NARRATIVES OF ARAB SECULARISM

Politics, Feminism and Religion

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SCIENCE AND PROGRESS

The Arab Intelligentsia and Secular Interpretations

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In most Arab countries, policies of modernisation and reform led to the emergence of new social groups in both civil society institutions and the state apparatus. Such groups included in their ranks writers, journalists, military officers, medical doctors, teachers, engineers, accountants and civil servants. Their members replaced, at a steady pace, in social and economic life, religious men and leaders, be they attached to a mosque or a church. The advent of political leaders such as Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt, coupled with the rise of mentors of the Reform movement in the Ottoman empire at large, created such a social group that began to articulate its ideas and put forward new programmes. These ideas and programmes were generally secular in their content and intent. Although they may refer to religion in positive terms or make use of some religious statements or precepts, it was obvious that a newly formed and growing stratum of educated men and women was edging its way towards the top arena of cultural production, offering at the same time innovative approaches associated with subjects that pushed traditional learning into marginal positions.

Science and Knowledge

By the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of objective knowledge, based on rigorous procedures, critical assessments, experimental investigations and direct observation or experience, permeated all public debates in Arabic newspapers, magazines, books, school lessons and learned discourses. In other words, objective knowledge was equated with scientific comprehension, or simply *'ilm*: meaning science in a broad sense, akin more accurately to *Wissenschaft* in the German language, rather than the practice of science in its more restricted sense. In this respect, any study that involves 'the systematic pursuit of knowledge, learning, and scholarship' was dubbed *'ilm*, with the end-result that two realms were gradually separated: religion and scientific knowledge. This pursuit embraced both

social science topics and purely scientific or technical subjects. Moreover, to be a practitioner of *'ilm* denoted the adoption of a version of secularity that had no qualms in differentiating and distinguishing worldly affairs and metaphysical beliefs, thereby relegating the latter to the domain of faith and promoting the former to serve the proper interests of human activities.

Writing in 1900 about the advent of "the new woman", Qasim Amin (1863–1908), the Egyptian judge and social reformer, opened his new book on the subject in these words:

> The new woman is one of the fruits of modern civilization. Her appearance in the West was a consequence of the scientific discoveries that freed the human mind from the powers of delusion, suspicion, and superstition, providing all individuals with control over their lives and charting for them a path to follow. Such changes occurred because science explored all issues, examined every idea, and rejected any proposition not proved to be in the public interest. This search resulted in abolishing the power of the clergy, eliminating the privileges of nobility, establishing a constitution for monarchies and rulers, and freeing black people from the bondage of slavery. It finally challenged most of the privileges that men had defined as theirs, which in effect had implied that women were not equal to men in any sphere.[1]

It is a statement that clearly adopts this novel *episteme*. Amin singles out "scientific discoveries" and "science" as the main factors that underlay all the positive changes in modern societies. Although religion is not explicitly mentioned, his emphasis on emancipating reason from delusions and superstitions and empowering individuals to determine their own destiny, coupled with "abolishing the power of the clergy", leaves no doubt as to his secularist preferences.

Amin contrasts "knowledge" with "ignorance". He then goes on to show how this knowledge should be refined on the basis of a critical sense of history.[2] Unlike his earlier approach whereby normative and traditional Islam featured as his guiding thread, the rights of his *New Woman* are discussed and defended according to their modern merits. Muhammad Jamil Bayhum corroborates my reading in a book he published in 1921 treating the historical background of women's struggle for equality.[3]

The highly publicised debate that took place at the turn of the twentieth century between the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad 'Abduh, and a Syrian/Lebanese journalist and publisher, Farah Antun (1874–1922), was mainly an echo of the scientific ethos of the era. As Rashid Rida (1865–1935), 'Abduh's disciple, explained, the whole discussion took place because Antun, as a Christian writer, claimed that "Christianity was more tolerant towards science than Islam and that Islam was more oppressive in its attitude towards science and philosophy than Christianity."[4] It is in this respect that we begin to see how religion became a mere variable that was either good or bad, beneficial or detrimental, depending on how diligently and consistently it upheld the tenets of scientific endeavour.

Thenceforth, religion had to be validated by science to be accepted as a viable enterprise. Hence the endless reiterations by 'Abduh and many of his disciples that Islam and reason or rationality went hand in hand. The debate was initiated by 'Abduh at the instigation of his disciple, Rashid Rida, who was more alert than his master to secular ideas and their potential threat to the hegemony of an Islamic style of discourse. This was in 1902. But Antun had been advocating the necessity of separating politics and religion ever since his arrival in British-occupied Egypt in 1897. His Journal, *al-Jami'ah*, launched in 1899, made secularism its intellectual brand, in addition to modernity and Western culture in its progressive expressions. He, moreover, adopted Ernest Renan's version of Ibn Rushd's philosophy.[5] Antun used Renan's positive appraisal of the Andalusian philosopher to show that philosophy was superior to religion in all its forms and denominations. In this sense, he noted how Jews, Christians and Muslims intermingled freely in a society built on tolerance and open-mindedness. It was in such a society that philosophy flourishes and religious fanaticism was relegated into a marginal phenomenon. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) represented in his thinking such a society. His commentaries on the works of Aristotle, as well as his discussions of Islamic culture, demonstrate the presence of "a scientific mind" that was not satisfied with conventional wisdom and traditional axioms.[6] Interestingly, he mentions in his discussion of Ibn Rushd's ideas two of his contemporaries': 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi and Qasim Amin.[7] The first condemned political and religious tyranny and called for a liberal democratic government, and the second was a pioneer in the Arab world in his articulation of the necessity and benefits of women's emancipation. Farah Antun singled out al-Kawakibi's endeavours to uphold the veracity of modern scientific theories by quoting what he considers to be relevant Qur'anic verses. Antun referred to a similar method used by Ibn Rushd when he wished to support what he understood to be correct scientific explanations, derived in the main from Aristotle's works. As to Qasim Amin, his advocacy of women's liberation reminded him of Ibn Rushd's agreement with Plato who, unlike Aristotle, asserted in his political Utopia, *The Republic*, the absolute equality of men and women.[8] These two examples also show that we are in the company of a band of intellectuals who shared beliefs and attitudes geared towards a secular scheme of things. Deism was one of those shared beliefs that deserves further investigation. Suffice it to say in this respect that Antun did not mince his words when he correctly identified one of Ibn Rushd's arguments as an example of a deist approach. Relying on Renan's modernist interpretations, and reading what was available at the turn of the twentieth century of Ibn Rushd's Arabic works, Antun deduced deism in the statements often made by our Aristotelian philosopher in explicating the extent and nature of God's knowledge. It was his opinion that God's knowledge is fully abreast of universals, but such knowledge does not include particulars, such as a person's activities, or human actions and behaviour in general. Thus, God does not interfere in the daily life of human beings who are left to decide for themselves how to organise or conduct their affairs.[9] In this sense, members of society enter into a social contract to govern their daily dealings and activities, devising and promulgating

their own appropriate laws and regulations. It is worth mentioning in this context that 'Abduh avoided discussing these specific points, and launched instead into an outburst of indignation and wounded pride. This was clearly revealed in his long-winded defence of the record of Islam in its support of science, unlike the shameful deeds of Western Christianity in persecuting its enlightened scientists. In enumerating the various cases of persecution, 'Abduh chose to rely in narrating his examples a book published by a British scientist and historian, who was affiliated to an American university, John William Draper (1811–1882). Paradoxically, Draper's book *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*[10] assumes a state of perpetual enmity and struggle between religion and science owing to the divergent origins and nature of the two entities. However, his main damning remarks are directed in the main against the Catholic church rather than Christianity as a whole. On the other hand, Islam is lauded for sustaining scientific research and encouraging scientists to investigate and explore new subjects. After rubbing our eyes, and clearing a foggy surrounding, we begin to detect the contours of a scientific debate conducted by a Muslim religious authority and a modernist writer, each wielding the arguments of a secularist European to buttress their own position in defending what they deem to be their cherished national culture. However, whereas 'Abduh seemed to have failed to win the intellectual argument, he, as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, scored a resounding populist acclaim. Or he and his supporters thought they did.

Looking back at this debate, it is plainly the case that being advocates and apostles of science, scientists and modern philosophy, rather than religion and religious leaders, was the motto and ethos of a new generation of intellectuals, both Muslim and Christian. However, two members of the intelligentsia stand out for their pertinent and consistent contribution to the articulation of a purely scientific worldview: Shibly Shumayyil (1850–1917) and Ya'qub Sarruf (1852–1927).[11] These thinkers, and many others, were branded 'Christian Secularists' by Albert Hourani and other scholars.[12] Ever since Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883) began in the early 1860s to argue for the separation of state and religion, a certain secular discourse was set in motion. It soon gained momentum as it was articulated from within the wider reformist drive launched by the Ottoman state. In 1884, Shibly Shumayyil, having studied medicine at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut and in Paris, translated and published Ludwig Buchner's lectures on Darwin. By that time, science had become for him the arbiter of all issues in history, nature and society.

Two years earlier, coinciding with the year of Darwin's death, the Lewis Affair erupted, in which Ya'qub Sarruf (1852–1927), teacher of Arabic and physics at the College, and Faris Nimr, an instructor in mathematics, were involved.[13] Its point of contention was Darwin's theory of evolution and its twin motors: natural selection and the struggle for survival, rather than Biblical notions of creation by design and other medieval assumptions. But they have entered the history of Arab thought as joint editors of *al-Muqtataf* (*The Digest*), the scientific review which they published in Beirut in 1876 and later moved to Egypt in 1884. The so-called affair was named after Edwin Lewis (1839–1907),[14] a young American

instructor, who at the Commencement exercise of 1882 at the Syrian College read out an address which was thought to be sympathetic to 'Darwinism'. Lewis was dismissed or was forced to resign; some of his colleagues followed suit and resigned as a demonstration of objection to the injustice of such a decision of dismissal. Students who signed petitions against the decision were suspended. Even on one occasion, violence manifested itself in various forms on campus, so much so that the local police got involved. In 1884, Sarruf and Nimr were also dismissed as college instructors. However, as editors of *al-Muqtataf*, they published the speech, which was delivered in Arabic,[15] and numerous responses to its various contents. It could be said that the magazine showed particular interest in the theory of evolution and went out of its way to expound its various aspects. Darwinism in this context drew a thick question mark about the validity of religious narratives and their version of the creation. Lewis differentiated between knowledge, which he considered "a passive state of mind" and a mere accumulation of facts, and science, which he praised as "an active state of mind". It was a creative act that uncovered hitherto unknown causes of things. While knowledge does not add new facts or data to our understanding of the cosmos or the natural world, science opens new vistas and uncovers unexplored horizons, adding thereby to our existing knowledge.[16] Entitled 'Knowledge, Science and Wisdom', it reserved the last category for religion, contending that scientific theories do not contradict faith or force us to change its tenets. Such an elaboration did not disturb Muslim sensibilities, nor did it lead to wild denunciations. All in all, there were fifty medical students in the college at the time of the affair. None of the students seem to have felt the urge to wash their hands of their instructor. On the contrary, most of them participated in an open strike. More importantly, almost all these students belonged to various Christian denominations. By the turn of the twentieth century, the SPC was propelled from a religiously based college into a purely secular institution. Darwinism, in its turn, was largely accepted as a methodology in its scientific implications. A scientific outlook was slowly gaining ground in the struggle for building a modern state or in achieving women's active participation in public life.

Liberating Women and Constructing Families

It was at the turn of the twentieth century that the idea of the modern family and the concept of state-building were brought together in a direct and elaborate style: the sound and healthy condition of the first was a prerequisite leading to the sustainability of the second. It was now assumed that these two institutions form the backbone of modern societies, and that their beneficial presence should be nurtured as a patriotic duty. Thus, social progress in advanced societies was rendered a function of well-rounded nuclear families and streamlined state institutions. In this sense, it became easier to decipher and expound how modernisation policies should proceed. As we have seen, educating women as a prerequisite for the formation of a sound family was a task repeatedly recommended by all major professional men of letters. In other words, the family became the basic

unit of civil society, and had consequently to be fashioned in accordance with the latest requirements of modern life. In our Alfierian moment, this task was widely expected to be undertaken by all enlightened members of government or the intelligentsia. However, in the first phase, the night-watchman state, in the best traditions of liberalism, was thought to be the best form of government. In other words, it was largely left to the market forces and fair competition to regulate the economy, ensuring thereby high rates of growth. In the second phase, the state took direct control of the main economic sectors, whereby liberalism was deemed to have failed to deliver the desired outcome. In this sense, the economy was powerfully present in both phases, but under different guises.

The first phase received its first theoretical articulation by an Egyptian judge and public servant, Qasim Amin (1863–1908). He did so in a gradual manner that started off by defending Islamic traditions as the bulwark of stability and national independence, and ended by discarding most of these traditions as obstacles on the road to the achievement of progress. Paradoxically, the initial position was elucidated in French in response to a treatise by a French aristocrat, le Duc d'Harcourt. The Duc, in his book, *L'Égypte et les Égyptiens*,[17] dedicated an entire chapter to what he called "the degradation and inferiority of Egyptian women". He informs us that his pronouncements on the various social groups and classes in Egypt were based on direct observations during three voyages he made to the country in the 1880s in the wake of its occupation by the British. He thought that in Egypt a war between two civilisations (*la lutte de deux civilisations*)[18] was raging, pitting the indigenous population against its European residents. His observations are grouped into topics dealing with the status and conditions of what he calls "Arabes, Coptes, Turcs, femmes et esclaves".[19] His discussion of the condition of women is thus a part of a panoramic view designed to show the fragility of Egyptian society and its morbid social mores. By doing so, he was criticising openly, as a former military man himself, his country's decision not to have joined the British military campaign that defeated the Egyptian army in the battlefield and conquered Egypt as its sole master. As to the condition of women, while he did differentiate between rural and urban settings, he branded both as a world brimming with ignorance, superstitious beliefs and complete subordination on the part of its womenfolk to the will and whims of men. He reserved his main critical remarks for members of the upper class as heads of households in Cairo. Although he made some positive comments in reference to the Coptic community, or to the efforts of the Egyptian government to put an end to slavery and trafficking in slaves, his diagnosis of the general prospects for women was steeped in a gloomy verdict that did not even spare those who were being educated in Western schools, either in Egypt or in Europe itself. He simply concluded that learning a foreign language made it easier for girls to read cheap novels full of debauched adventures. He directed his severest censure at the institution of seclusion, the veil, confinement within four walls and the pursuit of idle talk and gossip. All the negative aspects of these customs and practices were laid at the door of Islam, showing them to be direct products of its religious injunctions and legal enforcement. In other words, he thought that the barbarity (*la*

barbarie) that reigned in Egypt when Napoleon invaded the country in 1798 was still spreading its unchecked nefarious depravities and corruption almost a hundred years later. Tyranny, oppression, corvée or forced labour, cowardice of all indigenous Egyptians in their dealings with their rulers, and inability to launch any sustained resistance to their oppressors summed up the political culture of the country. It is noteworthy that by referring to the non-existence of education in the ranks of women or to the meagre results of an education pursued by indigenous girls, le Duc d'Harcourt opened the door onto an explosive subject that was exercising the energies of a new generation or claiming the attention of individuals of the emerging middle classes. The fact that a foreigner was using the status of women for ulterior motives may be considered beside the point in this respect.[20] Abolishing slavery and the emancipation of women were often entangled as a result of long historical processes that were thought to have eroded the status of the nuclear family and its centrality in childbearing as far as the ruling elites were concerned. It was thus one of the main issues that figured in the persistent demands of reformers: building a modern state should be preceded or accompanied by creating a modern nuclear family consisting of an enlightened father, an educated mother and diligent children. It is in this context that the response of Qasim Amin to the Duc's strictures should be understood. Amin's twin volumes, *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1900), were preceded by his response to the sweeping criticisms of le Duc d'Harcourt. This response was published in French under the title *Les Egyptiens*.[21] His arguments reveal the contours of a narrative that was to be perfected or brought to maturity by Muhammad 'Abduh and his conservative disciples, such as Rashid Rida (1865–1935). What irked Amin most was the contention that the Egyptians were destined to stay in a state of backwardness forever. Refuting such an irksome judgement figured as the dominant theme of Amin's response.

He therefore set out to prove that progress in various fields did take place, and was in full swing, in Egypt throughout the centuries, but more particularly under the 'brilliant rule' of the Arabs immediately after the Islamic conquests, and more recently, during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali that spanned almost the entire first half of the nineteenth century. As to the 'timid character' of the Egyptian fellah, he refuted the charge by citing his personal experiences as a magistrate. He thus stressed his bravery in the face of death, disease and banditry, but acknowledged that when faced with the forces of political authority, a fellah trembles at the terror generated by its presence.[22] However, his argument concerning the status and condition of Egyptian women is largely sanguine and fails to address the real issues that were to exercise his generation a few years later. He simply exhibits a complacent attitude that conducts a sweeping comparison between the institution of marriage in France, based on his recent personal experiences during his residence in Montpellier to study law, and that of his native land. He denied the existence of 'secluded or locked up women' and went out of his way to pinpoint the superiority of Islamic laws in dealing with matters such as inheritance, polygamy and custody of children. The negative effects of the veil and the necessity of educating women do not figure as high priorities in his scheme of things.

However, towards the end of his largely polemical rebuttals, he acknowledges the concrete advantages achieved by European countries in the field of science and industry. But he was certain that Egypt was on the right track and should be able to catch up provided it was given the opportunity and assistance to do so. More importantly, he thought that Egypt should be allowed to adopt a liberal system of government and enjoy an independent status amongst the nations of the world. The 'Urabi Revolt (1879–1882) is not condemned, but explained as a sign of impatience and an attempt to hasten the process of modern change. Even under British occupation, the pace of progress was given a new impetus with the introduction of canals and dams for irrigation, railway lines, a more efficient postal service, telegraph cables and a revamped court system. Egypt was thus standing on the verge of a new phase in its history, whereby administrative and economic advances would be capped by representative institutions and a limitless era of development under the banner of national independence. Thus, he pointed out that France was not in a better position before the Revolution: it was in the grip of crises and its population suffered famines, rapacious taxes and the heavy hand of despotism. Its monarch, Louis XIV, was prone to repeat a refrain that is remembered by everyone: *L'État c'est moi* (I am the state, or the state is me). The law that governs the foundation of states is the same everywhere and applies to all societies. It is "an eternal law" that transforms matter, human beings and institutions alike. Both France and Egypt are subject to the same social laws. Amin thought that only in the modern age did civilisation acquire the capability to strike permanent roots and proceed in its relentless march towards "perfectibility". This was the result of the adoption of science in all human activities. By contrast, ancient civilisations lacked a solid foundation to build on and were destined to decline or disappear altogether. Europe was in this respect the inheritor of a long series of preceding civilisations, particularly their philosophical, scientific and religious legacies. Having discovered the secret of creating an enduring state of progress, it behoves its Western masters to treat its former patrons in a generous spirit.[23] Doubtlessly, Muslims did fall behind Europeans and lost their former glories and prosperity. However, it was not Islam that caused this regression; it is rather the responsibility of those who neglected to apply rigorously and faithfully the precepts of their religion.[24] Amin's methodology reveals that that his defence of Islam did not mesh with his realisation that Europe had pulled far ahead of all other societies. He also thought that he had discovered the secret behind the astonishing accomplishments in industry, commerce, agriculture, education, the arts, administration and many other fields. It was science in its proper organisation, precise practices, comprehensiveness and its animating spirit of inventiveness. Whereas in former times its fragmented organisation and primitive instruments did not permit it to advance beyond a certain stage, turning thereby its achievements into provisional (*provisoire*) attainments, in our modern age, science has been established on a firmer footing and made part of the law of progress and constant transformation. Such a vehement espousal of scientific progress makes defence of the traditional rules and regulations governing the lives of women, the institution of marriage and inheritance laws stick out

like a sore thumb. It clashes with all the other analytical approaches that he used in order to show that Egypt was not doomed to vegetate in its swamp of stagnation. The law of progress was said to apply to all societies, irrespective of their background. Such an awkward position was normalised in view of what he had to say five years later. There was clearly a dichotomy in analysis that had to be revisited and dismantled.

His second treatment of the subject was articulated in Arabic, his native tongue, rather than French. It was not a response to the colonialist views of a French duke, but a deliberate call addressed to his compatriots. Its message was soon to reverberate across the Arab world and beyond.[25] Entitled 'Liberation of Woman' (*Tahrir al-Mar'a*), and published in 1899, it was more liberal in its general stance than his previous treatise, but still bore the hallmark of Islamic reformism rather than a purely secular narrativity. Its main theme echoes his French response: Muslim societies should endeavour to adapt themselves to the age of science, inventions and social progress. A good start would be to take a hard look at the condition of Egyptian women. Are they sufficiently educated to cope with modern life? Do they know how to manage their marital household? Are they in a position to deal with their husbands and attend to their concerns and interests in an informed and satisfactory manner? Do they understand the subtle art and technique of raising a child? Have they learnt how to prepare their children to confront future challenges in a meaningful way?

As to veiling, he put forward the contention that women in Islam are, as expounded in its Qur'anic injunctions and reliable sources, allowed women to reveal their faces and hands. Wearing the *Burqa'* was thus an alien tradition imposed and adopted for reasons that had nothing to do with piety and religiosity. Hence, unveiling in Amin's cultural repertoire simply meant that women should still cover their hair and neck and dress modestly, while taking the liberty of revealing their face and hands. His *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (*Liberation of Woman*) covers, in addition to the issues of education and the veil, the topics of "Women and the nation, and 'the Family'". Qasim Amin seems to equate the physical, mental and emotional health of the nation with that of the mother. In Arabic, *ummah* or nation and *umm* or mother are derived from the same root, and both are feminine names. Such combinations do exist in other languages, such as motherland or *la mère patrie*. References to *la Patrie* (*al-watan*) and love of one's country (*l'amour de la patrie-hub al-watan*) were more prevalent and widely used in literary and political tracts in the nineteenth century, whereas the concept of nation in its secular rather than religious connotations was destined to predominate in the twentieth century.[26] The concept and term 'nation' could refer in this context to the Egyptian, Moroccan or Syrian nations, as well as to the Arab nation as a whole. When Amin refers to "the nation", he singles out a geographic unit that is confined within specific boundaries, rather than a vaguely defined religious community. If he happened to speak of Muslims in the world, they are called "the Muslim nations"[27] in the plural version. He also states on more than one occasion his conviction in the existence of Egypt as a fully formed nation.[28] He thus deals with affairs and matters in the international arena on the basis of

the division of the world into nations, implying that they all enjoy legitimacy as political units, irrespective of the religion of their inhabitants or citizens. Thus, there is a definite conceptual shift that is unmistakably secular or secularist. Nevertheless, to Amin and his generation of the educated elite, who were on the whole imbued with a liberal ethos, nationalism was akin to a version of patriotism that is combined with a heightened political awareness. This was the case, for example, of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, the foremost liberal statesman and a model for many Arab politicians, and of Sa'd Zaghlul (1859–1927), the future leader of Egypt's struggle for independence. It was no accident that Amin dedicated his next book, *The New Woman*, to Zaghlul as a friend and an exemplary citizen. Thus, although Amin does boast of his country's long history,[29] he emphasises that new scientific inventions have shortened distances, eliminated boundaries and collapsed barriers between nations, so that thousands undertake to roam the globe despite its political divisions. Those who do so write books which are instantly translated into several languages. In this way, scientific advances have made modern knowledge easily available on a worldwide scale. To him, Egypt, in this new version, was in a state of stagnation turning into "a wasteland". Those Egyptians and others who shun change, considering it a "heresy" or "sinful novelty" (*bid'a*), should know that they are bound by natural laws as much as all other human beings. Laws of nature are God's laws, whereby "transformation and progress are conditions of life, whereas stagnation and immobility signify retardation and death."[30] However, petrified social customs and norms may at a certain stage overwhelm the religion of a nation and deprive it of its vitality. This is what happened to Islam after centuries of intellectual and economic progress. Consequently, the backward condition of a nation is translated into the equally backward condition of its women. In order to become prosperous again, society as a whole has to be reformed, starting with its basic constituent unit: the family. Moreover, although the Western woman stands at the highest level of modernity hitherto attained, this was not because of the influence of Christianity. Only after Christianity's impact had waned did women's circumstances and welfare begin to improve. Nor did the Egyptians fall behind other nations because of their religion. It is political and social tyranny that stifles human ingenuity, for it treats men and women like disposable chattels and cheap belongings. Woman fared worse because of her weakness and the haughty attitude of male relatives, extending from her father, passing by her brother and finally reaching her husband. It was a vicious circle that kept cropping up under different situations. Amin even conceded that family life was virtually non-existent, whereby the male head of a household would purchase white and black slave girls and marry several wives, so that his passion and lust ruled supreme, with no qualms of conscience or awareness of religious obligations. Divorce was pronounced by a man arbitrarily. All his habitual behaviour denoted an arbitrary style of life: he sat at the dining table all by himself, while all the females of his household, mother, wife and sister, were allowed to eat only after he had left. Moreover, eunuchs, guardians and supervisors kept an eye on women and their movements day and night. Imprisoned in her own house, a woman's incarceration did not end until

her last breath had expired.[31] But he goes on to indicate that things were beginning to change, whereby women were venturing outside their homes, albeit under the supervision of their husbands or relatives.

Amin recommended teaching women almost the same subjects suggested by al-Bustani fifty years earlier. But he did not confine a woman's function to her role as wife or mother. He thought that she should learn subjects that enabled her to earn her own living, enter the labour market and compete for jobs like men. To him, there was no perceptible difference between men and women intellectually, or in the functions of their body, or in rationality. In the course of discussing the various impediments that prevent woman from exercising her useful role in society, he highlights the consequences of patriarchy without employing the technical term:

> Generation after generation, woman has continued to be subordinate to the rule of the strong and is overpowered by the forceful power of tyranny wielded by men. Moreover, men have slammed the doors of opportunity and earning a living in women's faces, hindering them from making their way in the world.[32]

Patriarchy was to be highlighted on several occasions, by different Arab writers, but at this stage, it was treated as an ingredient co-existing with a long list of defects within the family as an institution. It is in this respect that we begin to appreciate the fact that the demand for educating and liberating women positioned the family in the foreground as its target and ultimate destiny. In fact, most of the chapters of Amin's *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (*The Liberation of Women*) is concerned with the institution of the family. His first chapter, for example, entitled 'Tarbiyat al-Mar'a' (Educating Woman), constitutes in its bulk a discussion of the constitution of the family in its constituent members, rather than woman *per se*.[33] Moreover, Amin discusses marriage as the union between two souls and two bodies. It is far more than a written contract detailing the obligation and rights of each party. He goes on to emphasise that 'love', a subject formerly reserved for unattached paramours, and the occasion for narrating illicit affairs, nightly visits and daring acts of jumping walls, should be redefined to signify consistent acts of devotion and loyalty to a single partner. It is in this vivid description of deeds of commitment to the institution of marriage and its association with raising and nurturing a family that the new generation of secular-minded reformers aimed to achieve. It is thus generally the case that those who wished to reform family life and pursue a modern style of living were vehemently opposed to polygamy, or called for restricting its practice to exceptional cases, such as infertility. Muhammad 'Abduh was one of the first reformers to voice such an opinion. But he was preceded by an entire coterie of people stretching back to al-Tahtawi who pledged to his wife in writing that he would not seek to marry another woman while they lived together. It would also be true to say at this juncture that, narratives celebrating the theme of love and loyalty in marriage could also be found in texts written by women predating the views expressed by Amin. As Marilyn

Booth persuasively argued, Amin was not the first to tackle issues touching on the rights of women,[34] but he did bring a certain focus to the whole subject of the marriage contract and the outmoded ulterior motives underpinning such undertakings. In addition to monogamy, he wanted new legal rules enshrined in the law of the land and granting woman the right of divorce. While the last right is still not fully accepted in most Arab countries, except under exceptional circumstances, monogamy has been slowly recognised as the norm, while a minimum age requirement was also introduced by the 1920s. Whether it was Amin's influence, together with that of like-minded intellectuals and reformist leaders, or the sheer weight of modern life, there is no doubt that things have not stood still:

> Today secular nationalists and religious conservatives alike uphold the conjugal family and companionate marriage as normative, projecting them into the distant past as authentically Egyptian and Islamic and as a foil to modern times, in which family values have supposedly weakened. . . . Tension between the two modern ideals of women's domesticity and women's emancipation, which was noticeable in the contrasting attitudes of male modernists and feminist-modernists toward women's work, found expression later in the republican constitutions, each of which has committed the state to enabling women to balance family obligations with work.[35]

Throughout his text, a certain optimistic narrative is perceptible as a running thread. The obstacles that Europe had to overcome, before its women were liberated, were more numerous and much more formidable than those encountered by modern Muslims: obscurantist Christianity, feudalism, political tyranny, stagnant economies and low scientific knowledge. All these impediments stifled Western development for centuries. In Egypt and the Arab world, on the other hand, Islam as a religion, unlike Christianity, fully supports women's emancipation. It, moreover, enjoys, Amin contended, an impeccable reputation in encouraging science and scientists. As to the other impediments, it is the responsibility of the adherents of such an enlightened and progressive religion to exert all their efforts to join the advanced societies whose progress was partly the culmination of what classical Islam had achieved. In this sense, Western accomplishments could be easily emulated within a short period. Thus, the cultural equation at this stage was as follows: whereas Europe progressed because it had managed to free itself from its Christian religion, the Muslim world had in the meantime fallen behind because it failed to live up to the precepts and expectations of its religion. But the furore that Amin's call for the emancipation of women had precipitated among religiously conservative cohorts made him retrace his steps and come up with a more convincing and coherent argument. His support for science, technological advances and liberal values in conducting state institutions and policies were all still there. But a new tone had crept in, starting off as a trickle and swelling into a deluge that overwhelmed the floodgates. Keeping in line with his concentration on the wellbeing of a sound family as the first building block in a well-developed society, he broached the subject in *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New

Woman) by revisiting Islamic history in a more critical approach. The religious mask that he had worn and maintained for so long suddenly dropped onto the floor. His eyes were freed to roam more widely, and peer into the past far more intently. His secular binoculars were recruited in the new adventure to bring distant terrains into our reception rooms. What did he see? What particular objects caught his attention and directed him towards a particular spot?

Public Politics and Private Intimacy

Firstly, he stressed the importance of freedom. Freedom, for him, meant the independence of the individual in her/his "thought, will and action". In this sense, he revealed that political oppression in the government and personal subjugation within the family run along each other, with one acting as the complementary extension of the other. Tyrannical rule over men in the state is paralleled by the tyranny of the same oppressed man within his own family.[36]

Secondly, modernity itself, rather than obsolete religious injunctions, prescribe how people should conduct themselves. By doing so, they begin to see their past in a different light, perceiving in this manner the social and cultural distance that separates them from their ancestors. A sense of the past is palpably present, dictating in its fresh emergence a more objective and scientific view of human life. The veil, for example, has had its day and should be seen as a vestige of the past. It was initially, Amin avers, imposed by husbands on their wives. They then decided to include in its ambit mothers, sisters and daughters. Whatever its origin, it is one of those "uncouth habits" that clashes with civilised life.[37]

Thirdly, it is wrong to ascribe a particular and permanent essence to woman. All statements that refer to woman as 'an evil creature' or impute to her personality enduring attributes of deceit and vile chicanery are based on false deductions. One should seek to discover the real causes that give rise to such traits: these include the unjust deprivation of women from proper education, the devastating seclusion of their bodies and souls, and in their treatment like slaves and chattels. Providing education, granting freedom and conferring dignity are guaranteed to bring up women to the level of men and obliterate all social and intellectual differences in their approach to everyday problems.[38]

Fourthly, although he thought it would be precipitous to grant Egyptian women political rights, he looked forward to the future whereby such rights would follow as the culmination and crowning conclusion of the other rights.[39]

Fifthly, ideally, both boys and girls should attend the same school and learn the same subjects. It is no longer feasible in the modern world to create artificial dichotomies between male and female, and pretend that they belong to two different societies. National life has brought forth new conditions that necessitates the participation of all citizens and members of society in public life, as well as in various types of employment and general functions and duties. However, he suggested as a preliminary step the opening of new schools so that girls would be trained in an honourable profession: childrearing. The other profession that women should be allowed to practise is medicine, with qualifications

to be obtained after the usual prescribed period of training. Commerce and trade should also be made available to the participation of women at the highest level of these professions.[40]

Sixthly, the family remained for him the essential unit of social life and national maturity. Mothers should master subjects dealing with the health and functions of the bodies and minds of their children. Fathers also have to become aware of modern methods of dealing with the emotional and psychological problems of their offspring. Parents should take responsibility when they fail to put an end to the spectacle of "lies, fears, laziness and ignorance", repeatedly exhibited by their children.[41] But it is to the mother that Amin directs his attention: she is responsible for the future of the nation in the way she brings up her children. Statements by Georg Simmel, Friedrich Schiller, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, François Fénelon and Alphonse de Lamartine lauding the role of women in the history of humankind are quoted to buttress his case. It is noticeable in this respect that he sought to seal his argument by resorting to the views of European writers, poets and philosophers, indicating thereby that Western modernity as a model to be followed had become self-evident. What is more remarkable is how Amin dismisses geography, climate and religion as possible hindrances in attaining a steady level of progress under modern conditions. He simply contends that underdevelopment or backwardness is directly related to the status of the family in Muslim society. It is in finding out what methods of childrearing and nurturing were applied that one would discover successes or failures in the life of adults. The individual's conscience, the inner soul (*wijdan*) of a child, and the moral sense of a teenager: these are the attributes that enable one to differentiate between right and wrong. They constitute a prerogative whose hidden energy is reserved for the mother to foster or ignore. Consequently, the failure by the mother in fostering and sustaining the human qualities that announce the emergence of a fully grown character dooms society at large. Character-building is thus considered the foundation stone of a healthy society that is to be located at all times in the bosom of the family.[42]

Seventhly, Islam was born in a land consisting of deserts and inhabited by Bedouin. It unified the tribes of these Bedouin and turned them into a unified nation imbued with a mission of conquests. It was the conquered populations of Syria, Iraq, Egypt and other places that infused the conquering Arabs with new sciences and modes of learning that were totally lacking in their desert provinces. Unfortunately, in the long struggles between supporters of scientific knowledge and upholders of religion, the latter came out on top and stifled the spirit of inventions and creativity. Such a situation obtained in European countries as well. But Europe managed to gain the initiative once again, thanks to its competence and expertise in renovating the sciences of the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs. They are now the rightful inheritors of such a rich legacy. All the modern discoveries in physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy were the result of new techniques perfected by a long list of Western scientists and scholars. New sciences were not simply imitations of old sciences. Literary, social, political and historical disciplines were consequently developed on the basis of these

new sciences. Science has as a result spread its exact accuracy and precise rules in all walks of life in Western societies. On the other hand, the Muslim world, in which science was arrested before it had reached a clear end, has fallen behind in the struggle for progress. Islamic civilisation itself is, as a socio-economic entity, no longer valid or relevant: it has been overtaken or replaced by another, more advanced, culture of science and discovery. Our social life has therefore been dislocated, and its familiar customs are in their bulk a heap of obsolete traditions. As to political organisation, no state institutions were built in a coordinated and systemic manner. All we had was a system of government controlled by an all-powerful leader called caliph or sultan: an unaccountable ruler served by equally unaccountable functionaries and holders of office. Both the ruler and his servants made up rules as they went along dictated by arbitrary reasons. The caliph was in theory and practice an absolute ruler who wielded his power within a field that was ill defined, and incapable of building appropriate structures designed to check the arbitrariness of one man's whims.[43]

It is at this juncture that we begin to locate the Arab dilemma in putting forward a secular interpretation of history. At this stage, secularity merged in its meaningful qualities into science as a narrativity. This narrativity was normalised for the rest of the century, in the sense that a scholar or a law-maker could understandably and plausibly use one or the other without infringing the public's comprehension of the interchangeability of these cultural terms. It has also become abundantly obvious that the modern model that caught attention and turned heads towards its majestic presence was the West as it had developed since the Renaissance and the age of discoveries. Colonialism, military invasions, annexations of foreign territories, greedy financial investments, extending loans as a method of controlling states and their revenues, changing governments to align their policies with the Metropole, racism, supporting the rights of women in the colonies and opposing similar demands in their own countries . . .[44] these and many other policies, practices and procedures were also present in discussing Western progress. But the laws which governed such progress were said to be based on a solid foundation of scientific approaches, so that retracing their gradual emergence was an inescapable requirement. As we have seen, Amin was genuinely sceptical about the value of the political culture prevalent in so many Muslim lands. He therefore discounted drawing meaningful benefits from the history of the Caliphate, except in the negative sense. It should be admitted for the sake of our wellbeing that:

> [t]he Caliph was the sole master in all matters. It was he who declared war, concluded peace, imposed taxes, formulated rules and regulations, and arbitrarily administered the affairs of the nation. It never occurred to him to ask others to participate in the decision-making process.[45]

Such a system, Amin concluded, ran counter to what had prevailed during the flourishing phases of the Greek and Roman nations. They had clear rules, constitutional regulations and parliamentary assemblies that curbed the authority of

their rulers and allowed other citizens to participate in the conduct of their political systems. The act of meting out punishments, relating in most cases to criminal and other civil violations, was given over to the whimsical decisions of the ruler in a Muslim society. Moreover, Muslim officials at that time knew nothing of "political, social or economic sciences". He gave as an example the celebrated *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), declaring that in it "not a single word is said about the family, which forms the basis of all human societies." As to the actual history of the family in Muslim lands, he now saw very clearly that the family in its modern sense was absent from Islamic history. Had it been present, the foremost Arab and Muslim historian, Ibn Khaldun, would have noticed it and registered its presence in his celebrated *muqqadim*a or *prolegomenon*. His prolegomenon has been hailed as the encyclopaedia of Islamic sciences, learning and politics, yet no trace of such an honourable institution is to be found in its compendious expositions. Although Ibn Khaldun has been considered 'the father of sociology', he often gets things wrong and commits gross errors. The most important sociological unit, for example, does not enter into his social register. Bedouin, tribes, peasants, dynasties and urban dwellers of all classes and groups are meticulously enumerated, yet when it comes to 'the family' we have blank references and deep silence pitched at its most eloquent timbre and intensity. How was it that he missed all of this and passed it over? He does not mention it even as a ghost or a lost spirit! He went on to show that the manner in which the marriage contract was concluded, the arbitrary procedure of divorce and the absolute discretion of the husband in acquiring new wives, even if their number exceeded the upper limit prescribed by the Shari'a, militate against all modern notions and methods of setting up a family unit. In seeking political and family models, Muslims should leave behind what was available in their past and turn their gaze towards the future.[46] Progress unfolds its ascendant march in its forward direction, whereas those who look back to the past only succeed in registering their inevitable regression in a recurrent fashion.

It is at this juncture that we begin to discern the emergence of a philosophically constructed outlook that placed science and progress as the new engines of modern life. Besides his demolition of the social and political norms of pre-modern Eastern societies, Amin, as we have seen, admonished those who were still hankering after "a golden age". To him, the golden age belonged to the future rather than the past. Humanity is not stuck in a regressive mode in which the preceding stage is always considered superior to the succeeding or present one. Such a concept leads to the belief that the most perfect human being was the one born at the dawn of history. According to that view, deterioration took hold and decay set in immediately after the birth of the first human being and has continued ever since. Accordingly, in our age such regression should have reached a stage whereby we as human beings are about to turn into "dumb animals". However, scientific and philosophical knowledge leads us to believe otherwise. We stand at the last bend of a progressive curve that has not, and may never, reach a final conclusion in its march or advancement. What we are witnessing is the emergence of a single, unified civilisation that is bound to continue its evolution towards higher and

higher episodes. He thought that there were encouraging signs that lend support to the idea that Egypt was slowly catching up, whether in the way its marriage or divorce laws were being codified, or the degree of modernisation in all walks of life. One could easily notice by taking a stroll down a street in Cairo or other cities, he asserted, that styles of clothing, department stores, schools, hospitals, restaurants, bookshops, libraries, newspapers, railways, governmental administration, furniture and so many other things have all been imported one way or the other from abroad. It is, moreover, disappointingly a sign of immaturity to pretend that we still score much higher when it comes to measuring our morals and spiritual values as opposed to theirs. But this is a false delusion that would be revealed as a baseless assumption. Scientific thinking and a high degree of organisation presuppose a mature personality that is imbued with high ideals and upright moral values. Although no perfection should be claimed for Western modernity, it, nevertheless, demonstrates that human societies are composed of habits, institutions and ways of conduct that are interdependent and intermeshed. This was what might be called his second law of modernity. The first law abolished the myth of a golden age located in the mists of our historical dawn, insisting instead on the beneficial effects of turning our gaze correctly towards the future. The second law teaches us that progress is a seamless web in which all pieces are sewn into a single item that is organically geared to behave or react. It is a living organism that is in constant interaction with its environment. We would, therefore, fail to apprehend one aspect of its structure and processes of growth, unless we take both into account. In so doing, we begin to feel the pulse of an entire system that is designed to move and operate as a whole, or, failing that, it would simply fragment into its separate constituent parts and collapse as a heap of discarded materials. The third law that is mentioned, but not fully elaborated, is the necessity of avoiding the erroneous method of seeing Western societies as a single block with no internal differentiations or opposing views. Progress in this sense signifies that actual movement towards a particular goal does take place in a field of constant struggle and fierce competition.[47] Finally, veiling has outlived its original purpose, whether it is sanctioned by religion or not. Modern life decrees its obsolete presence and demands its disappearance from public life.[48]

What Is Tyranny?

Amin's call for the liberation of women was complemented by the articulation of a political outlook that propounded the imperative introduction of a series of state institutions managed and presided over by sovereign citizens. He did so in gradual episodes summed up in coherent narratives. These preliminary remarks serve to introduce the reader to the central figure of our Alfierian moment: 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849–1902).[49] His slim monograph entitled *Taba'I' al-Istibdad* (*The Characteristics of Tyranny*) is here considered as heralding a new narrativity in Arab politics that could be said to have endured in one form or another until the end of the twentieth century. Before discussing the analytical

thrust of his thought and its affiliation to an Alfierian mode of thinking, it would be useful to indicate a few things relating to its concrete impact and how it has been viewed by various students.

Ever since its publication, this slim volume has never been out of print. Its author is said to have added to its contents during his lifetime on more than one occasion, while others think that certain additions were made to it after Kawakibi's death. Whatever is the case, there is no doubt that its basic structure and concepts are the same as they were devised by Kawakibi at the turn of the twentieth century. We also know that it has been used ever since its publication as an ideological text by various political groups, especially pan-Arabist groups in Damascus and other parts of the Arab world.[50]

The Syrian author and religious scholar 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi published between 1899 and 1902 a series of articles, collected almost immediately into book form. His contribution overlapped with Amin's publications in more than one aspect. His main concern was the nefarious effects of political despotism. He called his collected articles 'The Characteristics of Tyranny and the Demise of Oppression, or the Methods to Be Pursued for Its Annihilation' (*Taba'I' al-Istibdad wa masari' al-Istibdad*). In other words, he sought at once to capture the main traits and components of tyranny and to describe a remedy that is capable of creating a permanent solution to such a chronic disease of human society. Having experienced the tyrannical practices and oppressive measures, aimed at silencing him as a publisher and editor, by the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid, he fled Aleppo, his city and place of residence, and settled in Cairo in 1899. In Cairo he joined a growing community of Syrian intellectual exiles, including Rashid Rida, 'Abd al-Hamid Zahrawi, Tahir al-Jaza'iri, 'Abd al-Qadir Qabbani, Ibrahim al-Najjar and Muhammad Kurd 'Ali. Although he envisaged a civil society in which religion and politics would operate as two separate entities, his main contribution resided in proposing a political system differentiated into legislative, executive and judicial branches and brought forth as a result of a democratic process.[51] This line of argument was refined and elaborated by an Egyptian statesman and man of letters, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872–1963). Whereas Kawakibi articulated his case by citing examples from Islamic history and drawing on religious texts, Lutfi al-Sayyid advanced a pure liberal narrative that was inspired by the writings of the school of J.S. Mill and the succinct political expositions of Aristotle's *Politics*. It would be appropriate at this stage to mention that although Aristotle's philosophical corpus, including *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, was translated into Arabic during the golden age of Islam under the 'Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258), his *Politics* was not available in an Arabic translation until the twentieth century. Lutfi al-Sayyid was the first to render it into Arabic in 1947, not directly from the Greek, but by using a French version.[52] It wouldn't be far-fetched to conclude that modern Arab thought had to wrestle with creating a theory of politics for the best part of the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, discussions on the emancipation of women and the introduction of liberal state institutions overlapped with vehement debates on the desirability of secularism. The last received its full exposition in the same

period and under similar circumstances at the hands of Farah Antun, as we shall see shortly.

Kawakibi's diagnosis of political oppression was preceded by another prognosis, which led him to focus his lens on the state of Islam as a religion. The diagnosis of religion was published under the title *Umm al-Qura*,[53] describing in detail the proceedings of a putative conference held in Mecca in 1899, under the title *al-Nahdah al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Renaissance) and attended by leading religious leaders from almost all Muslim countries. The various views and exchanges, as reported by Kawakibi, deal in the main with the stagnation of the Islamic world or its apathy and retardation (*futur* or *taqahqur*), as well as the remedies suitable for its rejuvenation. All participants were supposed to reach certain conclusions and agree to implement a new programme of action based on their agreed decisions. What is remarkable about these two works is the division of their subject-matter, one dealing with politics, or treating tyranny in our case, and the other highlighting the plight of religion (*al-Nahdah* conference). Hitherto, students of his output have rarely considered the two products in conjunction with each other. By and large, it is generally assumed that al-Kawakibi rendered two different tunes modulating religious melodies in a separate key, but pitched to create a political mode in another. However, by seeing the two literary pieces as paired compositions intended to express two moods within an overarching symphonic rendition, one would immediately perceive the differentiation of the secular and metaphysical dimensions along a spectrum that has been elevated into the world of modernity as opposed to their medieval commingling. In other words, Kawakibi was consciously and deliberately performing two operations in which his religious and political worlds are held in two different places and slotted into the architecture of a structure that accommodates both, but at distinct or separate levels. We are told that when the conference proceedings were read by a highly placed Muslim prince, a conversation is reported to have taken place between the prince and its Indian delegate. The Indian delegate, attending the previously mentioned conference, was still not sure how to differentiate between what is political and what is religious. A statesman came to the rescue: his serene highness the Emir, assured him that the register of the proceedings clearly differentiate between the two realms, assigning to each separate functions and agents. "Religion is one thing and political rule is another," he is quoted with approval. He went on: "The administration of religion and that of politics were not performed in unison except under the rightly guided caliphs [the formative period of Islam AD 632–661] and by caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz [AD 717–719]."[54] Furthermore, the association that organised the conference (composed of twenty-two members and formally instituted in the course of its first meeting) endeavoured to distance itself from "any political colouring", pronouncing its mission to be purely religious.[55] By professing a religious mission for the association and a democratic organisation for his proposed polity, secular politics was launched as an intellectual current in its Arab arena.

The register (*mahdar*) of the proceedings as recorded by al-Kawakibi listed diverse remedies and analytical approaches, revealing thereby two vast fields

that were meticulously noted and explored: religion and politics, whereby each required specialised knowledge. However, both works did include simultaneous discussions on politics and religion, either by al-Kawakibi himself or in reported debates by others. In either case, there is a clear institutional separation between the two realms: one may mention in this respect his proposal to turn the institution of the Caliphate into a spiritual organisation leading the various Muslim communities in their religious affairs, whereas his proposal for doing away with despotism rested on modern notions of government and political authority. His sharp criticisms of tyranny were thus intended to pave the way for an alternative political system based on democratic procedures and values. It is in this context that count Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), the poet and founder of modern Italian tragedy, and the author of *Della Tirannide*, looms in our discursive horizon. The work itself is not considered one of the classical political masterpieces, such as Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Baron De Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois* or Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social*. But it seemed more relevant to the treatment of an urgent and acute problem, namely despotism. It had a single theme that appealed to Kawakibi, who was wrestling with the same challenge. However, he did not adopt the entire approach that Alfieri employed to tackle the subject. Alfieri, for example, considered all Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) to be breeding grounds for despotic governments, but Kawakibi exempted Islam from the charge and blamed instead its adherents, particularly its rulers and sultans. Moreover, he deployed a more dynamic theoretical searchlight in interpreting his facts and data. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, he was fully aware of the advances in the field of science, especially in theories dealing with various natural and biological phenomena, such as Darwin's theory of evolution with its twin tracts of natural selection and the struggle for survival.[56] Darwinism was, for example, becoming a staple intellectual diet for an ever increasing number of Arab scholars and writers.[57] He thus undertook to show how certain Qur'anic verses prefigured most new scientific theories and discoveries, making Islam the religion of science *par excellence*.

Kawakibi's chapter on the role of religion in underpinning tyranny blames Muslims for copying the worst practices and traditions of Christianity and the Christian church: they developed their own form of papacy by adulating leaders, consecrating their own band of saints, developing a ranking order of their clerics, imitating church ceremonies, visiting tombs of the deceased and seeking the blessings of the dead, aping customs of wearing and waving crosses by carrying flags. Various practices were borrowed from Judaism, Catholicism and Hinduism whereby Muslims ended up supporting blind traditions instead of creative and rational interpretations of their scripture. Had their scholars read the Qur'an in the light of modern life, they would have come across all scientific discoveries predicted and confirmed by various verses, ranging from the theory of evolution, the place of planet Earth in the solar system, how all organisms are related to each other, the art of photography, steam engines and electricity, and the impact of microbes in generating and spreading diseases, in addition to many

other discoveries waiting to be realised but already prefigured and presaged by the Qur'an.[58] It is to be noted that this emphasis on science and how it should be nurtured to create a healthy national community is highlighted in his earlier tract on dealing with purely religious matters. His other explicit contribution was the affirmation of the national bond that should prevail amongst Arabs, be they Muslim, Christian or Jewish. More importantly, al-Kawakibi opens his work on tyranny with a clear proposition: one cannot discuss the elimination of despotism without the deployment of articulated concepts created and assimilated as an integral part of a coherent discipline that considers politics an eminently scientific subject. Thus, the Arabs were glaringly in need of developing their own version of 'political science' (*'Ilm al-Siyasah*), in order to be able to understand their problems and devise solutions capable of building new robust institutions. This science of politics was obviously proposed and elaborated by the author himself. By doing so, political life was considered a public arena governed by secular rules and regulations. The Qur'an did sanction science and foretell scientific discoveries, but it looked as if no apparent political organisation was spelt out in its verses. The Arab world had therefore to work out its own system of government according to modern criteria and expectations. It is in this respect that the Alfierian dimension can be seen in its operational stage. Alfieri himself did not offer an original theoretical discussion on the emergence of despotism, or how despotism took on different characteristics, either in the Roman empire, the medieval period or the modern age. Or, as he states:

> I do not despair . . . of being able to show that tyranny is always tyranny in every time and place; and that, since it uses the same means to maintain its powers, it produces even in different guises identical effects.[59]

Although he thought that in both Oriental and European countries, tyranny had the same "three bases and mainsprings" (fear, religion and the militia or a permanent army), he nevertheless was particularly scathing about the Muslim world, while treating other Oriental tyrannies, prevalent in China or Japan, in more considerate or charitable terms. It must be remembered that he was writing when the Ottoman empire was still considered a formidable military threat to most European countries. Moreover, European writers in general elided 'Turk' and 'Muslim', considering both to be either the same person or religion. His understanding of tyranny in its Western and Asiatic contexts owes much to his favourite authors, particularly Machiavelli and Montesquieu.[60] For Alfieri as for Machiavelli:

> the most perfect form of government ever conceived by man was the Roman Republic in the days when it was uncorrupted by the imperial ambitions of Caesar. This humanist myth of the free state in which the citizen was protected from private or public aggression by impartial laws to which no man was superior had been Machiavelli's ideal in 1519: it was Alfieri's ideal in 1777.[61]

In 1900, al-Kawakibi's perfect model became liberal democracy with its separation of powers. He thought it was incumbent on the Arab young generation to set up a state based on the concept of liberty and national unity. It is in underlining the necessity of creating a new system of government that a fresh horizon is detected in Arab political life. Alfieri, in his thorough depiction, demonstrated how tyranny corrupts and poisons public and private life. It spares no single individual, social group, class or political party. Its tentacles are seen at work everywhere, penetrating into the most sacred places, including family life. To him, family life under tyranny was a form of servitude, both for the poor and the rich. Under tyranny, the latter should avoid marriage altogether, because they lose their exclusive rights as husbands and fathers. Their partners and offspring are doomed to a life of enslavement. However, his lasting contribution to our moment was his contention that there was no point in resisting tyranny unless one had already decided on the substitute. Resistance, be it peaceful or violent, goes hand in hand with figuring out 'the best substitute' to a despotic state. Although he recommended a republican form of government, considering "the bland name of monarchy" nothing but "a complete unadulterated tyranny", he was reluctant to discuss in detail the exact composition or institutions of his future state.[62] It is worth stating that Alfieri's name is mentioned only once by al-Kawakibi in his treatise on tyranny. It is in the course of discussing setting up a substitute and the means of doing so that "the renowned Alfieri" is quoted to the effect that tyrants should not rest on their laurels, for the mighty are often overthrown by the despised and belittled oppressed.[63] More importantly, al-Kawakibi is more forthcoming in his discussion of the details of his 'republic' or democracy. He, furthermore, adds another chapter on *taraqqi*, which corresponds to Alfieri's chapter five – 'Of Ambition' or (Capitolo Quinto – DELL'AMBIZIONE). The term *taraqqi* was used by the Young Turks in designating their underground political party, thought to have been founded in 1889: *İttihad ve Terakki* [*taraqqi* in Arabic] *Fırkası*. This is a strong indication that al-Kawakibi used the Ottoman edition in expounding his version of tyranny and democracy. *Taraqqi* in this context is an Ottoman rendition of *ambizioni* in Italian, and translated as 'ambition' in its English version. However, the term was used by the Young Turks and al-Kawakibi to indicate the concept of 'progress'. This concept is used in a much wider sense than that proffered by Alfieri and his eighteenth-century culture. With al-Kawakibi, tyranny is discussed in its nineteenth-century ambience, whereby notions of democracy and accountability are much more refined. He, moreover, avoids dwelling on the virtues of a republican form of government versus monarchical one. His main concern is constitutional accountability irrespective of its republican or monarchical designation. Moreover, his use of the terms *ishtirak*/*musharakah* seems to be a direct translation of Mazzini's conception of association (*associazione*). Furthermore, his depiction of the various aspects of tyranny is organised in a more logical and systematic manner. Alfieri's text, for example, alternates between discussing one particular psychological characteristic or practical experience, such as fear, and another purely sociological, such as the class of nobility. A social group or a psychological trait or practices are

sometimes juxtaposed, without, however, showing the reason behind this classification. In al-Kawakibi's case, tyranny is discussed, in a descending logical arrangement, in conjunction with religion, science, glory, money, morals, education and ambition/progress. The introduction is mainly concerned with the definition of the subject of tyranny, while the conclusion deals with the methods to be pursued for establishing an alternative system. Studying tyranny in this systematic manner constitutes an opportune occasion to underline the importance of founding an Arab science of politics. Such a call had become by then an obvious one to make. Even Muhammad 'Abduh, the upholder of Islam as an eternally valid system, had reached, under the influence of his master, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a similar conclusion as far back as 1877. But 'Abduh was referring to the newly translated work of Francois Guizot by Hunayn Khoury.[64] In it, Guizot traced the development of political systems, ideas and laws since the foundation of the Roman empire down to the French Revolution. 'Abduh, prompted by Afghani, wrote an article praising the work as a timely publication that filled a glaringly obvious gap in Islamic culture: the lack of a science of politics.[65] It is in this sense that being 'modern' or 'civilised' meant having the knowledge and ability to live in a state endowed with well-built and highly developed political institutions. In the Introduction to his book on tyranny, al-Kawakibi highlights the same gap and goes on to show that political science proper was exclusively developed as a discipline by "the founders of the Greek and Roman republics". In other cultures, it was dealt with as an extraneous or extramural addition to the disciplines of "history, ethics, literature or law".[66] It was not until the modern age that things began to change. His work was supposed to lay the foundations of an indigenous science of politics.

Islam in Its Feminist and Political Dimensions

Another pan-Arabist reformer, the Syrian 'Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi (1871–1916), entered the debate by penning and publishing articles and essays on the theory and practice of the Islamic Caliphate, the principles of jurisprudence and the exercise of rational interpretation as opposed to traditionalist legal pronouncements. He was keen to show how and why these pronouncements lacked creativity and up-to-date knowledge. Although his severest criticism was reserved for Sufism, its superstitions and its social practices, he convincingly demonstrated how the Ottoman sultan, who assumed the title of caliph, had no religious, legal or political right to occupy such a position. As a matter of fact, the stipulated qualifications he thought should be met by the occupant of the highest position in an Islamic state were made beyond the reach of all mortals. He practically concluded that the institution in its original form had become redundant with the foundation of the Umayyad dynasty in AD 661. What is more remarkable in this case is the manner in which al-Zahrawi invested his considerable religious knowledge to reach purely secular answers. He did so by travelling on our family-cum-state tracks concurrently. He did so by writing a modern Arabic biography of Khadija, the first wife of the prophet, and, a few years later, he

reiterated his conviction that political science as a discipline was sorely needed, and should be introduced into the Arab world to create the required conditions for joining the civilised nations.

His biography of Khadija was significant for two reasons. Firstly, it revisited the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia not as a land of ignorance and paganism, but as a sophisticated society composed of tribes that had a developed sense of their identity. They also adhered to well-articulated norms and customs. Secondly, Khadija was the first and remained the only wife of Muhammad as long as she was alive. Her role in the early period of Islam was crucially significant in steadying and steering the dissemination of the message on a firm basis and the right direction. She is presented to the reader as a woman of substance and high intellectual ability. Whatever good and courageous men could have done, she did better and excelled in all her public endeavours and private pursuits. "Her biography is worthy of being a guiding model for men as well as women." He informs the reader that he wrote his biography to please his mother, and present her with a concrete example of the merits and virtues of her female gender. It was also intended to act "as a reminder of the necessity of reviving respect for the rights of women".[67] He complemented his appreciation of the role of women in Islamic history by calling for a new type of political education. In a series of articles, published between 1910 and 1913, he stressed the fact that the Arabs in general were not sufficiently acquainted with the modern theory and practices of politics. The thrust of his argument revolves around the importance of public opinion that is based on a common national identity. Such an identity renders the construction of an efficient state, capable of meeting the demands of modernity, much more feasible.[68] In 1913, an Egyptian who had studied for his PhD at the University of the Sorbonne under the supervision of the French anthropologist and philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) published in French his dissertation on the condition and status of women in Islam and Muslim societies.[69] Mansour Fahmy (1886–1959) referred in his published dissertation to the work of Qasim Amin and his memory as a new voice of liberation. Fahmy's main argument is based not simply on the text of the Qur'an: it takes into consideration social customs, historical conditions and sociological factors such as class and ethnic backgrounds. By studying the evolution of the Muslim family across the centuries, Fahmy demonstrates the absence of the nuclear family as it had developed in its modern setting. He also concluded that reached the conclusion that the legal rules and injunctions that governed the treatment and comportment of Muslim women will give way to a set of secular regulations that are ultimately sanctioned by the requirement of the modern age. Upon his graduation, Fahmy was barred from joining the new Egyptian university as a faculty member. But he eventually managed to do so in 1919. However, the criticism directed against his views seemed to have silenced him as far as religion, women and secularism were concerned. Such negative reactions by religious and political authorities were to spring into action, whenever state institutions or the condition of women were raised. This happened on several occasions after 1913. In 1925, an Azharite cleric and judge, 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966), published a book

on the Caliphate in Islam.[70] Whereas Fahmy had confirmed Amin's view of the status of the family in Islamic history, 'Abd al-Raziq could be said to have set out to validate his insistence on considering the whole institution of the caliphate nothing more than a tyrannical organisation. In other words, it fell short of being a proper institution of government. Theoretically and practically, it could hardly be called 'a state' in the proper sense of the word. 'Abd al-Raziq confirmed these conclusions by rereading the early message of Islam and its formative period under the guidance of the prophet. He concluded that no Qur'anic injunction or authentic utterance attributed to Muhammad could be interpreted as a call to set up a political system known to history by the name of the Caliphate. Fahmy did a similar operation in his search for the family in Islam: he revisited the career of the Prophet and re-examined all the relevant Qur'anic verses. Fahmy expected to see the replacement of religious injunctions with secular laws in the political economy of the family, while 'Abd al-Raziq asserted that Muslims are not bound by any religious law to follow in their political conduct and should feel free to set up a civil government of their own choice. Fahmy did not live long enough to see the first Arabic edition of a book he originally published in French in 1913, nor did he venture into the same territory after his return to Egypt from Paris. 'Abd al-Raziq faced a religious and political uproar. He was stripped of his Azharite membership, lost his judgeship and followed in the footsteps of Fahmy by avoiding raising the same subject during his lifetime. In 1926, another former student of al-Azhar Mosque and University, Taha Husayn (1889–1973), raised a seemingly innocuous topic: the doubtful authenticity of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Although the theme of his work, *Jahili* poetry,[71] dominates his arguments, what is noteworthy are two points: his methodology and digressive statements on Qur'anic figures, such as Abraham (Ibrahim) and Ishmael (Isma'il). His methodology is highlighted as the exact one formulated by René Descartes. He tells the reader that Cartesian epistemology is built on doubting the authenticity of everything. Before embarking on a particular investigation, the mind must divest itself of all previous speculations. By doing so, it opens the way to ascertaining the facts of the matter. Moreover, Taha Husayn claimed that such an epistemology was the mark of modernity, while accepting what we are told without hesitation or questioning was what the ancients or traditional folk used to believe. The new methodology, if applied to the study of Islamic history or Arabic literature, could spark revolutionary changes in our knowledge and perception of past events and their context. As to pre-Islamic poetry, he was convinced that most of it was invented by post-Islamic persons, especially during the 'Abbasid era when the Arabs found themselves in a defensive position from a cultural point of view, vis-à-vis the Persian civil servants employed by the institutions of the Caliphate. As these Persians were wont to boast about their ancient culture, their Arab counterparts felt the need to come up with a sophisticated version of their own culture. That is how pre-Islamic poetry was born. In this sense, it tells us next to nothing about life before the rise of Islam. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an is the only document that provides us with precise information about the ethos and culture that preceded it. Moreover, by deploying such a methodology in other fields, one

becomes suddenly aware of how various concocted narratives come into being, flourish and take on a life of their own, turning in the process into authentic and well-established traditions. It is in this context that Husayn raised the possibility of a legendary existence of various Biblical and Qur'anic characters:

> Let the Bible tell us whatever it wishes about Abraham and Ishmael; the Qur'an may also do the same. However, the mere mention of these two names in the Bible and the Qur'an is not sufficient to prove their historical existence, nor does it confirm the story that refers to the migration of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, to Mecca and the genesis of Arabized Arabs in it.[72]

He goes on to argue that the whole story was invented to establish a relationship between the Jews and the Arabs, and consequently between Judaism and Islam. This was done for religious, political and commercial reasons. Fahmy had conducted a scholarly historical investigation in order to prove that the nuclear family is a modern entity that was still evolving; 'Abd al-Raziq undertook a similar operation to show that there was no valid model in the Islamic past for building a modern state. As for Taha Husayn, his Cartesian scepticism implied that the sacred text of Islam itself was not a reliable historical document. Taha Husayn was forced to withdraw his book from circulation, change its title and omit the offending passages from its main text. Although the 1920s represented in one sense the culmination of ideas, currents and practices that emerged in the first decade of the century, it also revealed hardening attitudes and trends of intolerance at a time when nationalist movements were being organised on a scale not seen before. From Syria to Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Sudan, a new nationalist generation was asserting the right of its communities to self-determination or independence. Perhaps the brief history of a new Syrian independent government based in Damascus sums up the high hopes, only to be rapidly followed by bitter disappointment. A nascent pan-Arabist movement, composed of disparate factions, military officers and prominent individuals hailing from Syria, Iraq, Arabia and Egypt, had entered into negotiations with the British and French governments to join the war against Germany and the Ottoman empire in return for setting up an independent Arab kingdom in the Western Asian part of the Arab world. The leader, entrusted with the negotiations on behalf of these groups and factions, was Sharif Husayn, Emir of Mecca and a direct descendant of the Prophet. As it turned out, he reached a broad understanding with the British on his own and without reference to his constituents. Moreover, such an understanding did not amount to a full political agreement deemed to be binding on both sides. His forces, armed and funded by the British government, did succeed in chasing the Turks out of Mecca and the rest of Western Arabia, except Medina. They also fought on the side of the allies in freeing Greater Syria from Ottoman domination. At the same time, the British had concluded in 1916 an agreement with the French (known as the Sykes–Picot Agreement) to divide the Fertile Crescent into zones of influence. A year later,

after having promised Syria to France and looked forward to occupying Iraq as a promising land of gas and oil, they issued the Balfour declaration in 1917, stating their support for the establishment of "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This promise was to be later formalised under the auspices of the newly formed League of Nations. Britain was granted the legal responsibility to administer the Palestine Mandate and prepare the ground for the Jewish national home. The Palestinians who constituted more than 80 percent of the total population were granted no such right, being simply assured of their entitlement to preserve their civil and religious rights. It was the fate of the son of Sharif Husayn, Faysal, to enter Damascus as a conqueror and liberator. In March 1920, a Syrian congress whose members represented all districts of Greater Syria met in Damascus as a fully legitimate body charged with founding an independent and sovereign state. It declared Faysal as its new king and the first head of a constitutional monarchy. It vested sovereignty in a democratically elected parliament or a bicameral legislature. Executive power was the responsibility of a duly formed council of ministers, while the judiciary was projected as an independent arm and institution of the state as a whole. A committee was formed to draft the constitution of the new state. It was on the verge of including in the text two articles: one declaring the state a non-religious or secular entity, and another granting Syrian women the vote. Although the looming French threat to occupy the entire Syrian territory tended to cause some postponement of resolving these issues in a positive outcome, women's suffrage received a deadly blow by the opposition of Rashid Rida, a Salafist religious leader who counted Muhammad 'Abduh as his mentor, and was later elected president of the Syrian congress, together with the more vehement rejection of Kamil al-Qassab (1873–1954), a religious cleric and leader of the Higher National Committee, an organisation that represented the populist opposition to Faysal's government. These two, representing outmoded religious views rather than the aspirations of a nascent patriotic movement, opposed granting the right to vote to all women, irrespective of their backgrounds or qualifications. Nevertheless, the Syrian Congress had put down a marker and underlined a threshold for other independence movements to achieve. In 1882, the British occupation of Egypt brought to an end a budding experiment in liberal democracy. In 1920, the French invasion and occupation of Damascus on July 25, 1920, put a temporary end to another experiment.[73] It was an experiment that asserted for the first time in Arab history that women had the right to participate in the political process of their country.

Before the 1920s decade was over, two substantive accounts on women's rights in the Arab world were published: one was by a Lebanese woman of Druze heritage, Nazira Zayn al-Din (Zeineddine), and another by a Tunisian political activist, who was educated at the Zaytuna mosque, worked as an accountant was an active trade unionist and championed women's rights in his country and beyond. His name was al-Tahir al-Haddad. Their narratives caused enormous furore and elicited vehement responses from all quarters of their societies.

Zayn al-Din (1908–1976) and al-Tahir al-Haddad (1899–1935) belonged to a new generation which aspired for change and social reform after their countries

had fallen under French occupation. Although they represent, in one respect, the continuation of a tradition that had its beginnings with the works of Qasim Amin, their delineations of women's rights and qualifications add dimensions that offer new perspectives and invite us to observe fresh encounters. The fact that both use the Qur'an and other Islamic texts to buttress their arguments may be noted as a throwback to earlier times, but their interpretations are largely drawn from concrete examples embedded in modern life. Moreover, Zayn al-Din's account was the first full study penned by an Arab woman and treating a single subject. Nevertheless, it would be true to say that she had predecessors, albeit on a smaller scale, such as Zaynab Fawwaz (1860–1914), who originally hailed from southern Lebanon, but spent her working life in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, or Hifni Nasif (1886–1918), an Egyptian feminist activist and author. To be more precise, Middle Eastern women's movements had been developing and gathering momentum since the second half of the nineteenth century. In their first phase, women's movements found their most prominent expressions as literary and cultural productions – writing books, publishing their own magazines and organising their own associations. Even at this early stage, some women, like Zaynab Fawwaz, raised the question of women's suffrage. During World War I, women's public activities extended to social welfare and health. Education figured also as a national task that found expression in founding new schools for girls. At this stage, it was a movement led by middle-class women. In the second phase, women's demands were deliberately formulated as part of an overarching national programme in which men and women participated for the welfare of the nation. One could dub this phase as being 'patriotic feminism' or 'feminist patriotism'. Issues already raised in the first phase, such as the veil, polygamy and education were still there, but they were listed within a wider framework that included political equality. For men and women to be equally treated by the law of the land and considered equal citizens of one country or state became the norm rather than the exception, at least theoretically if not practically. It was in this period that women entered public life in a political, professional and social sense. They participated in demonstrations, joined political parties, often forming their own branches within these parties, and some did not hesitate to take up arms in nationalist struggles, as in Palestine or Algeria. In the next phase, or in the second half of the twentieth century, women were granted the right to vote and run for parliamentary elections in newly independent countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and Algeria. Arab Gulf states, despite their wealth and close ties to the West, did not begin this process until much later, with some states still debating the religious implications of these issues. However, all Arab states, with the partial exception of Tunisia, have not yet reached the stage of seriously contemplating the introduction of secular laws to govern personal status affairs. But a certain progressive development could be clearly discerned in the feminist literature on these subjects. Whereas in the past women's rights were discussed within a religiously informed discourse, it has gradually shed its theological shibboleth and adopted a secularist style of treatment.

It is in this context that what Zayn al-Din and al-Haddad set out to argue and defend seems in one sense to belong to a bygone age. Compared to the emergence of the Gramscian narrativity, our first authors could plausibly be classified as practitioners of Islamic feminism.[74] As to the Tunisian male scholar, his work has been translated into English with a fine introduction that placed his approach and programme of reform in its historical context. His translators in this respect were not anxious to attach the work to a particular ideological category.[75] Moreover, the main topic discussed by our Lebanese feminist, the veil or veiling, was becoming almost irrelevant, as unveiling was gaining the upper hand in the battle for liberation. While al-Haddad died in 1935 at a very young age, Nazira Zayn al-Din survived him for almost forty-one years, yet she fell completely silent after the publication of her two books. But as the veil was becoming 'fashionable' again, her books were reprinted in Damascus in 1998. On the other hand, the Tunisian text has never been out of print; the latest version was published in Doha in 2012.

Perhaps the last contribution made before the onset and gradual ascendancy of what I shall call 'the identitarian tendency' was a book, consisting of a collection of articles, under the title *Major Social Problems*, published in 1936, by the medical doctor and Syrian opposition leader 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar (1879–1940).[76] The arrangement of its chapters according to a particular order of topics summed up pretty neatly all the main subjects that defined the contours and ambit of the first period of our Alfierian moment.

The book opens with a chapter on modernity or modern civilisation (*al-madaniyya*), followed by two chapters: one treating the relationship of woman and man, with special reference to the institution of marriage, while the second speculates on "the future of the Oriental family". He strongly supports monogamy as opposed to polygamy, and had no doubt that, as in the West, the extended household was being replaced by the nuclear family. He also noted the diminishing influence of patriarchy, or the father's dominance, in determining career choices or political allegiances. But he did not show much enthusiasm for women's participation in political life. He then consecrates a chapter to the topic of "state, government and subjects", followed immediately by another chapter significantly called 'State-Building'. These topics lead the reader to the longest chapter treating "political creeds and ideologies", extending from "the Republic of Plato to Russian Communism". Refining the definitions of his compatriot, al-Kawakibi as indicated earlier divides his subject into two branches: political science (*'ilm al-siyasah*) and political theory or political philosophy (*hikmat al-siyasah*). While the first deals with state forms and systems of governance, the second addresses the question of their origin, and the factors that led to the formation of civil society. His views on Ataturk's revolutionary reforms will be discussed in the next chapter on 'Religious Injunctions'. The rest of the collected articles concentrate on cultural and political and economic elements considered amenable or germane to the construction of national "homogeneity" and the creation of the bond of patriotism (*al-wataniyya*), in addition to the necessity of a new type of leader (*za'im*) or leadership. The feasibility and

desirability of violent revolution was also broached as part of political culture and life. In all cases, he thought that "a religious state" was a thing of the past. He discounted religion, except in its purely Sufi or mystical dimensions, as a unifying social bond the same way it used to be in the Middle Ages. While he praised its role in cementing social ties in the early stages of constituting a viable community, he insisted that it had lost its function in the modern age. Human societies are now built on the basis of "political union", whereby "general culture – irrespective of religious or sectarian creeds – is the basis of social unity."[77] Such views, expressed under the impact of a new world order that was soon to find its explosive implications in the Second World War, signalled the unsatisfactory character of a liberal scheme of things.

By the early 1930s, a new discourse began to dominate public discussions. It was largely identitarian, didactic and definitional. This discourse was introduced into the public arena by pan-Islamist and pan-Arabist groups and parties, followed by an Arab version of Marxism or Communism. They all fell into a set pattern that highlighted either national identity issues or purely local economic policies. Being identitarian became the focus of defining the identity of a particular country, nation or ethnicity. Persistent questions were asked, such as: is Egypt pharaonic, Mediterranean, Arab or Islamic? Each definition entailed a certain history, a specific culture and a set of particular values. Political organisations and literary associations did not flinch from asserting the characteristics of an entire nation by relying on their initial definition of its identity, leading thereby to wildly diverse tabulations of politics, ethics and economics. Such complex, yet superficial, narratives obscured the case for women's rights and the argument of building viable state structures. If we take a few examples from the leading ideologues of pan-Arabism or its more developed version, Arab nationalism, we begin to see the operative mode of such a discourse. The first to do so in a systematic way and throughout his career was Sati' al-Husri, considered as the founding father of the ideology of Arab nationalism. By reading his extensive output published between 1928 and 1968, what you come away with is his repeatedly reiterated definition of the nation as a cultural formation composed of the twin pillars of language and history. In this scheme of things, a common language takes priority and is considered more decisive in determining the nation's identity, whereas shared history is introduced as a vital but subsidiary element. Although al-Husri clearly stated his belief in the necessity of separating state and religion, and underlined in more than one occasion his support of granting women their full rights as citizens and partners, he does not seem to have contemplated discussing secularism in its full connotations in an Islamic context, nor did he think it was necessary to venture into the realm of state-building and how legislative or judicial institutions should operate.[78] The same statement applies to the output of another prominent pan-Arabist scholar, Qustantin Zurayq (1909–2000). He was a thoroughly secularist thinker, who thought that nationalism, as a modern movement, and secularism, as a cultural concept, were both requisite ingredients in the development of modernity. He called for a new Arab philosophy or theory of social development, dwelt at some length on the benefits

and necessity of liberating women and treating them as equal partners of men, and directed his attention to the discipline of futurology or futures studies. He was also a keen historian who was anxious to promote historical consciousness and a sense of the past as opposed to its glorification as a permanent or recurring present. All these laudable contributions were never discussed as elements of a theory of a future Arab state. Michel 'Aflaq (1910–1989), the co-founder of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party, who could be said to have coined or popularised the modern terminology of Arab nationalism, such as unity, liberty and socialism, falls into a similar category. Theorising state and secularism, in addition to women's rights, did not figure as an urgent task in pan-Arabist literature.

Is it any wonder that all pan-Arabist organisations and groups, upon seizing power, often by means of a coup d'état, were at a loss as to the future form of the new state they wished to set up? As military officers, or party cadres, they invariably managed and directed state institutions through ad hoc committees controlled by what they dubbed Revolutionary Command Councils – or by turning state institutions into instruments run and operated by single-party regimes. President Nasser, for example, kept reforming, changing and reorganising the Egyptian state under his rule from 1956 to 1970, at least on three occasions, without settling on or being satisfied with a particular formula. Moreover, no single regime, be it monarchical or republican, ventured beyond introducing amendments or improvements into set pieces of legislation on women or democratic procedures. Sectarian rules, religious regulations and Shari'a law, in one version or another, have continued to govern all personal status issues. This muddle has persisted in afflicting legislation and management of state institutions in most, if not all, Arab countries.

Pan-Islamist, or simply Islamist, groups did not fare much better. Their political proposals to set up an Islamic state do not stray outside very general formulas. The slogan 'Islam is the solution' is perhaps the most familiar and least helpful in searching for their potential political order. Ever since the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, this vague formula has reared its head under different circumstances without ever making much progress in a practical setting. On the other hand, Arab Communist parties avoided identitarian dilemmas on the whole, but immersed themselves in purely trade unionist or domestic economic problems. In all cases, state-building and women's emancipation fell largely outside the direct interests of the main political parties and intellectual currents.

Notes

1 Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman*, translated by Samiha Sidhom Peterson, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2004, p. 115; Arabic edition: Qasim Amin, *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, Matba'at al-Sha'b, Cairo, 1911, p.alif. The translated edition is excellently executed in most cases. But I have used the English version sparingly, preferring in most instances my own translation.

2 "It is impossible to understand woman's present status without an adequate knowledge of her position in history. This is a basic principle of social research, which demands

the understanding of various stages of change." Ibid., p. 119. Arabic, p. 1. I made slight changes to the English translation.

3 Muhammad Jamil Bayhum, *al-Mara 'a fi al-Tarikh wa al-Shara'i'*, n.p., Beirut, 1921, pp. vi–ix.

4 Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyyah*, 3rd edition, Matba'at al-Manar, Cairo, 1341h/1922–23, p. 4. The reference is to the preface written by the publisher, Rashid Rida. It was Rida who instigated the debate in the first place. Both Rida and Antun were born and grew up in northern Lebanon. The northern Lebanese city of Tripoli was their main social milieu in which they were exposed to the new ideas sweeping the Ottoman empire. Both sailed to Egypt on the same ship in 1897. Whereas Rida, a Sunni Muslim, joined the circle of Muhammad 'Abduh as an ardent disciple of his brand of religion, Antun, an Orthodox Christian, chose to adopt secularism as the cure of most ills plaguing the Arab world.

5 Ernest Renan, *Averroes et L'Averroisme, Essai Historique*, Auguste Durand, Paris, 1852.

6 Farah Antun, *Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatuhu*, al-Jami'a, Alexandria, 1903, pp. 10–32.

7 Their views are discussed at length later.

8 Farah Antun, *Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatuhu*, pp. 41 and 59.

9 Ibid., pp. 43–44.

10 Appleton & Company, New York, 1875. Draper was the son of an English Methodist preacher. On the other hand, 'Abduh must have used Draper's book in its French edition, as he had by that time learnt to speak and read the French language. It was translated under the title *Les Conflits de la Science et de la Religion*, Librairie Germer Bailliere, Paris, 1875.

11 Sarruf, together with his compatriot Faris Nimr (1856–1951), established in Beirut in 1876 the first Arabic magazine, *al-Muqtataf*, dealing exclusively with scientific subjects. In 1885, they transferred their magazine, *al-Muqtataf*, to Cairo, as explained earlier.

12 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970, chap. 10.

13 Upon graduating in 1874, Nimr was appointed by the College to assist Cornelius van Dyk (1818–1895), professor of astronomy, in the observatory as well as to teach Latin. Their journal or magazine was published without interruption until 1952. According to Marwa al-Shakry, 'The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut', *Past &Present*, No. 196, 2007, pp. 173–214:

> In Cairo, Sarruf and Nimr also founded the controversial newspaper *al-muqattam*, which began its publication in Cairo in 1889 and which was strongly pro-British in tone, and the *Sudan Times*, a bi-weekly Arabic-English paper founded in Cairo and Khartoum in 1903.
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> *(p. 200)*

14 Lewis was both a qualified medical doctor and an ordained Presbyterian minister.

15 Shafik Jeha, *Darwin wa Azmat 1882*, n.p., Beirut, 1991, pp. 222–223.

16 Nadia Farag, 'The Lewis Affair and the Fortunes of al-Muqtataf', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 1972, pp. 73–83. According to Farag:

> From the time of its foundation onwards, *al-Muqtataf* showed a great interest in the theory of evolution. One has but to look in the index of *al-Muqtataf* under the relevant entries to see the dozens of articles which were published in the journal about the subject of evolution, besides the innumerable questions and answers, notes and queries, news and letters to the editors on the same subject.
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> *(p. 74)*

17 Librairie Plon, Paris, 1893. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 112–113, offers an excellent summary of the Duc's Orientalist

vocabulary in enumerating the negative qualities of all Egyptians. It must also be stressed that d'Harcourt (1835–1895) was still hoping to push his country towards a militaristic adventure in the Middle East. Recalling Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, d'Harcourt summed up its state of affairs in these words: "sans industrie, sans commerce, sans relations intellectuelles quelconques avec le reste de l'humanité. Seules, dans ce triste pays, les ruines étaient remarquables" (p. viii).

18 An expression reminiscent of a similar phrase or slogan used in the second half of the twentieth century by Bernard Lewis and repeated by Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Simon and Schuster, London, 1996. See p. 213 for the context of 'the clash of civilisations' as explained by Lewis.

19 Duc d'Harcourt, *L'Égypte et les Égyptiens*, p. xi. By "Arabes", le Duc d'Harcourt meant either its indigenous Muslim Egyptians, notably the class of fellaheen, or its original conquerors under the banner of Islam. But he reminds his readers that the early Arabs who conquered Egypt were of a different character: intrepid cavaliers encountered many centuries later by the French upon their invasion of Algeria (p. 6). Volney is quoted in a section on the Mamluks and their treacherous and perfidious character (pp. 8–9). The same description was repeated word for word by an Egyptian historian writing in 1927 or 1928. See my *Modern Arab Historiography*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, p. 84. The topic of woman was a new addition that does not figure as a separate subject in Volney's narratives. See, in particular, M. Constantin-Francois de Volney, *Voyage en Syrie Et En Égypte Pendant Les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*, 2 vols, Volland, Paris, 1787.

20 Le Duc d'Harcourt devoted chapter VI (pp. 88–119) in its entirety to the subject of women: to him Egyptian women of all classes were either concealed (veiled) or locked up (secluded in the harem). *L'Égypte et les Égyptiens*, p. 88. Chapter VII (pp. 120–149) dealing with slavery (*Les esclaves*) is mostly a discussion of the treatment and status of young girls captured or purchased to serve in various roles in Egyptian households. By the time of its composition, this practice had dwindled to a trickle.

21 Kassem-Amin, *Les Égyptiens, Réponse à M. Le Duc D'Harcourt*, Le Caire, J. Barbier, imprimeur, 1894.

22 Ibid., p. 14: "Mais il y a une chose que l'Égyptien redoute plus que les maladies, plus que les coups de fusil, plus que la mort même, c'est l'autorité! Ah! oui, l'autorité, c'est la terreur du fellah!"

23 Ibid., pp. 241–244. In this sense, *madaniyya* was used to mean modernity rather than simply civilisation. It must be pointed out that 'civilisation' as such could be ancient or modern.

24 Ibid., p. 183. Amin takes it upon himself, as did al-Tahtawi before him, to refute the charge that Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ordered his commander, upon his conquest of Egypt, to burn down the famous library of Alexandria (pp. 240–241).

25 According to Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994, the slim volume "received at least thirty angry attacks" (p. 258), in either book form or pamphlets. Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, p. 47, for its multi-faceted repercussions.

26 In religion, *ummah* or *umma* simply meant 'community of believers'. Moreover, it is used in the Qur'an to denote several entities or things such as a community of believers, a specific social group or a single person. In other early Islamic documents, such as the Constitution of Medina, it referred to the formation of political alliances by different social groups.

27 Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-mar'a*, Maktabat al-Tarraqi, Cairo, 1899, p. 6.

28 "I do not believe there is one single educated Egyptian who does not think that his nation is in dire need of reform in its present condition" (Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-Mar'a*, p. 3).

29 It seems that the mania for ancient Egypt, its mummies and antiquities had not yet penetrated local cultural debates. However, in his second book, *The New Woman*, Amin does allude to the monuments of ancient Egypt, but without much of a fanfare.

30 Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-mar'a*, pp. 6–8.
31 Ibid., 14–16.
32 Ibid., p. 24.
33 It is perhaps pertinent in this context to point out that Butrus al-Bustani uses in his 1849 address on women the term *ta'lim* (instruction) rather than 'education' (*tarbiya*). Strictly speaking, instruction is more of a technical undertaking, whereas *tarbiya* has a much wider connotation ranging from education to cultivation and upbringing.
34 Marilyn Booth, 'Before Qasim Amin: Writing Women's History in 1890s Egypt', in *The Long 1890s in Egypt*, edited by Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014, chap. 13.
35 Kenneth M. Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology, and Law in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Egypt*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 2015, p. 207.
36 Qasim Amin, *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, pp. 30–32.
37 Ibid., pp. 39–40, 86–90. It is not entirely clear what he meant by "the veil" in this context, and whether he was still following the definition of his previous book published a year earlier. In its first definition, unveiling meant to him and early feminists, like Huda Sha'rawi (1879–1947), revealing the face and the hands, rather than doing away with any head covering altogether.
38 Ibid., pp. 43–46.
39 Ibid., pp. 78–79.
40 Ibid., pp. 105–108.
41 Ibid., pp. 114–119. Amin goes on to refute the charge made by some religious scholars of al-Azhar Mosque and University that history does not register the names of female scientists, philosophers or inventors. He lists and enumerates the scientific and philosophical contributions of Maria Mitchell, Caroline Herschel, Marquise du Chatelet, Madame Germaine de Staël, Clemence Rouvet, George Sand and others.
42 Ibid., 123–136.
43 Ibid., pp. 171–178. These views, irrespective of their accuracy, are rarely mentioned in studies on Qasim Amin.
44 Lord Cromer was the effective ruler of Egypt from 1883 to 1907. He notoriously blamed Islam for the backwardness of Egypt, while opposing in the same breath women's suffrage in Britain. He thought that granting the vote to women would carry "discord and confusion into every family of the country". Quoted in Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 374. Owen called Cromer's refusal to endorse women's suffrage "the thin end of the wedge argument".
45 Qasim Amin, *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, p. 177.
46 Ibid., pp. 177–183.
47 Ibid., pp. 200–214.
48 Ibid., p. 227.
49 There is no agreement among scholars as to the exact date of his birth. Some choose (unconvincingly) 1855 rather than 1849.
50 Mustafa al-Shihabi, *al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya*, Jami'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya, Cairo, 2nd edition, 1961, pp. 57–58. The author mentions al-Kawakibi's *Umm al-Qura* and *Taba'I' al-Istibdad* as two of the most influential textbooks used to propagate new notions and acquaint young members of clandestine organisations, formed at the turn of the twentieth century, with modern pan-Arabist ideas.
51 Youssef M. Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, pp. 82–89. See also Salam Kawakibi, 'Un Réformateur et la Science', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, No. 101–102, July 2003, pp. 69–82.
52 The first Arabic translation of the original Greek text was published in 1957 under the auspices of UNESCO.
53 Mother of cities or towns, i.e., Mecca, the birthplace of Islam.
54 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, *Umm al-Qura*, Dar al-Ra'id al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1982, pp. 228–229.

55 Ibid., p. 18.

56 Ibid., p. 55.

57 See Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013. An excellent panoramic survey of the impact of Darwinism on modern Arab thought.

58 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi', *Taba'I' al-Istibdad*, al-Matba'a al-Rahmaniyya, Cairo, 1931, pp. 24–27. Similar claims are put forward in his *Umm al-Qura*, pp. 54–55.

59 Vittorio Alfieri, *Of Tyranny*, translated, edited, and with an Introduction by Julius A. Molinaro and Beatrice Corrigan, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON, 1961, p. 63. Alfieri's *Della Tirannide* was written in 1777, but had its first published edition in 1800. It was reprinted several times in Italy and became very popular in France in various translations and editions. It was translated into Turkish in 1898 under the title *Istibdad*, which is the same term for tyranny in Arabic. Whether al-Kawakibi used an Italian, a French or an Ottoman Turkish translation is still a moot point. Although it is generally assumed that it was a Turkish translation, it must be stressed that this translation was printed in Geneva and did not become available in the Ottoman empire until after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

60 Ibid., Introduction, p. xix.

61 Ibid., p. xxi.

62 Ibid., pp. 96–99. Alfieri makes clear that he was able to show "in great detail how tyranny is constituted", but it was only "indirectly" that he showed "how a republic might be constituted" (p. 99).

63 Al-Kawakibi, *Taba'I' al-istibdad*, p. 131.

64 François Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*, Langlet et Cie, Paris, 1838.

65 Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-A'mal al-Kamila*, Vol. 3, edited by M. 'Amarah, Dar al-Shuruq, Beirut, 1993, p. 24. However, 'Abduh did not go beyond his desire to see the Arab world governed by an "enlightened despot".

66 Al-Kawakibi, *Taba'I'*, p. 3. Al-Kawakibi makes a few unflattering references to Arab women, giving the impression that they had already managed to seduce men to do their bidding.

67 'Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi, *Kitabat*, Vol. 1, edited by 'Abd al-Ilah Nabhan, Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1995, pp. 81–86. The first edition came out in 1908.

68 'Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi, *Maqalat al-Hadara*, Vol. 3, 1996, pp. 3–58. See also *Maqalat wa Kutub*, Vol. 2, 1995, pp. 403–414.

69 Mansour Fahmy, *La Condition de la femme dans la tradition et l'evolution de l'islamisme*, Librarairie Felix Alcan, Paris, 1913. Republished as *La Condition de la femme dans L'islam*, Editions Allia, Paris, 1990, 2021. It was not published in Arabic until 1997. Its publisher, Dar Jamal-Verlag, is based in Cologne, Germany.

70 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*, Maṭba'at Misr, Cairo, 1925. It is worth mentioning that it has reprinted several times since its publication. Consequently, it has never been out of print. There is now an English translation: Ali Abdel Razek, *Islam and the Foundation of Political Power*, edited by Abdou Filali Ansary, translated by Maryam Loutfi, Edinburgh University Press in association with The Agha Khan University, Edinburgh, 2013.

71 Taha Husayn, *fi al-Sh'ir al-Jahili*, Dar al-Kutub, Cairo, 1926.

72 Ibid., p. 26.

73 See Marie Almaz Shahristan, *al-Mu'tamar al-Suri al-'Am 1919–1920*, Dar Amwaj, Beirut, 2000, pp. 193–207. For the first draft of the Syrian constitution, see ibid., pp. 245–266. For an English version of the discussions on women's suffrage, see Elizabeth F. Thompson, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs*, Grove Press, London, 2020, chap. 13, pp. 212–225. For the English version of the text of the constitution, see ibid., Appendix C.

74 See, for example, a recent biography of Zayn al-Din: Miriam Cooke and Nazira Zeineddine, *A Pioneer of Islamic Feminism*, Oneworld Academic, London, 2010,

2019. Zayn al-Din published two well-known books dealing with her views of the status of Muslim women: *al-Sufur wa al-Hijab*, Matabi' Quzma, Beirut, 1928, and *al-Fatat wa al-Shuyukh*, al-Matba'a al-Americaniyya, Beirut, 1929.

75 Ronak Husni and Daniel L. Newman, *Muslim Women in Law and Society*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007. This is an annotated translation of al-Haddad's *Imra'tuna fi al-Shari'a wa al-Mujtama'*. The Arabic text was first published in Tunis in 1929.

76 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, *al-Qadaya al-ijtima'iyya al-Kubra fi al-'alam al-'arabi*, Matba'at al-Muqtataf, Cairo, 1936.

77 Ibid., p. 114.

78 In my book *Arab Nationalism: A History*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, I dedicated an entire chapter (chapter 4) to al-Husri's contribution to the theory of pan-Arabism. Yet, I had to deduce his approach to state institutions from scattered remarks. It was an exercise in squeezing out bits and pieces and sticking them together.