *ḥisba*—understood as the link between religious commitment and the political field—is offered as the moral support for the *shūrā*, as well as the guarantor of its compliance.¹⁵ From a philological standpoint, it should be noted that Yāsīn not only defends *shūrā* against democracy from a merely ideological perspective, but also from a linguistic one. Thus, the Arabic term *dīmuqrāṭiyya*, whose root is obviously not Arabic, but Greek, is substituted and superseded in Yāsīn’s project by the syntagm

¹³ Muḥammad Darīf, *Al-Islāmiyyūn al-Maghāriba*, 116.

¹⁴ ʿAbd al-Salām Yāsīn. *Al-Islām wa-l-ḥadātha*, 300.

¹⁵ The *ḥisba* institution refers back to the Quranic commitment: *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar* (Qurʾān 3:104, 7:157, 9:71 and others), that is, ‘command that which is just and forbid which is evil’. This constitutes a moral framework related to the political action within Islamic thought. See, Cl. Cahen and M. Talbi, ‘Ḥisba’, *EP*, vol. 3, 485–489.

ḥukm al-shūrā, which could be translated as ‘the government of the *shūrā*’, or indeed, ‘*shūrā*-cracy’ given that it corresponds to a neologism that intends to define a new conceptual reality both ideologically and linguistically.

It is significant to observe that—given the lack of concision on the practical development of the *shūrā* in Yāsīn’s texts, which is left at the mercy of *ijtihād* (personal interpretation), particularly as far as any political and social precision is concerned—the economy is treated as a basic mainstay for any further political development. This ‘interim materialism’, which is related to the setting of *shūrā*-cracy is also tackled through *minhājī* methodology with the aim of clarifying previous foundations that will eventually lead to a divine and prophetic government which, in Yāsīn’s thought, will be represented by the same system. Therefore, he finds that the *shūrā* and the development of *shūrā*-cracy are not only principles of action established in the Qur’ān, but also that it is offered as an historical religious, cultural, political and economic commitment and as the response of Muslims to Western hegemony as their only producer and exporter of ideologies and socio-political systems.¹⁶

Shūrā is a key word in Yāsīn’s discourse and a symbol of the conceptual and cultural re-appropriation of Islamic society, and of the active and dynamic principle of the whole political development in the *Dār al-Islām*. In order to attain this, *ijtihād* and *jihād* are privileged as methodological tools. On the concept and practice of *ijtihād*, °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn makes two claims. First, that it has a legal-religious dimension, given that this is one of the sources of *fiqh*, and thus of interpretation, study and analysis of the *sharī‘a*. Secondly, that it has a socio-political dimension, in virtue of being the institution that guarantees that Muslims have access to the political scene and to social, economic and cultural development. Therefore, he uses it as a distinctive methodological tool.

This is the way he understands this concept when he uses it as a privileged method of analysing contemporary socio-political contexts, in which both dimensions concur constantly. Likewise, when analysing the context of contemporary Morocco as a key setting of *fitna*, ruled by an unlawful and tyrannical government (*al-ḥukm al-jabrī*), Yāsīn considers that *jihād* is necessary as a method of changing the system once and for

¹⁶ Qur’ān 42:38.

all, and for turning it into a just Islamic system. Nevertheless, in Yāsīn's political conceptualisation, *jihād* is understood as a non-violent 'struggle' with strong spiritual roots and developed in every sphere of the individual and community life, paying special attention to the educational field. Although *jihād* is a comprehensive and global non-violent, but educative, action carried out in several progressive stages, Yāsīn does not reject the possibility of an armed *jihād* if the context of oppression would require so, as happens in Palestine or as happened in Iran in the late 1970s.

In °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn's political theory, there is a clear identification between Islam as a political development throughout the State (*dawla*) and the mechanisms (*siyāsa*) described. In this sense, the number of references to political content in Yāsīn's works is remarkable. Such references point out the historical need of providing an actual Islamic frame of reference, both moral and legal, to the political practice exerted by the State, in a way that is described as an Islamic state (*dawla Islāmiyya*).¹⁷ Thus, all his political theory is destined to settle the historical and methodological development of the final transition that begins with the tyrannical and oppressive state (*al-ḥukm al-jabrī*) up to the Islamic caliphate (*al-khilāfa al-Islāmiyya*), constituted by the union of several Islamic states.

Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī: Nahḍa and Arab democracy

Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī is one of the most important thinkers in contemporary Morocco, and one of the most well-known and respected in the wider Arab world too.¹⁸ Al-Jābrī is especially important because of his use of a specific methodology that is fundamentally founded on reason (*°aql*)¹⁹ beyond any other theoretical or ideological horizon in an attempt

¹⁷ The categorical terms *ḍarūrī* ('necessary') and *tārīkhī* ('historical') are used by Yāsīn to refer to his project as a historical imperative which must be put into practice. See °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Nazarāt fī-l-fiqh wa-l-tārīkh* (Tanta: Dār al-bashīr, 1995).

¹⁸ Certain intellectual movements and contemporary thinkers claim that the philosophical legacy (*falsafa*) of the Arab thought (*fīkr*), such as al-Jābrī and other Moroccan thinkers, can be referred to as 'The Philosophical School of Rabat'. See Chikh Bouamrane and Louis Gardet, *Panorama de la pensée islamique* (Paris: Sindbad, 1984).

¹⁹ The rediscovery of classical Arab philosophical thought, in which reason (*°aql*) is considered the fundamental axis, is the starting point of al-Jābrī's political thought. See Juan Antonio Pacheco Paniagua. *El pensamiento árabe contemporáneo* (Seville: Mergablum, 1999); and Miguel Cruz Hernández.

to avoid aprioristic references in his reflection. Thus, reason is understood as the principal mechanism of analysis and explanation of the world, of history, and of Arab thought.

Connecting with the wider framework of Arab thought, al-Jābrī establishes a relationship of dialectical necessity between the historical development of that thought and a renovation of contemporary Arab conscience (*al-waʿī l-ʿArabī*) as the centre of a new development of what he calls ‘Arabness’ (*al-ʿArab wa-l-ʿUrūba*) in all fields, including the political one. This renovation is the axis around which his theory of the Arab *nahḍawī* project is developed, fundamentally anchored in the full use of the rational potential of the *turāth* (Arab cultural legacy). Thus, he claims:

When we talk about the Arab *nahḍawī* project (*al-mashrūʿ al-nahḍawī l-ʿarabī*), we talk about a complete and general project; a project that tries to upgrade the *Nahḍa* in all fields: economy, society, politics and culture, and to originate ways and means to carry out its objectives and aspirations, using different types of readjustments and resources.²⁰

This *nahḍawī* project can be broken down into two parts: theoretical and methodological. On the one hand, it refers back to the historical Arab *Nahḍa* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the other, al-Jābrī states that it is necessary to make a practical and methodological effort to adapt the concepts and the ideas of the *Nahḍa* to contemporary means in order to achieve ‘unity’ and ‘progress’ (*al-waḥda wa-l-taqaddum*). From a political, social, cultural and economic point of view, this is the fundamental purpose of his project which also distinguishes it from other contemporary socio-political movements. According to al-Jābrī, Nationalism and the ‘national idea’ (*al-fikra al-qawmiyya*) are also essentially important in order to tackle the tricky question of the essence and the identity of the Arabs. In this way, he argues, Arab nationalism through the notion of the Arab *umma*, allows the integration of different peoples and tribes in the same common project. This is a key component in the expansion of the ‘Arab conscience’ (*al-waʿī l-ʿarabī*), the necessity of the unity of the *umma*, and, derived from this necessity, the settlement

Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico, 3rd vol. (Madrid: Alianza, 1996), 785–789.

²⁰ Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābrī, *Al-Mashrūʿ al-nahḍawī l-ʿarabī. Murājaʿa naqdiyya*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 2000), 12.

of a united Arab State.²¹

However, al-Jābrī himself claims that it is impossible to establish any kind of political project in that sense without approaching the question of culture (*al-thaqāfa*), since he feels that culture is not only the environment of any political project, but also one of its foundations. Thus, from the cultural point of view, Arab unity is represented by the decisive role of Arabic as the basic tool of communication among diverse Arab peoples and countries. Therefore, that culture which is denominated 'national' by al-Jābrī (*al-thaqāfa al-waṭaniyya*)²² holds an important position in the development of his political thought, since it constitutes one of the bases of any political and social development in the Arab world, which should be anchored in the profound recognition of one's own 'Arabness' and the 'Arab conscience' (*al-wa'ī l-^carabī*) in general. Society and the masses are in general considered by al-Jābrī the main subject of this development, as opposed to the position within the traditional analyses carried out by the elites.

In short, the basis of his *mashrū^c nahḍawī* (*nahḍawī* project) are structured around a double project: a critical project (*mashrū^c naqdī*) and an intellectual project (*mashrū^c fikrī*)²³. Starting from an analysis based on three methodological elements (structure, history and ideology), these seeks to achieve a break (*qaṭī^ca*) in the understanding of the *turāth* as an cultural identity and political legacy that might eventually allow Arabs access to their own sense of modernity.

As for the question of Islam and politics, the most outstanding conclusion that can be extracted from al-Jābrī's reading is that political thought cannot truly be critical except through the independence of reason

²¹ Ibid., 87. In this sense, it seems that al-Jābrī does endorse the most classical theses of the Arab nationalism, at least from the ideological point of view, not as much from the methodological one. See Sadok Belaid. 'Nationalisme, arabisme et islamisme dans l'idéologie politique du Maghreb contemporain'. *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* 24 (1985), 35–51.

²² Cultural crisis is considered by al-Jābrī as the same crisis of Arab reason. Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī, *Ishkāliyyāt al-fīkr al-^carabī l-mu^cāṣir* (Casablanca: Mu^oasasa bi-nashra li-l-ṭabā^ca wa-l-nashr, 1989), 57. On the influence of the crisis of Arab and Islamic culture in the socio-political development of the contemporary Arab world, see Hichem Djaït, *La Crise de la culture islamique* (Tunis: Cérès, 2005).

²³ Nelly Lahoud, *Political Thought in Islam. A Study in Intellectual Boundaries* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), 39.

from the strictly religious sphere, as well as through the discontinuity (*qaṭīʿa*) with political elements preconceived as Islamic. He considers that assuming a series of historical political institutions as 'Islamic' does limit the epistemological exercise of reflection about the political theory. Thus, Islam is understood in a religious way, but never in a political one. Nevertheless, al-Jābrī considers Islam as an ethical development and, therefore, as a possible moral framework of the State. So he seeks not to sacralise the historical and legal development of Islamic law, but to recapture its content with a conscious and, above everything, rational sense once more.

Democracy is also analysed from a rational point of view. Starting with historical and etymological ideas, al-Jābrī, rescues the classic meaning of the term 'democracy' as 'the government of the people, by the people and for the people' (*ḥukm al-shaʿb nafsi-hi bi-nafsi-hi*). He argues the difficulty of maintaining this definition without appealing to the 'State' (*dawla*) as a system of organisation, without which this socio-political development is not possible because it must have two elements to enable it: the existence of the ruling part (*al-ḥākim*) and the governed part (*al-maḥkūm*), as well as the development of relationships between them.²⁴ The idea, therefore, is acceptable, but it needs a practical political development that can shape and adapt it to a given society.

Al-Jābrī draws a distinction between 'political democracy' (*al-dīmuqrāṭiyya al-siyāsiyya*) and 'social democracy' (*al-dīmuqrāṭiyya al-ijtimāʿiyya*), establishing a dialectical relationship between them, since political democracy cannot be applied correctly as an effective model of government without dealing with social progress. Nor can issues of social democracy be settled without having appropriate political structures.²⁵ Therefore, both types of democracy are valid and necessary.²⁶ The turning point for the change is found by al-Jābrī in the self-awareness of the people (*al-tawʿiyya*) and in their subsequent engaging in the fight for public freedoms, that from political democracy will reach social

²⁴ Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābrī, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya wa-ḥuqūq al-insān* (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1994), 15.

²⁵ This dialectical relationship between both types of democracy makes al-Jābrī remember, in a very illustrative way, the unfathomable riddle of 'the chicken and the egg', for which it is very difficult to know which is the type of democracy that can engender the other, pointing out the necessity of complementing each other. *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25

democracy as their main objective. This way, once reached, means and ends will constitute the basis of the whole democratic structure, which is seen as a demand and as a historical aspiration of the Arab peoples.²⁷ This process should begin with an analysis of contemporary Arab reality and recourse to the *turāth* as a way of finding their own path.

It is also important to highlight al-Jābrī's democratic consideration as a national necessity (*al-dīmuqrāṭiyya ʿarabiyya waṭaniyya qutriyya*). Nevertheless, it is as well considered an Arab necessity, since Arab unity (*al-waḥda al-ʿarabiyya*), which is the ultimate aim of some trends of Arab nationalism as Pan-Arabism, and its political program (which al-Jābrī supports ideologically, but not methodologically), will not be able to be reached completely until all Arab state structures are controlled by new democratic elites in each country. In addition, they should guard the basic values of the democratic system: equality (*musāwa*) and justice (*ʿadl*).

The huge distance between his philosophical conception of the 'Arab Being' and the application of a political system or, according to his own conceptualisation, between 'thought' (*fīkr*) and 'reality' (*wāqiʿ*)²⁸ is evident, since although the 'Arab conscience' (*al-waʿī l-ʿArabī*) is unique in the variety of its Arab and Islamic components, in political outline the necessary separation between 'State' and 'religion' is imposed as a guarantee of development, freedom and ideological pluralism within a secular Arab State. The reconciliation of both elements in the theoretical development of al-Jābrī is made by the application of democracy and the autonomy of the political field in opposition to any totalitarian conception, considered as an unquestionable necessity, although with its own characteristics.²⁹ Such a national analysis, always starting from reason, is also essential for the construction of a specifically Arab democratic model, and seeks to solve the problems of each country, overcoming any ideological and conceptual divisions.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābrī, *Ishkāliyyāt al-fīkr*, 13.

²⁹ One of these nuances is the Arab ideological basis, and the *turāthī* and *nahḍawī* analyses of contemporary and future Arab reality, which would give sense to the whole democratic development in the Arab countries. See Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābrī, *Al-Khiṭāb al-ʿArabī l-muʿāṣir: dirāsa taḥlīliyya naqdiyya*, 6th ed. (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1999), 83.

³⁰ Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābrī, *Wijha naẓar: nahwa iʿāda bināʾ qadāyā l-fīkr al-ʿarabī l-muʿāṣir*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 2004), 95–115.

Yāsīn's and al-Jābrī's political readings compared and contrasted

Starting with the biographies and works of °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn and Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī, there is an obvious convergence in their basic attitudes in relation to the society to which they belong. Both thinkers assume a vital responsibility through the interpretation of their own context, where they were born and where they developed intellectually. It can be also said that the depth of this first interpretation of contemporary Moroccan socio-political context is the one responsible for the origin and continuity of their respective reflections, since it is a critical interpretation that comes from an evident trauma caused by the crisis this reality is going through.

'Education' (*tarbiyya*, *ta°līm*), 'culture' (*thaqāfa*) and 'identity' (*huwiyya*) are important concepts in the arguments of Yāsīn and al-Jābrī. Both thinkers establish different ideological perspectives to elaborate a dialectical framework that joins these three concepts, and which becomes a point of reference of their respective positions. While Yāsīn considers that education is the basis of every socio-political development towards the construction of a fair Islamic society, supported by unquestionable Islamic identity, al-Jābrī believes that education is also indispensable but as a first step along the way to reach the emancipation of Arab society, as well as being the basis of 'Arab conscience' and 'national culture'.

It is also important to point out the significance that both °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn and Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī confer on historical readings and to the particular conception of 'time' as a recurrent theme of their ideologies.³¹ In this sense, the conception that each of the authors have with regard to 'history' is similar, since it appears in their works as a fundamental parameter of their interpretations and analyses. 'History' is conceived as a series of lineally positioned events that, depending on each ideological reading, aims towards some specific point in the future at which the development of their respective projects will become present. This way, both share the necessity of undertaking these projects as a historical task (*al-waḍīfa al-tārīkhiyya*)³², fully inserted into the present.

³¹ The historicity of thought and ideological speeches is not an exclusive concern of both authors, but rather one of the most pressing questions in contemporary Arab thought, especially in relation to the importance of the *turāth* and the *salafīyya* as central concepts. In this sense, see Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 2003), 84–99.

³² The concept of *al-waḍīfa al-tārīkhiyya* ('the historical task') is specific to al-Jābrī's thought, although the historical importance of the action at the

Methodologically, some of the elements that differ between the authors have to be highlighted, bearing in mind that their respective projects arise with the same vocation, approximately at the same time and, therefore, in a very similar context, and that they are both constituted as dynamic methods. That is to say, they require a conscious and committed analysis of reality and a certain setting in ideological practice. Both projects are also constituted as ‘methodologies of the change’ which propose a reading of the past and an analysis of the present. This reading and analysis, generally by means of rupture and continuity processes, can solve the problems, beginning with the problem of identity and the reflection on the Arab-Islamic being itself and its situation in the world and in the immediate socio-political reality. Thus, among the main differences that separate the methods of Yāsīn and al-Jābrī, that is to say, the *minhājī* and the *nahḍawī* methods, the following are of particular note:

Epistemological horizons

Yāsīn’s epistemological horizon is the Islamic Revelation (*al-wahī l-Islāmī*). His conception of the world and of history is mainly spiritual and religious, since the content of the revelation is considered as the truth in absolute terms, thus having obvious ideological implications. So, while considering his thought on the side absolute truth, it is not necessary to argue anything, given the authority of the Revelation, which constitutes the ultimate and recurrent reference of his line of argument. On the other hand, Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī’s epistemological horizon is reason (*‘aql*). This being the *leit motif* of all his reflection, he continues to consider Islamic spiritual development as an ethical reference of social, political and cultural evolution of the Arabs.

Ideological and historical framework

In the case of Yāsīn, his very framework is the ‘prophetic path’ (*al-minhāj al-nabawī*).³³ His reference model is therefore deeply Islamic, since it is based on emulation of the Prophet Muḥammad’s conduct as shown through the Revelation. In the case of al-Jābrī, the ideological framework is also directly related to the terminology that frames his project, that is, the ‘Arab *nahḍawī* project’ (*al-mashrū‘ l-nahḍawī l-‘Arabī*).³⁴ As it happens with the ‘prophetic path’ of Yāsīn, the title of

present time to modify the future as a necessity is also present in Yāsīn. See Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī, *Wijha naẓar*, 114.

³³ See °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, *Al-Minhāj*, 11-13.

³⁴ See Muḥammad °Ābid al-Jābrī, *Al-Mashrū‘ al-nahḍawī*, 12-15.

this work—which can be applied to his project on Morocco and the whole Arabness—suggests a double ideological and historical dimension. Thus, ‘Islamicity’ and ‘Arabness’ are constituted as basic parameters, respectively, of each one of the intellectual and political developments of both authors, both represented, in a symbolic way, by the use of Arabic as their privileged medium of expression.

Methodological tools

From a political point of view, the methodology and the conceptualisation of °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn’s works are based on religious terms, but by bringing the speech, terms and language used up to date. Al-Jābrī’s methodology is strictly based on rationalistic and scientific tools. The difference between the purely philosophical thought of al-Jābrī and his ideological reflections on the political field does not only stem from the external expression of his postulates, but also from his critical positioning.

Socio-political patterns

In the case of °Abd al-Salām Yāsīn, the socio-political pattern that once again has to be built or rebuilt in real and symbolic terms, makes the development of his reflections contingent on it, since he takes an ideological position towards the construction of a particular pattern: the *shūrā*-cratic state. On the other hand, al-Jābrī assumes the necessity of undertaking a process dedicated to establish democracy as the only possible political framework of development. However, he does not defend an imported Western democracy subjected to their same rules and premises, but rather—aware of the diversity and the richness of the Arab civilisation as an idea and a reality—he seeks to construct a theoretical, Arab model for democracy.

From a strictly political perspective, the projects of Yāsīn and al-Jābrī appear as alternatives for change that begin from the political context of contemporary Morocco but which aim to build a political future based on the transformation of the relationships of power and the methods of exercising it. The analysis of the State and its configuration conform to a common framework in both thinkers because both reach the conclusion that justice, as the main objective of a political structure, does not take place in the current State configuration and, what is more, it does not have any possibility to be part of its future ethical evolution either. As such, a transformation of the political system is essential, although each thinker assumes a very different programme of references.

In the analyses undertaken by Yāsīn and al-Jābrī, Islam, *shūrā* and democracy play central roles for they are the concepts around which their respective political projects are constructed. They also have evident ideological meanings, since they set up a certain conception of reality from different epistemological horizons. They are, therefore, used as ideological emblems, but this does not reduce the validity of their analysis. On the contrary, ideological commitment is understood as a requirement of the political project. Their analyses of the role of civil society (*al-mujtama^c al-madanī*) and of human rights (*huqūq al-insān*) are illustrative of their respective theoretical developments, which range from rejection to critical assimilation. Indeed, the same thing might be observed in their view on the Palestinian conflict as a symbol of the crisis and hope for change in the Arab and Islamic world.

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