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THE HISTORICAL DEBATE ON SECULARISATION BETWEEN F. ANṬŪN AND M. ‘ABDUH.
GOD’S ABSOLUTISM AND ISLĀM’S IRRATIONALITY AS CORNERSTONES OF
ORIENTALIST ISLAMIC- CHRISTIAN DISPUTE DURING THE NAḤḌA.

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Abstract

In 1945, Hamilton A.R. Gibb delivered the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago, supporting a classical Orientalist attitude concerning, first of all, the Arab incapacity to throw off its intense feeling for the separateness and individuality of concrete events, and secondly, encouraging a degree of methodological generalization, arguing for the existence of a Muslim aversion directed towards the thought-processes of rationalism. This was a point of view which was deeply rooted within classical Orientalist authors, from Silvestre de Sacy, to Ernest Renan and Ignac Goldziher to David B. MacDonald. However, this analysis is not going to reconsider issues already widely covered by academic research, but will instead investigate the debates between Faraḥ Anṭūn, and Muḥammad ‘Abduh on Secularization, and the dispute on the specific topics related to the *Kalām* argument within the inter-religious context of the *Naḥḍa*. In the *Odyssey of F. Anṭūn, A Syrian Christian’s quest on Secularism*, Donald M. Reid reports Anṭūn’s viewpoint that Islamic Theology was mainly rooted on two assertions: God’s omnipotence and the rejection of every secondary cause capable of limiting the creator’s power. Allah’s *qadar* discourages scientific and philosophical research because every worldly event is directly and uniquely related to God’s behaviour. Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s refutation promoted a new- Mu‘tazilite and Philosophical analysis which was able to show how human reason, secondary causes and logic were, on the contrary, not rejected by Islām, but were deeply ingrained within Islamic and religious thought. The founder of *al-Jāmi‘ah al-‘Uthmānīyah* produced an attack not only geared towards an attack against Islām, but also against all Semitic religions, with the intention to highlight the opportunity to create a secular State in which Muslims and Christians could participate on a footing of complete equality. ‘Abduh’s position, although not so far away, was strictly connected to the need to have law based on relevant principles of equality that could be argued for through a reformist Islamic approach, because within Islām, state and religions could not be separated, but could be reformed together. This paper seeks to deepen the analysis concerning the *Kalām* cornerstones which were re-discovered to support ‘Abduh’s standpoint in this open debate, and also to examine an Orientalist Arab-Christian thought which, through Faraḥ Anṭūn, would further encourage a confrontation within Arab society which is still unresolved today.

FARAḤ ANṬŪN AND HIS DUAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Faraḥ Anṭūn’s intellectual awareness parallels the feeling of falling in love: a privileged relationship with an Enlightened and Positivist European culture that this author identified in the works and also within the life experiences of his favourite, which included Jean J. Rousseau, Lev Tolstoy, Jules Simon, Ernest Renan, and Friedrich Nietzsche. It would be wrong to consider, however, that the more intimate consciousness of Faraḥ Anṭūn belongs exclusively to the European world. On the contrary, it is relevant in this introduction to discover the dual, or better, the plural intellectual background of *al-Jāmi‘ah* ‘s founder.

Inside the *Naḥḍa*, in particular during the XIX century, a *First Generation*¹ of authors emerged for whom Arab cultural renewal was directly linked to and influenced by the discovery of the European cultural background. Regardless of their religious view, the Egyptian Rifā‘a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, the

¹ Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 67s.; Paolo Branca, *Voci dell’Islam Moderno*, (Genova, 1997), p. 101ff.

Circassian, but Tunisian by adoption, Khayr al-Dīn, the Syrian ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī and the Lebanese Shakīb Arslān and Buṭrus al-Bustānī, were influenced in varying degrees by Enlightened and post-Enlightened thought, in particular concerning the connections existing between Religion and Politics, State and Law and the equality of all citizens in a State of Law.

Rousseau’s *Du Contrat Social: ou principe du droit politique*, in which the main political topics refer to the new figure of the Citizen, the role of Sovereignty and that of General Will, or better the will of the majority; Montesquieu’s *Considerations sur le causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*, in which the virtuous political system is identified in the Roman Republic’s historical phase, and Fenelon’s *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, which directly influenced Jean J. Rousseau’s reflection, played major roles in the early *Nahḍa*, bringing the Arab intelligentsia to reflect on issues not previously addressed.

Ṭaḥṭāwī’s *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*² is a deep analysis of the main characteristics and qualities established in the modern state: the French Constitution of 1814 and the first ten articles are contemplated and scrutinized to increase knowledge of such modern dogmas as Homeland (*waṭan*), the rights of a nation’s citizens, the citizens’ responsibility, the different types of Freedom, the concept of Equality and Justice and the connection between freedom and happiness.

Khayr al-Dīn’s *Aqwam al-masālik fī ma’rifat aḥwāl al-mamālik*,³ (tr. with the Surest Path to knowledge concerning the conditions of the country) has two specific tasks: the first is to spur Arab and Muslim statesmen to seek all possible ways of improving the condition of the Islamic *Umma*, increasing their capabilities and competences in sciences and knowledge and improving their working life in agriculture and trade, promoting an industrial awareness. The second is to limit the persistent opposition among the Muslim masses with regard to the improvement of others, simply because they support the idea that all the behaviour and suggestions of non-Muslims must be renounced, and any possible enhancements associated with them should not be taken into account.

Finally, ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī’s *Umm al-Qurā’*⁴ (tr. the Mothers of Town, Mecca) is an original analysis in which twenty three representatives from around the Muslim world discuss Pan-Islamic resurgence and criticize political tyranny. The list of causes concerning the decline, referred to religious and political reasons which have moral roots, and are acknowledged in fundamental and derivative causes: the effect of the doctrine of Predestination on the ideas of the *Umma*, the abandonment of religious tolerance and leniency in religious practise, the belief that philosophical and rational sciences are incompatible with religion, the enmity towards the higher sciences because of the comfort of ignorance and abasement etc. are only a few examples of a long list of aspects which reflect Arab cultural stagnation and religious/political sectarianism.

The *Nahḍa*’s ongoing reflection on these topics acknowledged an initial debt to European thought, whilst nevertheless showing a keen involvement within a reformist Arab policy engaged to revolutionize the entire Middle East. This approach, which was to fragment into more diverse strands during the twentieth century, maintained a certain unity of purpose, although showing individual points of view. Al-Kawākibī’s anti- Ottoman Pan-Islamism is different from al-Afghānī’s political activism, which is more directed against Western imperialism. Nevertheless, both, in reflecting on the necessary improvements of Islamic society, supported the use of *Ijtihād* (independent reasoning) refusing *taqlīd* (imitation) as a form of capitulation and abandonment of reflection. At the same time, M. ‘Abduh’s considerations, in continuity of that of his master, were to show a specific uninterrupted awareness of the debate between European Orientalists and Arab- Muslim authors on secularization and religion’s role in society -- al-Afghānī debated this area of thought with E. Renan in Paris, after

² Rifā‘a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, tr. by Ihsan ‘Abbas, rev. by Ch. Issawi, ed. Ra’if Khuri in *Modern Arab Thought*, (Princeton, 1983); Kurzman, Ch., *Modernist Islam, 1840- 1940*, (Oxford, 2002), p. 31ff.

³ Khayr al-Dīn, *Aqwam al-masālik fī ma’rifat aḥwāl al-mamālik*, tr. by Leon Carl Brown, (Cambridge, 1967); Kurzman, Ch., *Modernist Islam, 1840- 1940*, p. 40ff.

⁴ ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī, *Umm al-Qurā’*, in *A’mā al-kāmila lil Kawākibī*, (Beirut, 1995), pp. 358s.; Joseph G. Rahme, ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī’s reformist ideology, Arab Pan-Islamism and the Internal Other’, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, n.2 (1999), pp. 159-177.

his lecture on 'Islam and Science' given at the Sorbonne in 1883, and M. 'Abduh disputed with Anṭūn (a main supporter of E. Renan) on *al-Manār* in 1902 on similar topics.⁵

As pointed out by Josep P. Montada in his article 'Faraḥ Anṭūn: active reception of European thought,'⁶ this author was a novelist, a playwright and a journalist, but in relation to his work as a translator and interpreter, and as main editor of the journal *al-Jāmi'ah*, he was in direct contact with a European literary tradition which influenced him not only in his way of thinking, but also in the way of being an Arab-Christian affiliate of the *Nahḍa*.

I add *Christian* for a specific reason: to emphasize the more open natural propensity of this author with regard to everything related to European culture. The privileged relationship among the European powers and the Near East Christian communities (Latin, Catholics, Orthodox or Maronites) was not exclusively related to economic and trade activities,⁷ but also included the fields of education and culture. The Kiftīn boarding school, where Anṭūn was formed, was 'a centre of tolerance' where the President was a Protestant and the Director a Maronite, while the teacher of Arabic and Arab Literature was a Muslim.⁸

However, it would be inaccurate to consider Anṭūn as an exclusive supporter of a Romantic and Positivist literature, more inclined to be Westernized, than to defend his cultural background.

There are, at least two aspects of Faraḥ Anṭūn: the translator and interpreter of European post-Enlightened thought, influenced by both eighteenth century and contemporary European authors, and the Arab- *Nahḍa* supporter and novelist, deeply engaged in a process of Near Eastern change.

The founder of *al-Jāmi'ah al-'Uthmāniyya* (the Ottoman League), a journal launched in March 1899, and after a few months re-named more simply as *al-Jāmi'ah*,⁹ used many sources, mainly French periodicals, to make his magazine attractive to the Cairo intelligentsia. After a few editions, *al-Jāmi'ah*, along with the review *al-Hilāl*, founded by Jūrjī Zaydān, and *al-Muqtabas*, set up by M. Kurd 'Alī, became one of the most important periodicals read by Egypt's cultural élite.¹⁰

The real target of *al-Jāmi'ah* was to support the social and cultural development of Egypt, although Faraḥ Anṭūn, as a migrant intellectual, also ensured the representation of democratic and egalitarian ideas. Specifically, the Lebanese author aimed to promote the reform of the Ottoman state. The main goal of *al-Jāmi'ah*'s editor emerged in the first edition of the magazine, in an article entitled *al-Iṣlāḥ al-ḥaqīqī* (the true reform): to ethically reform the Ottoman and Egyptian states, and to encourage a more fundamental political renovation.¹¹

Faraḥ Anṭūn was the Arab interpreter of Enlightened and Positivist aspects of European reflection, using the most interesting ideas and values to convey a spirit of change in the Near East. At the beginning, he shared the enthusiasm of many Arab intellectuals for the French Revolution, and at that time the common idea was that a clear similarity existed between the situation in France before the Revolution and the contemporary period of the Ottoman Empire. This subject would therefore interest the politically motivated readers, and the inclusion of a historical novel by A. Dumas could well have contributed to the success of the magazine. If the first literary love of Faraḥ Anṭūn was Jean H. Bernardin de S. Pierre, his intellectual admiration for Jean J. Rousseau was also expressed profoundly during his visit of France, and in particular during his time in Chambéry, where the Swiss met Madame Françoise – Louise de Warens, and lived for 15 years. The reading of *Les Confessions* would inspire him along the path of approaching a state model rooted on the values of equality and education, and in an article entitled, *Mashrū' jadīd fī-l-lughah al-'arabiyyah* (a new project within Arabic),

⁵ Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, p. 120ff.

⁶ Josep P. Montada, 'Faraḥ Anṭūn: active reception of European thought', *Pensamiento*, Vol. 64, n. 242 (2008), pp. 1003-1024.

⁷ Gelvin J., *The Modern Middle East. A History*, (Oxford, 2011).

⁸ Josep P. Montada, 'Faraḥ Anṭūn: active reception of European thought,' p. 1004.

⁹ Faraḥ Anṭūn's bibliography is well analyzed by Donald M. Reid, *The Odyssey of F. Anṭūn. A Syrian Christian's quest on Secularism*, (Chicago- Minneapolis, 1975), p. 3.

¹⁰ Maria Avino, *L'Occidente nella Cultura Araba*, (Roma, 2002), p. 45.; Sharabi, H., *Arab Intellectuals and the West: the formative years, 1875-1914*, (Baltimore, 1970).

¹¹ Faraḥ Anṭūn, 'Al-Iṣlāḥ al-ḥaqīqī,' *al-Jāmi'a*, 1 (1899), p. 5.

published in 1902, Anṭūn counted *émile ou de l'éducation* and *Le contrat social* among the main works that Arabs were in urgent need of familiarity with. The editor specifically highlights Rousseau's idea that education is necessary and imperative in order to save the good intimate aspects of human nature. Only the promotion of the formation of men free from prejudice, violence and hypocrisy can be expected to give rise to a better society. As with Rousseau, Anṭūn is confident in the possibility of reforming society by working on the individual: 'What else is this social reform, of which so much talks these days, if not a reform of men?'¹²

A second formative author for the Lebanese novelist was Lev Tolstoy, and in particular his novel *Resurrection*, which is a panoramic description of social life in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, and reflects its author's outrage at the social injustices of the world in which he lived. Anṭūn viewed these two authors' opinions in relation to the injustices within society as being not just relevant to their own time and situation, but as being applicable on a universal basis.

However, the most influential European activist to which Farah Anṭūn would come to be compared to, was the French philosopher and statesman Jules Simon, whose essay *La Femme au XIX siècle* he translated (*al-Mar'at fī l-qarn al-'ishrīn*). It is important to emphasize that *al-Jāmi'ah* would have supported and defended the ideas of Simon in the Arab world, and particularly his recognition of the important role of women in society. In his view, the woman becomes an essential element of the educational process, one who transfers the spirit of the nation, the foundation upon which the political virtues must be built. The second main credit towards Jules Simon concerns the universal right to be educated non-denominationally, although Anṭūn's Kifṭīn School was plural but confessional.¹³ 'Simon was a freethinking deist, a committed Republican, yet rather conservative. If there is a constant in his activity, it is no doubt his concern for public instruction, *education nationale*. He pleaded for a free compulsory education; 'free' means not excluding the Church from running its own schools.'¹⁴ The Editor, who started a limited correspondence with the French Philosopher to ask permission to translate his writings, repeatedly asserted, from the first issue of his periodical, that a true reformist approach in any country is based on education, which is directly linked to the family and to the school system. Energised, one might say, by a spirit of the Enlightenment, Anṭūn was also driven by a deep need to spread the culture within every level of society, in the belief that this would help the Arab world to annihilate intolerance, prejudices and every form of obscurantism, seeing these ills as the main causes of Near Eastern decadence.¹⁵

The picture of Anṭūn which first emerges, as briefly described, is that of an Arab who identifies in an Enlightened and nineteenth century Europe, a model from which inspiration may be drawn for the reform of the Arab world and a decadent Ottoman Empire. However, this interpreter and translator also played a significant role as the supporter of an Arab *Nahḍa* in which he gave his contribution for an improvement of Near Eastern societies. All his articles and contributions are intended to raise awareness of Europe, and more particularly of France, in order to improve the society to which F. Anṭūn feels inextricably linked, the Arab one.

Anṭūn also wanted, through the magazine, to teach the Arabs the best way to protect themselves 'culturally and politically,' from the hidden dangers inherent in aid proposals made by the European powers. The Lebanese encouraged Arabs to become responsible about their economic resources without delegating their exploitation or their administration to Westerners; at the same time, Anṭūn encouraged them to become more united, to all feel part of the same community.¹⁶ Although fascinated by French and European culture, the founder of *al-Jāmi'ah* was well aware of the risk the Ottoman Empire and the Arab world ran:

¹² Farah Anṭūn, 'al-Riwāyāt al-'arabiyyah wa anfa'uhā lanā', *al-Jāmi'a*, 9 (1906), pp. 331-339.

¹³ Farah Anṭūn, 'Al-Sharq wa al-Gharb, al-Dā' al-khārijī', *al-Jāmi'a*, 1 (1899), p. 6.

¹⁴ Josep P. Montada, 'Farah Anṭūn: active reception of European thought', p. 1012.

¹⁵ Maria Avino, *L'Occidente nella Cultura Araba*, p. 48.

¹⁶ Paola Viviani, *Un Maestro del Novecento Arabo: Farah Anṭūn*, (Roma, 2004), p. 32.

Unfortunately, the West, in our body, has already seen a gap for their own boundless ambition. In fact, Europe has created it by his own hand, using, for this purpose, the principle of the division, that of *divide et impera*; so, he began to work hard to separate the hearts and create discord, using against each other in order to achieve their own ends. At one point, the West, realizing that the process would be slow if it were limited to work on the thoughts already formed, has used the schools to get what he wanted.¹⁷

It is for this reason that Antūn initially supported a Pan-Islamic, or rather, a Pan-religious attitude, encouraging the unity of the Ottoman Empire against European colonization. In the article: *Al-Ikhā' wa'l-ḥurriyyah*,¹⁸ Antūn emphasises the values of brotherhood and patriotism (*ḥub l-watan*) for the preservation of unity, and also in regaining faith in God, which applies to all the religions established within the territory of the empire. It seems that the Lebanese supported the idea that the unity of the people was closely connected with the assurance that God is the One for all believers, no matter what their particular confession. Antūn searched the instances of contact between Christians and Muslims, with the hope of healing conflicts and misunderstandings, without fully understanding that the further break-up between these faiths was already in train, and indeed, that some of his work would actually contribute to this disruptive process.

The model proposed by Antūn was to emerge as that incorporated in his novel, *Religion, Science and Property, or the three cities, (Ūrshalīm al-Jadīda aw faṭḥ al-'Arab bayt al-Maqdis)*,¹⁹ in which he proposed a utopian society based on the principles of equality, fraternity and moderate socialism. The novel is a Historical analysis related to the different phases of Jerusalem under the Jewish, Christian and Arab authorities, and within it, his methodological approach, which is directly linked to a socialist and secularized project for the society, emerges. Adopting the works of Montesquieu and Comte, but abandoning the polemical spirit of the debate with M. 'Abduh, Faraḥ Antūn established that the main causes of the decadence of the empires in History, and specifically of the Byzantine empire, was the interference between the political and religious powers. History, or more precisely, a critical approach to history, like a Science, is able to show the truth and to determine the causes and consequences of society's progresses and delays. The main problem in Antūn's work, is that he ignored the advent of Islām in 'Arab society. The author failed to properly consider this historical revolutionary event as an episode on which to build a critical comment. Placing emphasis on the Arab ethnic main character in order to create solidarity between Christians and Muslims, but ignoring the universality of the Islamic message, his hope for a utopic and secular society would have had little value from the outset.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is relevant to conclude this introduction by observing that the first Antūn, the interpreter and knower of European thought, is quite different from the Lebanese author, who was able to locate in confessionalism (*marāḍ al-'asr*) the great problem of the Arab world, and the factor which prevents the formation of a national consciousness and the development of a feeling of unity. As a result, he was to take on religious issues, an attitude that can be defined as deistic, of rejection of domestic disputes between the various religious behaviours, and was to develop an idea of religion that defines 'natural,' in accordance with reason, and which tended to identify God with the supreme order of nature.²¹ In line with these positions, he did not fail to make accusations against men of religion, but directed these almost exclusively toward the Christian clergy, which he saw as guilty of cultivating in the people those feelings of intolerance towards other religions, fanaticism and sectarianism, which were all in opposition to true progress and were designed only to preserve their secular power. It is evident that Antūn is capable of anticipating Modernist approaches, something

¹⁷ Faraḥ Antūn, "al-Islām wa'l-madāris wa'l-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah" *al-Jāmi'a*, 14 (1899), pp. 279-283.

¹⁸ Faraḥ Antūn, "Al-Ikhā' wa'l-ḥurriyyah" *al-Jāmi'a*, 1 (1899), pp. 33-35.

¹⁹ Zayned ben Lagha, « Ūrshalīm al-Jadīda de F. Antūn, une vision de l'histoire pour un projet de société », *Bullettin d'études Orientales*, Vol. 53-54 (2001-2002), pp. 105-123.

²⁰ Zayned ben Lagha, « Ūrshalīm al-Jadīda de F. Antūn, une vision de l'histoire pour un projet de société », p. 122- 123.

²¹ Maria Avino, *L'Occidente nella Cultura Araba*, p. 48.

which was to clearly emerge in the debate with Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and that he was more than just a pedantic imitator of nineteenth century European thought, although the influence of Ernest Renan on his thinking is strong.²²

This dual understanding of Antūn’s intellectual background, as the Arab interpreter of European thought and as the Arab *Nahḍa* writer, needs to be seen in the context of an Eastern Christian cultural attitude toward an Arab world with a Muslim majority. The influence of Ernest Renan’s religious view on the Lebanese is probably the key to a better understanding of Antūn’s position in the debate with Muḥammad ‘Abduh and to his modernist pan-Arab attitude.

REDISCOVERING ERNEST RENAN

The influence of *la science laïque* and the aim of promoting a critical historicism of Christianity shaped Ernest Renan’s thinking during its development. The conflicting connection between Renan’s philological approach to critical History and the long history of faith in Jesus, have disrupted, in the French, the association between personal faith and the evolution of the Christian Faith in History. Renan’s increasing atheism starts from the recognition that Science is the new religion, because at present, philology and critical history are able to dismantle *dogma* and previous historical understanding, putting it fully into question.

Edward Said argued that Renan psychologically replaced his faith in Christ with an Orientalist approach on Semitic studies, in order to confirm to himself that his choice of atheism was well established.²³

Renan’s influence on European schools of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies remains clear in the positions assumed by such academics as William Muir (1819 – 1905) and Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883), but is also present in the work of more recent authors: Hamilton A.R. Gibb, in 1945, delivered the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago supporting a classical Orientalist attitude concerning first of all, the Arab incapacity to throw off its intense feeling for the separateness and the individuality of concrete events, and secondly, encouraging a little methodological generalization, arguing the complete aversion of the Muslims to the thought- processes of rationalism. In *l’Actes du symposium international d’histoire de la civilisation musulmane* entitled *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’Islam* (Bordeaux, 25-29 June, 1956),²⁴ the rational Mu‘tazilite approach is recognized as properly Islamic, but his decadence and the defeat, in twelfth century, of the philosophical position of Ibn Rushd in the debate with al-Ghazālī, are absolutised as indicative of Islamic decadence; another Orientalist, and Renan’s inspired position.

It is therefore clear that an author such as Farah Antūn, so deeply oriented towards French culture, was influenced by the analytical complexity of Renan’s academic background and by his understanding of rationality in Middle Eastern religious culture.

The ‘rationalist Averroes’, as basically released and independent from the Muslim religion, is the ‘positivist’ key point of Renan, the ‘father’, of the awakening of modern studies concerning the Arab philosopher.²⁵ Renan considers Averroes to be the only Islamic thinker and philosopher worthy of the name, as in his opinion, Islām is an advocate of an obscurantist and backward world view, unable to open itself to science and modern knowledge. In the foreword of Renan’s work: *Averroé et l’Averroïsme*, the author argued: ‘*Je suis le premier à reconnaître que nous n’avons rien, ou presque rien, à apprendre ni d’Averroès, ni d’Arabes, ni du moyen âge.*’²⁶ The entire work, more focused on

²² Farah Antūn, “Radd Renan ‘ala ḥāramihī wa munāzirihī” *al-Jāmi‘a*, 7 (1902), p. 6.

²³ Said, E., *Orientalism*, (New York, 1979), tr. by Stefano Galli, *Orientalismo*, (Milano, 1999), p. 143ff.

²⁴ Ritter, H. “L’Orthodoxie a-t-elle une part dans la décadence”, *l’Actes du symposium international d’histoire de la civilisation musulmane : Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’Islam*, Bordeaux, 25-29 June, 1956, (Paris, 1977), pp. 167-183; Ch. Pellat, « Les étapes de la décadence culturelle dans le pays arabes d’Orient », *l’Actes du symposium international d’histoire...*, op.cit., pp. 81-92.

²⁵ Campanini, M, *Averroé*, (Bologna, 2007), p. 135.

²⁶ E. Renan, *Averroé et l’Averroïsme*, (Paris, 1882), p. V.

the European studies concerning the Andalusian philosopher, than on the rational thought of the same, shows the author's limited understanding of Ibn Rushd, but also evidences Renan's inability to fully understand the historical period that preceded the philosopher's work and the entire body of Islamic rational thinking. Renan clearly states the Eurocentric inability to understand Islamic thought, and specifically, in recognizing the complexity of the historical evolution of Muslim thought over the centuries, and in the different geographical areas of *Dār al-Islām*. '*Autant les Arabes ont imprimé un caractère national à leur création religieuse, à leur poésie, à leur architecture, à leur sectes théologique, autant ils ont montré peu d'originalité dans le tentative de continuer la philosophique grecque.*'²⁷ Supporting that, '*Le véritable génie arabe, caractérisé par la poésie des Kasidas et l'éloquence du Coran, était absolument antipathique à la philosophie grecque. Renfermés, comme tous les peuples sémitiques, dans le cercle étroit du lyrisme et du prophétisme, les habitants de la péninsule arabique n'ont jamais eu la moindre idée de ce qui peut s'appeler science ou rationalisme. C'est lorsque l'esprit persan, représenté par la dynastie des Abbasides, l'emporte sur l'esprit arabe, que la philosophie grecque pénètre dans l'Islam,*'²⁸ encouraging an analysis which continues to be depicted as clichés and un-historical discernment.

Renan's awareness of Islamic rationalism is imbued with prejudices which are not properly scientific, and these clearly come out in the second chapter of his analysis on the Andalusian philosopher and the rationalist religious background of Islamic sects.²⁹ The French author recognized that Islamic rationalist thought, in particular that of the Mu'tazilite sect, appeared before the advent of Greek philosophy and the translation process of philosophical sources under the 'Abbasids, during the decades of the caliph al-Ma'mūn; however, he usually confused the Mu'tazilites with the entire group of *Mutakallimūn*, attributing to them theological theories such as God's capacity to create evilness, which is ethically in contrast with the school of Baṣra.³⁰ Islamic Theology (*Kalām*) and Philosophy (*Falsafa*) are considered by Renan as the antipodes of scientific thought: '*La casualité ne réside pas dans les lois de la nature; Dieu seul est cause.*' for the *Mutakallimūn*, while Renan's interpretation of Islamic philosophy is rooted on: '*La philosophie n'a jamais proposé que deux hypothèses pour expliquer le système de l'univers: d'un côté, Dieu libre, personnel, ayant des attributs qui le déterminent; providence, causalité de l'univers transportée en Dieu; âme humaine substantielle et immortelle; d'un autre côté, matière éternelle, évolution du germe par sa force latente, Dieu indéterminé; lois, nature, nécessité, raison; impersonnalité de l'intelligence, émergence et réabsorption de l'individu.*'³¹ This reaffirms an extremist interpretation of the debate. Renan's work is unable to properly understand the connection between Islamic *Kalām* and Muslim *Falsafa* due to his lack of knowledge about the connection and conflict between Islamic theology and philosophy. In *Averroé et l'Averroïsme*, the author fails to deploy the philosopher's skills in order to effectively understand the complexity of the topic. Renan's ignorance of the association between al-Kindī and the Mu'tazila³² is clear: the Arab philosopher's attempt to introduce Greek philosophy into the Islamic World (in the ninth century), as the handmaiden of theology, may then have been more in keeping with the true Islamic way of life than the attempts of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd to understand prophecy and revelation in exclusively philosophical terms. Renan's inability to recognize al-Kindī's relationship with *Kalām* affects most of the subsequent arguments on the incompatibility between Islamic rational theology and *Falsafa*. 'Another parallel that emerges between al-Kindī and the rationalist school is that expressed by Davidson, in his studies on John Philoponus about the doctrine of the creation of the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 101ff.

³⁰ Hourani, G., "Islamic and non- Islamic origins of Mu'tazilite ethical rationalism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7 (1976), p. 61; Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and their deserts*.(2008) *The character of Mu'tazilite ethics*. (Woodstock, 2008); Mariam Abdul Aziz al-Attar, *Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār: The culmination of Mu'tazilite Moral Doctrines*, (Leeds, 2008).

³¹ E. Renan, *Averroé et l'Averroïsme*, (Paris, 1882), p. 108.

³² Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, (Oxford, 2007), p. 23s; Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic. Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 1962), p. 176ff.

universe [...] Al-Kindī as well as al-Iskāfī and an-Nazzām (both Mu'tazilites) state that the fraction of time, which is attributed to the creation of the known world, could not be understood if you conceive, as claimed by Philoponus, the infinity of the world, as the infinite time is not identifiable. Al-Kindī instead, along with Abū al-Hudhayl and even Nazzām, argues strongly against Philoponus, that by introducing a concept of space temporality, it is impossible to establish the limit of a fact that has a beginning, since that usually begins must also have an end.³³

However, Renan's work *Averroé et l'Averroïsme* also requires a re-evaluation, in strict connection with a general reassessment of the French author. Edward Said has every reason to condemn Orientalism and the work of Renan, as seen in relation to colonial-style racism, due to the irrational and disreputable words directed against Arabs, Muslims or Semites in general in all his works including the one at issue here; nevertheless, it is clear that his study of Averroes has opened the way to the discovery and revaluation of the Arab philosopher in the contemporary age, although his work is now completely outdated. After the triumph of Averroes's philosophy in the European academies of the sixteenth century, the decline of Aristotelianism, defeated by the scientific revolution of Galileo and Descartes, the 1852 work of Renan rekindled the historical interest in the Arab philosopher, not only in Europe, but more especially in the Arab world, accentuating the discussion on reason within Islām during the *Nahḍa*.

THE DEBATE WITH M. 'ABDUH: PURPOSES AND CONSEQUENCES

The famous debate between Faraḥ Anṭūn and Muḥammad 'Abduh is most likely the result of a misunderstanding: the Lebanese intellectual, *en passant*, wants to draw a link between the thought of the Arab philosopher of XII century (Ibn Rushd), and the work of the contemporary *muftī* of Egypt, highlighting his critical and rationalist interpretation of the Qur'ān. However, in order to delve into the main reasons for this debate, it is necessary to better understand the historical reasons for this lack of understanding.

When Anṭūn published the first issue of *al-Jāmi'ah* in 1899, 'Abduh had recently become the main legal authority of Egypt; during the few years before his premature death in 1905, the *muftī*, who had already published the *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* and was working on his *Tafsīr*, became president of the religious society for the revival of Arab sciences, and worked towards reforming *al-Azhar* University by making proposals to improve examinations, the curriculum and the working conditions for both professors and students. He travelled and met with European scholars in Cambridge and Oxford University during the period when his views were developing, and concluded that Muslims suffer from ignorance about their own religion and the despotism of unjust rulers. The idea of transforming *al-Azhar* into a modern university and the main centre of a reform movement to develop an intellectual revival for the whole country, coincided with strong opposition within the more traditionalist ranks of the *'Ulema*. Faraḥ Anṭūn's articles on *al-Jāmi'ah* appeared for the first time in 1902, and the publication, in 1903, of *Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatuhu*, increased the *muftī*'s religious and political vulnerability; 'Abduh needed to defend himself against Islamic conservative attacks on one side, and a simplistic external interpretation of his work and of Islamic *Falsafa* and *Kalām*, on the other side. The main consequence, few months before 'Abduh's death, was the resignation of the *muftī* with his friends 'Abd al-Karīm Salmān and Shaykh al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥanbalī: in practice, this constituted a declaration of failure of his work as a reformer.³⁴

A few years before the Anṭūn - 'Abduh debate, there was another dispute between the *muftī* and the French Foreign Minister M. Gabriel Hanotaux, following an article which appeared in the *Journal de*

³³ Van Ess, J., "Une Lecture à rebours de l'histoire du mu'tazilisme", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 46-47 (1978- 1979), pp.164-240- pp. 19-69 ; Watt, M., *The Formative Period of the Islamic Thought*, (Oxford, 1998); Reynolds, G.S., *A Muslim theologian in the sectarian milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār and the critique of Christian Origin*, (Leiden, 2004); Madelung, Schmidtke, and others eds., *A common rationality: Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*, (Warzburg, 2007).

³⁴ Adams, C.C., *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, (New York, 1933), p. 76ff.

Paris in 1900 under the caption: *Face to face with Islam and the Muslim question*. These debates, in which the relationship between Islām and modernity was put under analysis, implicitly showed that the lack of inter-religious dialogue and the preservation of a more conservative Islām, was a better choice with which to defend the Arab-Islamic identity against the ongoing European and Christian attempt to alter Middle Eastern society. Hanotaux saw the Aryan origin of Europe as implying an allowance for human free will and the tolerance of more democratic institutions, as set against the Arab Semitic background, more related with God's unity and predestination. He supported the idea that Christian faith tended to increase an awareness of God's immanence in human life, along with the appreciation of a human being's worth and his nearness to God, while the Muslim doctrine on God's unity and transcendence has tended to direct thought towards the idea of man's insignificance and helplessness.³⁵

Muḥammad 'Abduh replied to Hanotaux by focusing on the impossibility of conceiving history as closed by geographical barriers which do not take into account the fact that when Europe [...] knew no other civilization than that of war and bloodshed (probably referring to Middle Dark ages), Islām came to it bringing the arts and sciences and learning of the Persians and the Aryan peoples of Asia, of the Egyptians, Romans and Greeks, after they had purified these of the impurities introduced by the rulers of western nations. The truth is that all nations borrow from one another according to need [...].³⁶

'Abduh also supported the existence, within the early ages of Islamic religious thought, of Muslim 'compulsionists' (*Jabariyyah*) and 'free-willers' (*Qadariyyah*), arguing that the Qur'ān denies compulsion and teaches about 'acquisition' (*Kasb*) and free-will in about forty-six verses.

The 'Abduh's reply appeared in the journal *al-Ahrām* in 1900, but the debate politely continued until the month of July, when the *mufī* finally answered through three articles published on *al-Mu'ayyad* and in which he admitted to the oppressive *status* of Muslims, supporting, nevertheless, a pan-Islamic approach: an attempt to summon Muslim peoples to reform their own conditions through the only means that promised success, religious reform and political independence from European colonialism.

It is highly likely that Faraḥ Anṭūn was aware of the debate which had taken place between the *mufī* of Egypt and the French plenipotentiary, but, as argued by Albert Hourani: '[...] polemics have their danger: in defending oneself, one may draw closer to one's adversary than one thinks. It is significant that both his controversies (with Hanotaux and Anṭūn) were concerned, not with the truth or falsity of Islām, but with its being compatible with the supposed requirements of the modern mind; and in the process, it may be that 'Abduh and Anṭūn's view of Islām and Arab world, were affected by their view of what the modern mind needs.'³⁷ It was, of course, easy in this way to distort, if not destroy, the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts, to lose that which distinguished Islām from other religions and even from non-religious humanism. It was perhaps this which made 'Abduh's conservative critics uneasy: there was bound to be something arbitrary in the selection and the approximation. Without intending it, and probably also without doing it properly, 'Abduh was opening the door to the flooding of Islamic doctrine and law by all the innovations of the modern world'.³⁸

The *mufī*'s real intent was to rediscover Islām as a rational religion. In the first edition of his *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, the author argued that the Islamic message is not directed only to consciences, but, to be completely understood must also be developed using reason.³⁹ The moral value of Islām when compared with other religions is given by rationality. The needed entity is eternal in the past, eternal in the future and simple, which means that searches for the simplicity of things; the Life, the Knowledge, the Will, the Omnipotence, the Freedom and the Unity of the deity are part of the same essence.⁴⁰ The

³⁵ Ibid., p. 87ff.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁷ Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 144.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

³⁹ 'Abduh, M., *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, (Cairo, 1897), tr. in *Trattato sull'Unicità*, Soravia G. ed., (Milano, 2012), p. 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 63ff.

Qur'ān teaches us that God has allowed and ordered us to know about Allāh, but not through the use of preconceived dogmas. Instead, the author made his own statements, explaining the divergent doctrines and refuting them with rational argumentations. Allāh has appealed to reason and has aroused the human intelligence, showing the order of the Universe and the rules to guide the Earth. 'Abduh demanded that reason should probe what was written in the Qur'ān on this subject because religion and reason could fraternize for the first time in a holy book and through the mouth of a Prophet sent by God.

Regardless of the outcome of this dialogue, it was clear that 'Abduh's positions or better defences of Islām, which were more than apologetic, were likely to discover a strand of Islamic thought, rational and rationalist, which the Middle East had long since forgotten. The reaffirmation of Mu'tazilite theological positions, after centuries of anonymity, was indicative of the concrete effort made by M. 'Abduh in encouraging an effective change, at least as far as Muslim religious thought was concerned.⁴¹

According to the previously expressed position of Albert Hourani, and although Muḥammad 'Abduh wrote his *Risālat* before these debates took place, the main authority of *al-Azhar* assumed a position that defended the existence and strength of an Islamic rationality, and at the same time encouraged the revival of Islamic studies which might be able to properly boost a correct understanding of Mu'tazilite thought, the Ash'arite authors, and also the thought of *Shuyūkh* as expressed by Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd.⁴²

It is clear that Farah Anṭūn's purposes in the debate with 'Abduh were probably quite similar: the discovery of an Arab philosopher forgotten over the centuries, and at the same time, the unintended consequences, were those of encouraging the opposition to the *al-Azhar* reform process pursued by the *mufī*, effectively blocking it until the Nasser decades. Furthermore, this debate, more than bringing together the different positions of the challengers, stimulated antagonism and misunderstandings, radicalizing positions and strengthening those who claimed the dialogue's impracticability. This difficulty was partly due to the differing cultural backgrounds of Anṭūn and 'Abduh, but also to the historical understanding of Islamic and Arab history. Although the aim might have been worthwhile for both debaters, the consequences increased the disaffection between the authors (and also between Anṭūn and Rashīd Riḍā, who were previously friends), encouraging the fracture among the more secular and nationalist element of the *Nahḍa*, which would later identify in Ṭaha Ḥusayn and 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, some of the most relevant twentieth century supporters, and a more conservative position of the *Salafiyya*, starting precisely with Rashīd Riḍā's reflection and his partial alteration of 'Abduh's thinking.⁴³

THE DEBATE ON *KALĀM* VIEWPOINTS, CONFLICTS AND CONVERGENCES

The lack of understanding described in the previous paragraph is based on the unsuccessful debate between these two authors. On one side, 'Abduh's *Rūḥ al-Jadīd* discussed theses which were unpopular with the traditionalist Muslims; on the other, the Anṭūn's lack of comprehension of two aspects: the razor's edge on which the *al-Azhar*'s *mufī* walked in relation to the Islamic community, and the incompatibility, at that time, of Anṭūn's position, which had echoed a rough interpretation of Islamic thought.

⁴¹ Hildebrandt, T., *Neo-Mu'tazilismus. Intention und Kontext im modernen arabischen Umgang mit dem rationalistischen Erbe des Islam*, (Leiden, 2007); Hildebrandt, T., 'Between Mu'tazilism and Mysticism. How much of a Mu'tazilite in Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd' in *Common rationality. Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*, (Wurzburg, 2007); Marco Demichelis, 'New Mu'tazilite theology in the contemporary age. The relationship between Reason, History of Tradition' *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova Serie XC, 2 (2010), pp. 411-426.

⁴² Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 148.

⁴³ Adams, C.C., *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 177ff.; Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983) p.222ff.

The Islamic master discoursed on the fact that God, who created the laws of the World, may at some point of his own volition, have them alter in relation to what is good for his creatures (human beings), by sending envoys that chose to reform the human condition.⁴⁴ Emphasis is then placed on the question of the creation of the cosmos and the presence in it of natural laws which might govern it independently from the action of the Factor which made it. Faraḥ Antūn, making a mistake, asserted that the *muftī* seemed to move away from the Orthodox position of Islamic theology, going towards the point of view of Averroè. This Christian author had interpreted the Islamic dispute between *Kalām* and *Falsafa* as simplistically argued by Ernest Renan in his *Averroè et l'Averroïsme* and interpreted by 'Latin Averroism.'⁴⁵

However, to better understand the Antūn vs. 'Abduh debate it is necessary to divide it into two phases: a first phase, related to the 1902 articles which appeared in *al-Jāmi'ah* and *al-Manār*, and a second one associated with the Lebanese publication, in 1903, of *Ibn Rushd wa falsafatuhu*.

According to Donald M. Reid's analysis, the first aspect on which the two authors came into conflict, was Antūn's interpretation of specific passages of the Islamic *mutakallimūn* theology; for the Christian author, Islamic thought was founded on the creation (*khalq*) of substance (*ḥudūth al-maddah*) in the world by a Creator, and the omnipotence of the Creator on the World; which implied the absolute will of the initiator to whom everything is ascribed, in relation to changes, even though the creation presented itself in a form different from the current one, and this also depended on divine omnipotence.⁴⁶ 'Abduh's answer contested both the terminology, and the content: concerning the terms, the Islamic scholar supported that *ḥudūth al-maddah* did not have the same meaning, for the *mutakallimūn*, as the term *khalq bi-khāliq* (creation from a Creator); the first indicated a *wujūd* (existence), the affirmation of bodies and accidents in a specific time instant; the second a *ījād*: existence in action, out of nowhere, which was a Mu'tazilite position. In relation to the content, the connection between the Creator and the principle, 'Abduh's position is again pro-Mu'tazilite, because in the correlation between the Creator and the *musabbabāt* (the one who has caused), he admits the existence of the secondary causes (*asbāb*) that is stated through *tawallud* (cause and effect without intermediate point of volition). During the ninth century, Mu'tazilite authors such as al-Jāhīz in *Ḥayawān* (Cairo, 1945, pp. 348-349) and Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir argued the existence of secondary causes (the growth of a plant from a seed, the birth of a child), as the foreseen suggestions of *natura naturans*, which, though created by a Creator, is able to act freely from the same Creator.⁴⁷

The 'Abduh position floored the Christian intellectual, who would have rebutted on the non-orthodox position of Mu'tazilite thought; however, the *muftī* had demonstrated that even in Islamic thought there was inherent the root of a freedom of action of the created being in relation to the Creator. This was a line of reasoning which would have to support the idea of a human's freedom of action toward God.

What attracts Antūn in Ibn Rushd is what previously attracted the Frenchman Renan: the assertion of the Islamic Philosopher that prophecy is a kind of understanding, that prophets are like philosophers and that there is one truth which is addressed by the prophets through religious symbols for the masses, but which the real intelligentsia can contemplate directly.⁴⁸ This is an obvious generalization of the *Kitāb Fasḥ al-Maqāl* of the Andalusian philosopher.

The publication of the articles that followed in 1903, by *Ibn Rushd wa falsafatuhu*, increased the tension of the debate. Leaving aside the first part of the essay, which focused, like the Renan version, on the life of the philosopher, in the second part, entitled *falsafatuhu* (his philosophy), Antūn argued about the non-acceptance by Averroes of the explanation, constantly supplied by the Islamic Orthodox

⁴⁴ Donald M. Reid, *The Odyssey of F. Antun, A Syrian Christian's quest on Secularism*, p.83s.; Viviani, P., *Un maestro del novecento arabo: F. Antūn*, p. 187ff.

⁴⁵ Anke von Kugelgen, "A call for Rationalism: Arab Averroist in the Twentieth century" *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 16 (1996), pp. 97- 132.

⁴⁶ Faraḥ Antūn, "Ta'rikh Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatuhu", *al-Jāmi'ah*, 8 (1902), pp. 517-540.

⁴⁷ Donald M. Reid, *The Odyssey of F. Antun, A Syrian Christian's quest on Secularism*, p. 85s; Viviani, P., *Un maestro del novecento arabo: F. Antūn*, p. 191.

⁴⁸ Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 255.

theological tradition, on the question of the simultaneous presence of Good and Evil in the world, as well as the problem of Divine voluntarism (i.e. the possibility, only hypothetical, of divine intervention in the world). As a second aspect, the Lebanese also expressed his opposition towards Averroes' thought concerning the idea that human beings were completely free to act physically and intellectually, but not in relation to being members of a structured society, because, the external elements exercised a great influence on any man.⁴⁹

Even in this case, it would emerge that the Lebanese probably did not have a proper understanding of the Mu'tazilite position on this which, on the contrary, was well known by Ibn Rushd. On the first topic, the school of Baṣra was clearly determined in supporting the coexistence of Good and Evil in the world, attributing Evil, however, exclusively to the work and action of men, as being able to create acts of iniquity. Concerning the second aspect, it is relevant to highlight that Ibn Rushd's understanding of the society of his time led him to recognize that the action or the thought of a single man was not in any way able to change the society, but, on the contrary, it would be society which would cause transformation of a human being's action and philosophy.

Ibn Rushd in *al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adilla fī 'Aqā'id al-Milla* (the Exposition of the Methods of Proofs concerning the beliefs of the community)⁵⁰ confirmed that the Theological Orthodox position (the Ash'arite) was in great contrast with his own point of view, referring in particular to the creation of the World and God's theodicy. It is quite easy to argue that Ibn Rushd, who was very familiar with Mu'tazilite thought, emphasized the main differences between the unorthodox position of this school with the more conventional attitude of the al-Ghazālī theological school. Antūn's analysis of Ibn Rushd, as that of Ernest Renan, who named the school of Baṣra in his analysis, suffers from a too partial and ideologically influenced interpretation which is antithetical to any religious disclosure.

Faraḥ Antūn's concluding questions to Ibn Rushd are rational, but emphasize an ideological pre-construct. 'What do we do, then, and what do we believe? We believe, as Averroes did, in the obligation of the allegorical interpretation of meanings, or, as al-Ghazālī, in giving credence to what is literarily written in the books? How can we bring everything to reason, to the apodictic demonstration or to the natural and positive science, on which, today, the Knowledge is based?''⁵¹

The answer hinged on the differences, inherent among a scientific argument, which is founded on reason, and a religious topic, which instead is rooted in a response of the heart. These two types of response are irreconcilable; reason considers the responses of the heart as absurd because the outcome of education and tradition, but not intimate of human feeling.

The scientific demonstration is different from that of the heart, while the last can not comply with the first; there is no way to give validity to one applying the laws of the other, given that the reason and the heart have different tasks. [...] the heart and the religion are the first for which is flashed in his mind the idea of oppressing science and reason, in relation to a shout: I do not believe in anything and I do not consider something unless I have seen with my own eyes and experiences, along with Bacon, in an active and passive way, and after these trials have led me to a single outcome! The heart and religion feel aversion to this materialist and dry method, because it equally destroys all religions.⁵²

This position highlights a global incompatibility both in relation to the *muftī* Muḥammad 'Abduh, and that concerning the study of Ibn Rushd. Antūn's secularism is also the main reason linked to the Christian author's inability to fully understand a philosopher such as Averroes, who, while assuming a

⁴⁹ Faraḥ Antūn, *Ibn Rushd wa falsafatuhu*, (al-Iskandariyya, 1903), pp. 94, 103-104, 122-123.

⁵⁰ Averroes, *Faith and Reason in Islam*, tr. by Ibrahim Najjar, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 78ff., 115ff.

⁵¹ F. Antūn, *Ibn Rushd wa falsafatuhu*, p. 123.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

rationalist position, had been a *qāḍī al-quḍāt* under the Almoravids, holding an eminent religious office.⁵³

The subsequent controversy concerning tolerance and oppression in Islām and Christianity, that encouraged ‘Abduh to counter the Lebanese through a written work, entitled *al-Islām wa l-Naṣrāniyyah*, was indicative of a clash that favoured two profoundly different ideas of political institution: that of separation among the two powers, the temporal and the spiritual (Faraḥ Anṭūn); that of the cohabitation of the same, but in a plural and egalitarian society (Muḥammad ‘Abduh).

Antūn’s attack against Islamic’s intolerance, was, however, misinterpreted; as reported by Albert Hourani, the Christian author argued that the separation of the two powers in Christianity made it easier for Christians to be tolerant than for Muslims, but he also made it clear that the record of the two religions was much the same, and if European countries were now more tolerant that was not because they were Christians, but because science and philosophy had driven out religious fanaticism (the subsequent two World Wars would quickly ridicule the idea of European tolerance and positivist perception).⁵⁴

Donald M. Reid, moreover, reports that both Arab intellectuals converged on the use of reason, and that science and religion could not be in conflict,⁵⁵ if reconciled through a rationalist methodological approach, indicative of a critical analysis. In addition to that, Faraḥ Anṭūn and Muḥammad ‘Abduh believed in a reformed education, patronized by the state and supported by a modern methodological approach, linked to the learning of foreign languages and scientific matters, as it was in the Academia and *Madāris* of the ‘Abbasid age. Both finally converged on the need for education of woman in order to improve Middle Eastern societies, even if Muḥammad ‘Abduh, for which polygamy was in contrast to a correct interpretation of the Qur’ān, preferred a first level home-based female education on religious and social grounds.⁵⁶

Main divergences remained evident in relation to political decisions and Anṭūn’s democratic theory of government. For the Lebanese, the ruler should not rule according to his own will or personal convictions. He should act in the light of laws laid down by the Assembly of representatives. The people must possess sovereignty while the Assembly must be superior to the religious authorities as well as to the ruler: this is the Anṭūn’s really significant advocacy of separation of spiritual and temporal powers. A political thought clearly inspired by a European cultural background.

CONCLUSION: AND THE WINNER IS?

It is difficult to argue that in this debate either of the two participants achieved the moral victory; ‘Abduh died few years later, while Anṭūn began his Odyssey around the world without a real home and country of reference. When he eventually returned to Egypt, in 1909, his review *al-Jāmi‘ah*, closed down after two editions. However, a distinction needs to be made in relation to the relevance of the intellectual inheritance that both authors have left to the *Nahḍa*, and Anṭūn’s legacy has proved influential with regard to the Modernist political actors of the *Nahḍa* and contemporary Arab Averroists researchers.

Although ‘Abduh’s religious reflection was at the beginning only partially recognized as appropriate for this historical period, its major importance emerged more in the second half of the twentieth century than in the first part. ‘Abduh’s disciple, Rashīd Riḍā, partially rejected the thought of his master, and we need to wait for the work of exegetes such as Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967) and Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh (d. 1991) to detect a certain continuity.⁵⁷

⁵³ Wael Abu ‘Uksa, “The Meaning of “Tolerance” which is the meaning of modern civilization” in *Journal of Levantine Studies*, Vol. 3, n. 2 (2013), 166 - 169.

⁵⁴ Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 257.

⁵⁵ Donald M. Reid, *The Odyssey of F. Antun, A Syrian Christian’s quest on Secularism*, p. 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁷ Benzine, R., *Les nouveaux penseurs de l’Islam*, (Paris, 2004), p. 153ff.

In contrast, the inheritance of Antūn was immediately noticeable both in relation to the studies on Ibn Rushd, and the contribution to the *Nahḍa*, Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1947), Maḥmūd Qāsim (d. 1973), M. ‘Ammāra, and M. ‘Abd al-Jābrī (d. 2010) are authors who have produced relevant studies on the Andalusian philosopher⁵⁸. Other relevant work has emerged from intellectuals such as ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1966), Quṣṭanṭīn Zuraiq (d. 2000), and Sāṭi‘ al-Ḥuṣrī (d. 1968), who played a significant role within Arab Nationalism, but in particular supported an effective distinction between political and spiritual power and a pan-Arab ideology regardless of religious affiliation.⁵⁹ Finally, there is another area in which Antūn’s reflection has played a significant role in promoting a certain continuity: gender studies. It is in relation indeed to the publication within *al-Jāmi‘ah*, in August 1899, of some parts of *The liberation of woman (Taḥrīr al-Mar‘ah)* of Qāsim Amīn,⁶⁰ that the editor devoted an article to him in which he used information coming from the well-known book by the French politician, Jules Simon, entitled *La Femme du vingtième siècle*, published in 1892. In 1899, when Qāsim Amīn (1865-1908) published the *Liberation of Woman*, the mainstream of Egyptian public opinion attacked him fiercely, and in 1900 he had to write *The New Woman* to explain his position and defend himself. However, *Al-Jāmi‘ah* was an exception. In the previously mentioned January 1900 issue, Faraḥ Antūn included an article entitled ‘Views of the philosopher of *Al-Jāmi‘ah* and of Qāsim Amīn on woman’ which begins:

After we read the book *Liberation of Woman* by Qāsim Amīn, magistrate at the Appellate Court in the capital, with the great attention it deserves and after we summarized it in the section “Education and Instruction” of this volume, we held it useful to translate for the readers of *Al-Jāmi‘ah*, as well for those in Egypt and in Syria who seriously care about this issue, the view of the philosopher of *Al-Jāmi‘ah*, we mean Jules Simon, who does not lack behind at all in his sound judgement and exact insight. Some words that Qāsim Amīn says in his book have reminded us of the testimony of this philosopher [...].⁶¹

The encouragement of Qāsim Amīn would continue in subsequent issues; Antūn argued that there were common features between the Egyptian author and the French politician, even venturing to propose a research methodology similar to that of Descartes.

It is relevant to highlight that Antūn’s thought is able to investigate different facets of the *Nahḍa*, specifically the rediscovery of Arab rational philosophy and Ibn Rushd, the adoption of Enlightened and Positivist European thought in the Arab world, and the necessary role played by women in society. The commitment, which lasted throughout a lifetime, to teach relevant aspects of European thought in the Arab world gave, results which were only partially observable. The major shortcoming of the role played by Faraḥ Antūn was, after all, to preach a rational methodology, but to apply it partially, due to its lack of compatibility with a prebuilt ideological assumption, something which clearly emerged in the debate with Muḥammad ‘Abduh. The partial distortion of Ibn Rushd’s image and philosophy, previously enacted by Ernest Renan and subsequently by Faraḥ Antūn, in addition to emphasising a limited preparation on this subject, risked the alteration of the Islamic philosophy of an author who was already particularly unpopular in the Arab-Islamic culture, one that instead needed a genuine rediscovery. It is therefore clear that Antūn’s merit in being an Arab frontrunner in many fields of the Arab *Nahḍa*, was limited by the undue influence of European ideologies.

⁵⁸ Anke von Kugelgen, ‘A call for Rationalism: Arab Averroist in the Twentieth century’, *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 16 (1996), p. 104ff.

⁵⁹ Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism. Between Islam and the Nation-State*, (New York, 1997), p. 116s.; Hourani, A., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 309s.; Kurzman, Ch., *Liberal Islam, a sourcebook*, p. 29ff.

⁶⁰ Kurzman, Ch., *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940, a source book*, p. 61s.

⁶¹ Josep P. Montada, ‘Faraḥ Antūn: active reception of European thought’, p. 1013.