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*Inḥiṭāṭ* – The Decline Paradigm:
Its Influence and Persistence
in the Writing of
Arab Cultural History

Edited by

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# The Decline of Islam and the Rise of *Inḥiṭāṭ*: The Discrete Charm of Language Games about Decadence in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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The notions of 'decline', 'decadence' and 'decay' held sway over academic and popular European depictions of Islam from the early 19th century onwards. Put in a simple way, the underlying idea was that 'the Islamic civilization' had lost its former leading role in the world and fallen into stagnation and passivity. The formation of this discourse can be traced back to three processes culminating in the late 19th century: (1) the establishment of religious studies as independent fields of scholarly research in Europe and the United States; (2) the use of 'religion' as a category to rank cultures, exhibit their artefacts and explain human behaviour; and (3) the emergence of a global discourse on Islam and the establishment of an academic field called Islamic studies. In the course of these processes, Islam was defined by three main characteristics: its 'difference' to Christianity, its character as a 'political religion' and its 'sterile' (unappealing) form of monotheism all of which justified its marginalization in the field of religious studies.[1] Therefore, this chapter pinpoints examples of scholarly treatment of Islam past and present and shows that classifications of Islam have been constructed through a globalized discourse since the 19th century. Even in analyses of Islamism in the 20th and 21st centuries the idea looms large that Muslim resentment against the West can be explained as a psychological reaction to the 'decline' of Islam.[2]

The decline of Islam, however, was not only an ascription, but shaped the self-perception of many authors from North Africa to South Asia from the 19th century onwards. Rather, the notion of decline and decadence (arab. *inḥiṭāṭ*) has been so widely used by Turks, Arabs, and Persians as well as Muslims in India and Indonesia that it seems nearly impossible to imagine a historiography of Arab or Muslim societies and what their self-perception would look like without the very idea of decline and decadence.

For example, Egyptian shaykh Rāfiʿ Rifāʿa aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1873) wrote that to fight *inḥiṭāṭ* was a reason why the delegation, which he was part of, was sent to

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[1]  Schulze, "Islamwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft"; idem, "Islam und Judentum im Angesicht der Protestantisierung der Religionen im 19. Jahrhundert"; idem, "Die Politisierung des Islams im 19. Jahrhundert"; idem, "Mass Culture and Islamic Cultural Production in the 19th Century Middle East".

[2]  See for example Lewis, *What Went Wrong?*; Langman and Morris, "Islamic Terrorism"; for an Arab argumentation see al-ʿAẓm, "Difāʿan ʿan at-taqaddum"; 111f.

France (1826–1831); he listed the fields of knowledge unknown or nearly unknown in Egypt.[3] Likewise, in his *Khuṭba fī ādāb al-ʿarab* ("Lecture on the Arabs' Education"[4], 1859), the Lebanese Buṭrus Bustānī (d. 1883) renders a list of fields of contemporary knowledge which is close to unknown among Arabs, from chemistry to poetry,[5] and passes the judgment: "Education (*ādāb*) among the Arabs is in a state of total decadence (*inḥiṭāṭ kullī*) in these days"[6]. *Inḥiṭāṭ* is also the first noun in the anti-colonial polemic of 1930 written in answer to the question "Why do the Muslims lag behind while others have progressed?"[7], which was penned by the pan-Islamist and pan-Arab author Shakīb Arslān (d. 1946) in Geneva. The liberal Egyptian writer Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973) also warned against cultural *inḥiṭāṭ* in 1938 if the education system in formally independent Egypt was not reformed. The Egyptian theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), based his ideas about *jihād* on the notion that Muslims had already regressed to the times before the revelation of Islam and thus entered a second *jāhiliyya*. And even Moroccan philosopher Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī (d. 2010), writing in the 1980s, understood *inḥiṭāṭ* as the main challenge for "Arab thought and philosophy" which has not yet found a convincing answer to it.[8] This is not to mention Arab authors who sense a deep feeling of depression in the face of the "collapse" of "Arab civilization" because of the political backlash after the so-called Arab spring of 2011.[9]

The following chapter tries to answer the question of why Arab and Muslim authors adopted the European formula of a "decline of Islam" and in which way they used it and turned it, at least partly, against its European readings. It aims to show how language games about decadence served the quest for political and cultural empowerment.

The overall idea is, therefore, to analyse the entanglement of the concepts of decline and *inḥiṭāṭ* and to challenge common scholarly interpretations, which classify Arab texts on Muslims' decay in an over-simplified way either as an uncritical adoption or a firm rejection of a European concept. This paper argues that

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[3] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, 9–11.

[4] Al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī ādāb al-ʿarab*. The lecture is not only about Arab literature, as Sacks seems to assume, but on the state of knowledge among Arabs; compare Sacks, "Futures of Literature", 32–55. Bustānī explains in his first sentence: "The subject is the education (*ādāb*) of the Arabs, if you liked, you could also say on the Arabs' sciences (*ʿulūm*), arts (*funūn*) or knowledge (*maʿārif*)". On al-Bustānī philological work see Glass, "Buṭrus Bustānī (1819–1883)".

[5] Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī ādāb al-ʿarab*, 32–33.

[6] Ibid, 32.

[7] Arslān, *Li-mādhā taʾakhkhara l-muslimūn wa-taqaddama ghayruhum?*, at first published in *al-Manār* in 1930. On the author see Cleveland, *Islam against the West*; for a synopsis of Arslāns essay and his ideas see ibid, 115–134. An English translation ("Our Decline and its Causes") was published 1944 in Lahore, see ibid, 194 Footnote 3.

[8] Abu-Rabiʿ, "Islamic Philosophical Expression in Modern Arabic Society", 65–69.

[9] Melhem, "The Barbarians Within Our Gates".

Arab reactions can neither be termed one or the other. European concepts were pluralistic, highly complex and, in their sum, even contradictory so that it seems impossible that they could be simply adopted or refused by non-Europeans or that they could be wholly forced upon them. Neither should we think of European concepts exclusively in terms of "clash" (Huntington) or an unrestricted unity of power and knowledge (Said), nor should we assume that a simple reversal like "Provincializing Europe" (Chakrabarty) will end power asymmetries.[10] Instead, this chapter argues, on the one hand with Chakrabarty, how difficult it was for non-Europeans to overcome ubiquitous European concepts of historiography, which set European history as the measure for human development and identified deficits and failure in non-European religions, cultures, and societies. On the other hand, it holds – in opposition to Chakrabarty – that as a long-term perspective one should de-provincialize non-Europeans histories rather than re-provincializing Europe.

In this vein, the entangled concepts of decline and *inḥiṭāṭ* can help us to understand how Arabs and Muslims shaped and re-negotiated their views and identities in an ongoing process. In the face of often essentialized, culturalized, racialized and rationalized European conceptions of Islam and Islamic history, different individuals and groups strove to articulate their difference as well as their similarity to Europeans. By debating the short-comings of their societies as well as of European views on them, they tried to reclaim their history and shape a new cultural identity by themselves. The essential point in this re-negotiation was not primarily to formulate another stable, differently coined essence, but to start a process in which Arabs or Muslims could perform their opposition to the European cultural critique and struggle to define their own culturally sovereign way of life.[11]

From this point of view, the following aims to substantiate three points. The first is that the discourse on decline and *inḥiṭāṭ* was part of a transcultural communication process[12] on cultural differences. Therefore, decline meant something different in European and Arab (con-)texts, but its meanings blended into each other when trying to explain the gap between European strength and Muslim weakness. Among European scholars of the 19th century it was a widespread approach to treat decline and Islam as synonymous because Islam was said to be

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[10] See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996); Said, *Orientalism* (1978); Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe* (2008).

[11] By using the term of "cultural sovereignty", I refer to the example of American Indians' struggle as described by Coffey and Tsosie, "Rethinking the Tribal Sovereignty Doctrine: Cultural Sovereignty and the Collective Future of Indian Nations", 209: "If our struggle is anything, it is a struggle for sovereignty, and if sovereignty is anything, it is a way of life. That way of life is not a matter of defining a political ideology, or having a detached discussion about the unifying structures and essences of American Indian traditions. It is a decision – a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies – to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process."

[12] The term "transculturality" describes processes of exchange and adaption, translation and border crossing in contact zones, see Herren et al. (eds.), *Transcultural History*.

a non-creative religion, culture or civilization. A typical European opinion, expressed for example by Ernest Renan (d. 1892), assumed that the former Islamic rise happened in spite of its essence, while its decline was a result of its character. The typical Muslim response held that it was not Islam but a variety of interior and exterior circumstances that were responsible for the current situation of the Muslim world.

Secondly, understanding decline as a language game[13] entails focusing on the manifoldness and similarity of different usages of decline and *inḥiṭāṭ*, their functions in different situations, and their capacity to legitimize opposing claims. In the last few decades, a certain predominance of perception studies on 'invented' or 'constructed' Islam, especially from a post-colonial and anti-Orientalist perspective, has shown how the Orient has been conceptualized as the passive or decadent other of Europe. Much less attention has been paid to the communicative character of entangled concepts like decline/*inḥiṭāṭ*. My argument is that the European talk about the decadent character of Islam immediately prompted an Arab counter-discourse, which opened up a continuous discussion process about the 'real' meaning of progress and the 'real' reasons for decline.

Thirdly, when Europeans were confronted with the Oriental other, they also met their own ambivalences towards the past and progress. The notions of decline and decadence were not only self-congratulatory (with regard to non-Europeans), but also self-referring since many Europeans and Americans were worried about a smouldering cultural crisis threatening their own societies in a merely 'gilded age'.

To begin with, I highlight the historical background and four factors for the Arab and Muslim use of *inḥiṭāṭ*. Then I explain their counter-discourse by drawing on two examples, Mohammed Webb and Shakīb Arslān, from the 19th and 20th centuries and by a re-examination of the debate between Renan and al-Afghāni in 1883. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the three scholarly approaches, which make the impact of the Protestant reformation, European renaissance and European Orientalism the pivotal point for explaining Europe's ascendancy and Islam's crisis. Many scholars have declared humanism, Protestantism or Orientalism as the essence of the European history, arguing that Europeans left a strong rational, religious or colonial footprint in world history. In this sense, the proliferation of the decline metaphor to the Arab world has been explained either by the attractiveness of European modernity or by its sheer power. Accordingly, Muslims either wanted to emulate the European rise by striving for a renaissance of Arab culture (*nahḍa*) and a reform(ation) of Islam (*iṣlāḥ*) or they wanted to fight European models altogether.

Epistemologically, this approach is a critical re-reading of received scholarship on the roots and impact of Reformation, Renaissance, and Orientalism. It draws on the idea that the choice was not simply between surrender or opposition to

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13  With reference to Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*; see also Xanthos, "Wittgenstein's Language Games".

European concepts because Arab and Muslim societies could neither become wholly Europeanized nor totally liberate themselves from European influences. Yet, Arab and Muslim intellectuals tried to subvert European hegemony and its concepts by proclaiming their own cultural sovereignty.[14] Such a subversive and performative act aimed at shifting the figuration of the political imaginary,[15] although Arabs and Muslims could neither reverse the existing global order nor fully achieve cultural sovereignty. Yet, the global system of colonial rule not only changed colonized countries, but also offered them new possibilities because of the growing movement of people, ideas, and goods. That the elites of colonial or semi-colonial countries had the possibility to travel to Europe and study there made it possible for them to articulate strategies against the overwhelming power of the metropolises and elaborate on the false contrast between European modernity and colonial backwardness.[16]

## I. Four Factors in the Arab and Muslim Use of Inḥiṭāṭ

### I.1 Historical Background

Muslims had already experienced growing European predominance in certain areas prior to the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet, they did not experience this difference as a cultural crisis since they were still convinced of their own extraordinary position. As far as only the hereafter really counted, they tended to believe, at least from a religious point of view, that the transient world could be left to the Christians.[17] Only in the 19th century, the view, which was shaped in Europe between the 17th and 18th centuries and held that rise and decline had changed their topographic allocation in the modern era, started to spread in the Muslim world. As Reinhart Koselleck has argued,[18] rise and fall had been notions of succession and contradiction in Antiquity and the Middle Ages; perfection was only assigned to the hereafter, whereas all worldly things were doomed to perish. In the modern era, improvement was understood as an infinite earthly process. For Kant, the creation had a beginning, but no ending; and for Leibniz, we lived in the best of all possible worlds because it was permanently improving. Thus, 'progress' and

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[14] For the heuristic value of this concept see Feindt et al., *Kulturelle Souveränität*.

[15] On subversion and sovereignty, see Klein and Finkelde, *Souveränität und Subversion*.

[16] Gödde, "Globale Kulturen", 522.

[17] See Matar, "Confronting Decline in Early Modern Arabic Thought", 78: "From Tripoli to Alexandria to Meknes, the only manner in which Arabic writers confronted the juggernaut of European ascendancy was by means of separating *deen* from *dunya*. The *dunya* belonged to the Christians, the *deen* to the Muslims; the first was transient; the latter was what truly counted. The *dunya* would be destroyed since it was a prison; only *deen* would triumph. Unwilling to concede decline, Arab Muslims separated what the Quranic revelation had sought to unite: Islam as *deen* and *dunya*."

[18] Koselleck, "'Fortschritt' und 'Niedergang'", 214–230.

'decline' became asymmetrical notions: decline was only partial in the context of over-all progress; things declining were things no longer needed. However, this modern belief in progress also triggered the objection of cultural critics like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Nietzsche. Rousseau already conceded that humankind was doomed to progress, but argued that progress produced decadence, which was visible in the loss of innocence and the decline of mores, language, emotions, and reason. Therefore, thinkers in modern Europe understood progress as an infinite process of perfection, accompanied by phenomena of decline and forms of cultural malaise.

In the first half of the 19th century, the response to European ascendency had a pragmatic imprint: delegations from Egypt and the Ottoman Empire were sent to Europe to acquire knowledge and intensify contacts. Both aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī and al-Bustānī underlined the responsibility of political leaders for cultural exchange, past and present.[19] Al-Bustānī says in 1859 that the situation of the Arabs had been worse 30 years ago;[20] the help of foreigners,[21] missionary schools, the reform of school education[22] and the initiative of rulers like Muḥammad ʿAlī who had opened the printing house in Būlāq[23] gave a spark of hope for all Arabs. After exposing the state of the sciences among the Arabs after the advent of Islam,[24] al-Bustānī rhetorically asks where all the scholars, physicians, teachers, geographers and historians have gone[25] and ridicules the idea that he who knows about Arabic grammar is nowadays regarded as the highest scholar (ʿallāma) among Arabs[26]. As the up-and-coming lexicographer, he pleads for reform of the Arabic language and vocabulary because in its current state it forms a means in itself, a scripture engraved upon a door which is difficult to pass to discover the old and new treasures of knowledge which lay hidden behind it.[27] About the long-lasting exchange with Europe, al-Bustānī concludes that in the past "we gave them the sciences

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[19]   See Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, 8f.; Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, 17, 27. Ṭahṭāwī writes that "during the times of the Abbasid caliphs we were the most accomplished of all countries" because they promoted scholars and artisans and were themselves interested in sciences and arts. Likewise, Governor Muḥammad ʿAlī cured the ailing country from degeneration (*fasād*) since his accession to power by supporting the sciences, handicraft and manufacturing as well as shops, factories, schools and the military with the help of the Europeans; yet, he did not do this because they were Christians, but because there was need for it. He cites the *ḥadīth* "acquire knowledge, even if it be in China."

[20]   Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, 30.

[21]   Ibid.

[22]   Ibid, 36–39.

[23]   The importance of printing houses and Bulaq is mentioned several times, see ibid, 27f., 34f., 38, 40.

[24]   Ibid, 6–30. The account is not impartial, but has a slightly anti-Islamic tone, for example when al-Bustānī recounts the legend as a fact that the Arabs burned 400,000 books from the library of Alexandria when they conquered the town.

[25]   Ibid, 26f.

[26]   Ibid, 31.

[27]   Ibid, 18–24.

from our left hand in one way [only], but they have started giving it back to us in all [possible] ways".[28] Thus, education was now standing in front of the Arab doors and Arabs should do away with their clanship, partisanship, and selfish interests to let it in like an old friend after a long absence.[29]

However, what seemed to be within reach for al-Bustānī by the mid-19th century, turned out to be more complicated by the end of the 19th century for political and cultural reasons. On the one hand, Muslims and Arabs realized that development could not be attained by simply relying on Europeans' benevolence. As they realized that progress was not only a technological, but also a political, cultural and social question, terms like "Europeanization" (*tafarnuj*) in the 19th or "Westernization" (*taghrib*) in the 20th century became an invective for some, while others pondered on the degree and inescapability of radical changes.

The second half of the 19th century forms a turning point in political relations with Europe, mainly because the élites who had pinned their hopes on Europe, saw themselves threatened by European colonialism. Now they started to blame Europeans for not living up to their own humanitarian and civilized standards.[30] The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 is worth mentioning because the Egyptian Khedive Ismail (reg. 1867–1879) is said to have proudly proclaimed at this occasion that his country no longer lay in Africa, but had become part of Europe.[31] What followed instead in Egypt, but also in other regions under Ottoman rule or with a Muslim majority population,[32] was a period of economic bankruptcy and military defeat, colonization or semi-colonization. Likewise, the Ottoman Empire started to lose most of its European possessions and Christian subjects. It found itself not only politically and militarily in a state of permanent retreat, but became an empire of Muslims which was finally dismantled at the end of World War I and strove towards even greater ethnic, linguistic and religious homogeneity with the formation of the secular republic of Turkey after the abolition of the caliphate in 1924.[33] A further date signifying the changing perception of European politics was the Indian Mutiny in 1857, which the British understood as an uprising of mainly Indian Muslims; it therefore put the idea of Islam as a possible threat to the British Empire on the agenda. Both the security of India and of the Suez Canal passage motivated the British to occupy Egypt in 1882 in order to subdue the ʿUrabi uprising which had rebelled under the slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians"[34] against the European financial control of Egypt.

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28  Ibid, 27.
29  Ibid, 39.
30  Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*.
31  Schulze, *Geschichte der Islamischen Welt im 20. Jahrhundert*, 28.
32  Only ten percent of all Muslims worldwide lived in the Ottoman Empire at that time.
33  Akturk, "Religion and Nationalism".
34  Schölch, *Ägypten den Ägyptern*.

These political events were accompanied by questions about the cultural nature of progress. The enthusiasm about scientific progress was gradually pushed to the background by social and cultural questions. This process is even reflected in *al-Muqtaṭaf*, the journalistic spearhead of the *nahḍa*, published in Egypt since 1876 by the Lebanese journalists from a Greek-Orthodox background Yaʿqūb Sarrūf (d. 1927) and Fāris Nimr (d. 1951). The publisher saw it as their task to dedicate their journal to science, innovation, and optimism in a time "when no month goes by in which the Europeans do not invent a thousand machines, tools, and technologies".[35] Slowly, but steadily the primary focus on natural sciences changed over the years. As Dagmar Glass' list of subjects shows, most of the articles in 1909 and 1925 dealt with the history of science, with cultural and social issues or biographies.[36] Thus, the *meaning* of scientific progress – the question of what it meant generally and for the Arab readers – gradually gained more attention than science itself.

At about the same time, critics of European influence like Ibrāhīm Muwayliḥī (d. 1906), Muḥammad Muwayliḥī (d. 1930) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), who belonged to the circle of intellectuals around Afghānī and ʿAbduh, established new platforms of cultural criticism with the pan-Islamic journals *Misbāḥ al-Sharq* (1898–1903) and *al-Manār* (1898–1935). At least some of the authors in these magazines tried to unmask the corrupting influence of European civilization, which ranged from mass education over political ideologies (socialism, anarchism) to immoral lifestyles and women's education and emancipation. In their view, the so-called modernization had not closed or minimized the gap to Europe since the times of Muḥammad ʿAli and Khedive Ismael, but corrupted Egyptian society right to the bone.[37]

Against this background, decline or *inḥiṭāṭ* worked as a master-frame structuring a semantic field, which was made up of related notions (like moral decay, decadence, backwardness, passivity, and stagnation) and their opposites (reform, development, rise, action, and movement). Decline (*inḥiṭāṭ*) was intrinsically knit together with renaissance (*nahḍa*), and reform (*iṣlāḥ*) because the terms as binary oppositions referred to each other. This is because the perception of crisis informs the longing for "renaissance", the need for "reform", and the call for "action". Reformers, no matter whether politically conservative or liberal, often also held the view that even the processes of thinking, speaking and writing – i.e. literature and

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[35]   Glass, *Der* Muqtaṭaf *und seine Öffentlichkeit*, 217. The journal was published under the subtitle "scientific, industrial and agricultural newspaper" (*jarīda ʿilmiyya ṣināʿiyya zirāʿiyya*).

[36]   Ibid, 223, 231f. In 1928, even the subtitle was temporarily changed to "Arabic Monthly Review of Current Science and Literature", ibid, 214.

[37]   See the famous novel *Ḥadīth ʿĪsa b. Hishām* by Muḥammad Muwayliḥī (published in article form from 1898 to 1902, in book form in nine different editions since 1907) in which a former minister of war, Aḥmad Pasha, wakes from the dead to witness the corruption with his own eyes. On Muwayliḥī see for example Ende, *Europabild und kulturelles Selbstbewusstsein*; Allen, *A Period of Time*; Sacks, "Futures of Literature", 43–48.

language itself – were affected by decline and demanded a 'new beginning'.[38]
Whatever concrete improvement scholars, intellectuals, politicians, and activists
proposed in the field of education (from aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī over Buṭrus al-Bustānī to
Ṣarrūf/Nimr and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn), religion (Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Rashīd Riḍā), na-
tional politics (Muṣṭafā Kāmil, Luṭfi as-Sayyid) or pan-Islamic engagement (from
Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī over Shakīb Arslān to Sayyid Quṭb), all of them paid
tribute to a more or less dramatic, yet abstract notion of *inhiṭāṭ* which had begun
at some time in the past and which they wanted to stop and reverse.

This formula was also applicable to the much discussed gender relations in
Muslim societies. As a colonialist like Lord Cromer, a humanitarian like Florence
Nightingale, or missionaries like Annie von Sommer and Samuel Zwemer under-
stood the veil and the seclusion of women as a form of degradation, a symbol of
'hopeless life' and a 'chief barrier to progress',[39] Azhar shaykh Qāsim Amīn (d.
1908) answered in his work *Taḥrīr al-marʾa* (1899) that Islam was not culturally in-
ferior because it was not Islamic norms, but "centuries of despotic rules" which
had made Egyptian society "lazy, ignorant and locked in tradition".[40] Political and
social tyranny had created tyrannical homes where "man in his superiority began
to despise woman in her weakness".[41] Thus, immorality and irrationality thrived
and created a weak and corrupt society; so, Muslims and the majority of their
scholars defended ideas, customs and traditions which "had no relation to genu-
ine, true and pure religion".[42] Qāsim Amīn conceded that a strong nation re-
quired educated women who would "breed" strong men; drawing on the Qurʾan
and Hadith, he argued that what was required in Islam was "morality" and "mod-
esty" which meant decent clothing ("veiling") for both sexes, but neither the cur-
rent practice of the veil nor a mimicking of Europeans.[43]

Arab feminists also used a structurally similar argument. Lebanese essayist and
pioneer in short story writing Widād Sakākinī (d. 1991), for example, wrote in her
first collections of essays in 1932 that men and women had enjoyed equal rights
in early Islam, but centuries of decline had made woman the prisoner of her
home who knew nothing about freedom and the universe; this ignorance resulted
in the decline of the whole *umma*.[44] In another collection of essays *Inṣāf al-marʾa*
(1950), she further explained that "Muhammad, the liberator of women",[45] was a
precursor of the rights proclaimed by the United Nations. While the American

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[38]  See Sacks, "Futures of Literature", referring to Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Muḥammad al-Muway-
      liḥī, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.
[39]  For these examples see Mazid, "Western Mimicry or Cultural Hybridity", 54.
[40]  Ibid.
[41]  Quoted after Mazid, ibid, 49.
[42]  Ibid, 57.
[43]  Ibid, 59.
[44]  Sakākinī, *al-Khaṭarāt*, 33f. On Sakākinī see Ottoson Bitar, "*I Can Do Nothing against the
      Wish of the Pen*" and Sing, "Lässt sich der Harem Muhammads feministisch deuten?".
[45]  Sakākinī, "Muḥammad, muḥarrir al-marʾa".

and French nations discussed which of them had invented human rights, Islam originally represented "a just and complete constitution" which encompassed the call for the liberation and just treatment of women. For Sakākīnī, these rights had to be re-enforced in the present time. Her writing combined an argument about the Islamic authenticity of women's emancipation with an argument about the universality of human rights in order to counter internal and external critiques of women's education and equality.[46]

These examples show that the use of the concepts of *inḥiṭāṭ* and *nahḍa* was not linked to a certain political or religious orientation. Arab Christians and Muslims, secular nationalists as well as Muslim reformers, Islamists and feminists made use of this concept to argue for their cause. It would therefore also be wrong to trace the spread of the concepts of *inḥiṭāṭ* and *nahḍa* back to an anti-Turkish proto-nationalism – a combination of "European" nationalist thought with a criticism of Ottoman rule. Some Arab authors for sure shared anti-Turkish feelings and even held the Ottomans responsible for the decline of Islam and Arabism. However, the *inḥiṭāṭ* metaphor was used by Arab authors with an anti- as well as pro-Ottoman inclination and with differing views on the role of religion and Islam. For example, the Egyptian Muwaylihīs pledged themselves to a Pan-Islamic form of Ottomanism. In contrast, the publishers Yaʿqūb Sarrūf and Fāris Nimr, who had fled from Beirut to Cairo, preferred British liberalism to Ottoman rule, and Muṣṭafā Kāmil (d. 1908), the champion of Egyptian nationalism, remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire, but saw British occupation of Egypt as the main evil to fight.[47]

The Syrian Sunni Rashīd Riḍā, who became an ardent advocate of Arab auton-omy prior to and during World War I,[48] differed from his personal friend Shakīb Arslān, a Druze emir from Lebanon, as well as from Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914), a secu-larist of Greek Orthodox background from Beirut, both of whom remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire. Zaydān was one of the main popularizers of the idea of a cultural Arab *nahḍa* through his articles in his journal *al-Hilāl* and his novels on Arab-Muslim history; he even wrote a history of Islamic civilization (*Tārīkh at-tammadun al-islāmī*). When he was offered the post of a professor for Islamic his-tory at the Egyptian University in Cairo in 1910, the appointment was revoked because of a campaign against him instigated by Rashīd Riḍā who published a booklet with critiques of Zaydān's works arguing that Zaydān's positive view of Arab history might fuel Young Turkish chauvinism.[49]

Although nationalist Arab historiography since George Antonius tries to build on the nationalist overtones in the Arab *nahḍa* movement,[50] criticism of the cur-

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[46]  For this debate compare Ende, "Sollen Frauen schreiben lernen?".
[47]  On Kāmil see Steppat, "Nationalismus und Islam".
[48]  On Rashīd Riḍās ideological searching, see Ryad, "Anti-Imperialism".
[49]  Philipp, *Ǧurǧī Zaidān*, 61–66; Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte*, 32–35.
[50]  Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (1938).

rent state of affairs was also widespread among the non-Arab elite in the Ottoman Empire. The perception of *inḥiṭāṭ* was one of the reasons for the sultans to mount the so-called *tanzimāt* reforms (1839, 1856). In the last third of the 19th century, the so-called Young Ottomans demanded further reforms because they saw the empire as still in decline.[51] Although the rise of Turkish sultans to power after the end of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258 has not always had the best press in Arab or Egyptian nationalist reconstructions of Islamic history,[52] this does not mean that there was a continuous line of anti-Turkish sentiments among Arab writers throughout the centuries[53] or a decline of Arabic literature under Ottoman rule, as some modern critics want to have it.[54] Ironically, such generalizations risk foisting European anti-Turkish tropes onto Arabs. In Europe, the decline of Islam has often been concomitant with anti-Turkish stereotypes which have been widespread since the 15th and 16th century and depicted the Ottomans as barbarians.[55] Napoleon, for his part, used this trope upon his landing in Egypt in 1798 and tried to justify the occupation as liberation of the Arabs from the Mamluks' yoke which had ruined the country.[56]

Against this historical background, the following section argues that Arabs and Muslims adopted the concept of "decline" mainly because of four factors: (1) they were confronted with the same prejudices about a decadent Islam in different contact zones from Indonesia over India and Egypt to France and the United States so that (2) the use of concepts like "decline" and "Islam" allowed them to transcend national and regional boundaries, formulate common responses and envision themselves as part of a civilizational – national, cultural, religious – entity with a similar history facing similar contemporary problems. (3) They took up current issues from European and Western debates, which they translated for a local audience. (4) The lack of unanimity among Western scholars and the contradictory nature of their explanations of progress and its relation to religion facilitated Arabs' and Muslims' subversion of the concept of decline by drawing on contradictory Western sources, models, and ideas.

For the first two points – common rhetorical strategies in the face of globalized prejudices –, I refer to the discussion on Islam during the Parliament of World Re-

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[51]  Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*; Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 78.

[52]  For example, the Islamist intellectual ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Masīrī (d. 2008) compared the 'functionalist state' of Israel to the Mamluk state which lasted for 267 years, but predicted the possible end of Israel in the next 50 years, because the wheels of history are moving faster today, see: Jarīdat al-Nahār al-Kūwaytiyya, "al-Masīrī: Isrāʾīl sa-tazūl khilāl 50 ʿāmman".

[53]  According to Haarmann, "Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity".

[54]  For a critique of the persistence and re-appearance of this topos even in the 21th century see Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature'".

[55]  Konrad, "Von der ,Türkengefahr' zu Exotismus und Orientalismus"; Thomas Kaufmann, "Kontinuitäten und Transformationen im okzidentalen Islambild des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts".

[56]  Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789–1939*, 49f.

ligions in Chicago in 1893 and to Shakīb Arslān's essay from 1930. For the other two points – the translation of intellectual debates and the subversion of European hegemony –, I re-interpret the Renan-Afghānī debate to show that it already contained many arguments that would later circulate among Arab and Muslim authors.

### I.2 Mohammed Webb and Shakīb Arslān: Arguments against Globalized Prejudices

In 1893, in the heyday of technological enthusiasm, the Columbian exhibition in Chicago and its side-congress, the Parliament of World Religions, can be seen as an expression of the growing global importance of the category of religion in popular debates. It was the first world fair in which religion stood as the central category under which cultures were presented, cultural artifacts exhibited and cultural differences discussed.[57] Religious representatives were summoned at the megalomaniac exhibition which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World because – in the words of one of its organizers – the world fair "which accentuated the material glories of modern civilization needed the Parliament of Religions to bring back to the human mind the greater world of the Spirit".[58]

Islam played a visible role in the exhibition, but was virtually absent from the Parliament of Religions which claimed to represent religion worldwide.[59] This paradox goes back to the fact that the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph Abdülhamid II was eager to present his empire as part of modern civilization and was among the first nations to respond positively to the invitation to the fair and sent a special commissioner to it.[60] Yet, Abdülhamid II (reg. 1876–1909) decided, like most official representatives of Christian confessions, not to support the Parliament of Religions. The reasons are unclear, but he perhaps suspected it to be the work of American missionaries or a stage for the Armenian cause.[61]

Thus, Islam was visible at the commercial heart of the world exhibition, the so-called "Midway Plaisance" whose most popular concession was the "Street in Cairo".[62] It consisted of waiters serving coffee, belly dancers and "a handsome, ro-

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[57] See Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*, 86 and 123f. and 128, where he writes: "And it was in the United States that the subject of religion first began to appear in earnest as yet another means through which the widening circle of intercultural relations might be both represented materially and even discussed among participants. Exhibitionism in America thus represents a separate case study altogether from its European counterparts."

[58] Zilkowski, "Introduction", 9.

[59] The so-called ten world religions were: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. Excluded were, for example, American Indians, while Black Americans could only speak if they were Christian converts.

[60] Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 216.

[61] Ibid, 221.

[62] Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*, 115.

seate mosque with a gleaming white minaret, splendid models of Islamic cities and Oriental bazaars, simulations of centers of religious learning, and other highly re-garded feats of architecture".[63] Bedouins from Syria and Lebanon, located at the end of the midway, enacted a "Wild East Show" and formed the "primitive" form of Islamic culture in contrast to the other more sophisticated Islamic displays.[64] Midway Plaisance was commercially driven by the many images of the "primitive" it offered.[65] For the spectators, it formed a "long highway of human progress", a voyage "around the earth and down time",[66] which represented the idea, that "so-cial evolution could be projected spatially around the contemporary world as well as historically 'down time' to explain differences between contemporary human cultures based on their respective histories".[67] There was no better way than draw-ing on religion to explain the differences represented by the midway chaos.[68] Ex-cept for the Chinese and Islamic cultures, non-Western peoples along the midway were made up only of cultures viewed as "primitive" which had just "embarked on the long trip up the evolutionary ladder to civilized expressions of religion".[69]

On the other hand, Muslim representation at the religious side-congress was low.[70] Although the Parliament figured as the first significant meeting of religious representatives from East and West in history, out of 200 speakers "only half a dozen men (depending on how one counts) from what today is considered Asia actually addressed the audience in English".[71] The meeting owed its existence to a growing American self-awareness of its multi-religious and multi-cultural charac-ter: "The real intrigue of the event rose from the fact that foreign representatives were allowed to speak without interruption or rebuttal – an unthinkable format in Britain, and certainly an implausible one in France".[72] However, only four lectures directly dealt with Islam, two by Christian missionaries, one by an Arab Jew and one by the American Muslim Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb (d. 1916).[73]

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[63]  Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 212.
[64]  Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*, 119. The Bedouins performed mock attacks on a desert caravan, known as the "Wild East Show".
[65]  Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*s, 117.
[66]  Ibid, 136.
[67]  Ibid. A central idea of the exhibition was to represent "the three Americas from primitive savages up to the present time", see ibid, 101.
[68]  Ibid, 135.
[69]  Ibid, 136.
[70]  The reasons are unclear, see Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 227f. Even the re-nowned Indian scholar Ameer Ali who had written "The Spirit of Islam" (one of the few reference books written in English by a Muslim at the time) declined the invitation.
[71]  Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*s, 125.
[72]  Ibid.
[73]  For the lectures on Islam and other lectures that at least mentioned Islam see Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 228–241. The text by the Egyptian Jewish journalist Yaʿqūb Ṣanūʿa (d. 1912) was subjected to "radical editing" in the proceedings; Barrows cut out 400 words and many references to Islam and Koran; on Ṣanūʿa see Ettmüller, *The Construct of Egypt's National-Self.* Webb spoke twice, but his words were compiled in one text.

Webb, a convert to Islam,[74] was introduced by congress president John Henry Barrows with the remark that "this was the first time Islam had ever been expounded to an American audience by one of his professors".[75] However, Webb did not stand on virgin soil untouched by prejudices about Islam; they had already arrived before he opened his mouth. The first lecturer dealing with Islam was the missionary George Washburn, President of Robert College (today's Boğazici University) in Constantinople, who conceded that it was difficult to determine "what is essential about" Islam, but was sure that nothing was gained from calling Islam "a form of Christianity"[76] and came to determine that both religions were essentially not the same and even "mutually exclusive":[77] "Christianity is essentially progressive, while Mohammedanism is unprogressive and stationary".[78] Drawing on Renan's arguments (see further below), he argued that Islam's flowering was "neither Arab nor Mohammedan in its *spirit* and *origin*" and "left no trace in the Muslim faith".[79] This meant that Islam "cannot progress because it is already perfect" whereas "the Christian Church, with some exceptions, perhaps, recognizes the fact that the perfection of its faith consists not in its immobility, but in its adaptability to every stage of human enlightenment. If progress is to continue to be the watchword of civilization, the faith which is to dominate this civilization must also be progressive".[80]

Therefore, it seems to be no accident that the only reported outburst at the Parliament of Religions occurred during Webb's lecture, in spite of all the efforts to show respect to the invited speakers. Webb started his lecture – like so many lecturers on Islam since then – by explaining why Islam was so often misunderstood in the West, pointing at prejudices and generalizations concerning Islam and Muslims (because of polygamy, "the religion of the sword", slavery) and criticizing the tendency to explain Muslim behavior by religion or to judge "people of the East by the standards of our civilization".[81] He not only juxtaposed the true Muslim from the shortcomings of Western civilization, but also asked about the meaning of civilization. He admitted that Islam "will not produce the kind of civilization that we Americans seem to admire so much, but it will make a man sober, honest and truthful, and will make him love his God

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[74] On Webb see Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, and Knight, "The Problem with White Converts". Webb, brought up as a Presbyterian, joined the Theosophical Society and converted to Buddhism in 1880 or 1881; interested in Eastern spirituality, he learned more about Islam through contacts with Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (d. 1908) and the Aḥmadiyya movement and finally converted to Sunni Islam in 1888.

[75] Doughty, "The Hindus at the Fair".

[76] Washburn, "The points of contact and contrast between Christianity and Mohammedanism", 565f.

[77] Ibid, 582.

[78] Ibid, 579.

[79] Ibid, 580.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Webb, "The Influence of Social Condition", 524.

with all his heart and all his mind, and his neighbor as himself".[82] The Muslim's "religion is not a thing apart from his daily life, to be put on once a week and thrown aside when it threatens to interfere with his business or pleasure". To make his point, he told his audience that he had formerly shared all the prejudices about Islam, but through his travels to the Orient had come to believe that "the evils that we Americans complain of in our social system – drunkenness, prostitution, marital infidelity and cold selfishness – were almost entirely absent".[83] Webb argued that Westerners had, in spite of all technological progress, no right to feel superior to others,[84] and underlined that "a class of Mussulmans and Hindus and Buddhists in the East, with whom the western missionaries rarely come in contact", was distinguished by their profound learning in English, Oriental tongues and all the known systems of religion and philosophy; "nearly all the more intelligent and highly educated Mussulmans of India are quite as well informed as to the history and doctrines of the other religious systems as they are concerning their own".[85]

The scandal, however, occurred not because of these remarks, but when 'Yankee Muslim' Webb tried to talk about polygamy and was interrupted by hisses.[86] He claimed that polygamy or purdah was no requirement of the system of Islam, that he "never met two Mussulmans in my life who had more than one wife"[87] and that women were treated equally in Islam. Finally, he justified polygamy by stating that it would be a curse in America, but that there were times, countries and circumstances in which it might be a benefit.[88] The press reported that the lecture was interrupted by interjections and that "the whole audience was out of sympathy"[89] with this statement. In response, Reverend George Post from Beirut quoted a sample of Koranic verses about polygamy, divorce and the Prophet Muhammad as a polygamist[90] "that inculcates that even the inhabitants of Chicago and New York slums would have a higher ideal, though they might not be living up to it"[91] – according to a press report which further mentioned that "some of the Chicago newspapers, in their desire for a sensational heading, have exaggerated the demonstration made against Mohammed Webb from New York [...]". Not only Post, but Barrows also seems to have been annoyed by Webb to the ex-

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[82] Ibid, 528.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid, 524.
[85] Ibid, 524f.
[86] Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 236–241.
[87] Webb, "The Influence of Social Condition", 526.
[88] See Druyvesteyn, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 65f. and 224; Doughty, "The Hindus at the Fair".
[89] Doughty, "The Hindus at the Fair".
[90] Published in the proceedings directly after Webb's lecture as Post, "The Koran".
[91] Doughty, "The Hindus at the Fair".

tent that he left out Webb's original wording in the congress proceedings[92] and mentioned neither Webb nor Islam in his final conclusion to the parliament although he was eager to present quotations by participants from different denominations to underline the importance of the congress.[93]

The outburst because of Webb's remark on polygamy has a local, US-American history[94] as well as intellectual roots in Protestant and enlightenment positions. Luther had already argued that polygamy showed the moral decay of Islam which led to social disarray; during the enlightenment, this position was translated into the secularized argument that polygamy made women slaves to men.[95] Both arguments mark a difference from Islam and imply that morals and the position of women in Christian Europe are *per se* higher than in Islam.

The globalized form of prejudices is also reflected by Shakīb Arslān's essay which was inspired by two questions sent by Sheikh Muḥammad Bayanūni ʿUmrān from West-Borneo to Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, the editor of the Islamic journal *al-Manār* in Cairo, with the request to forward them to Shakīb Arslān in Geneva so that he could answer them. These three people did more than form a communication network reflecting similar experiences from different contact zones with Europeans. What Arslān did first of all in his answer, was to map out how Muslims lived under different conditions in different states,[96] arguing that "decline and weakness" – although unequally distributed in varyingly strong degrees among Muslims from China to Bosnia – were a common feature because the living conditions of Muslims were neither satisfying with regard to religious nor to worldly affairs because most of them had lost the spirit of their forefathers and lived under foreign rule. Thus, he perpetuated the idea that it was valid to look at all these peoples as 'Muslims' and that their current condition was the result of an *inḥiṭāṭ* that called for unity, action, and sacrifice. He urged that the addressees of this message had to be the Europeans as well as the Muslims because the latter had "to make the Europeans understand that Islam will not die and that Muslims do not hand over their countries without war".[97]

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[92] See Webb, "The Influence of Social Condition", 526, and Druyvesteyn, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 224; Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 237; Barrows cut out 40 words about polygamy and some hundred words of Webb's second lecture.

[93] Barrows, "The End of the Parliament", 939–951.

[94] Only after church president Wilford Woodruff of the largest Mormon group, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, had announced the official end of plural marriages in 1890, did the Utah Territory become the 45th state of the United States (1896). Yet, the Mormons were not invited to the Parliament of Religions, see Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 221.

[95] Konrad, "Von der 'Türkengefahr'", paragraphs 14 and 28.

[96] Arslān, *Li-mādhā*, 8–10.

[97] Ibid, 28. Arslān compared Muslim inactivity to the early martyrs of Islam and the death toll European powers paid in World War I concluding that it will not be possible to gain independence without sacrifices, see ibid, 16–19. He pleaded for "a death for life" through war in order to leave behind the "death for the continuation of death" under colonialism.

Already the request to let a Syrian expatriate comment on Muslims in East India is rather interesting as it duplicates the outside-inside perspective. That the enquiry was directed to Arslān – the self-appointed spokesman of the Arab and Islamic cause in Europe and at the League of Nations – means that he had the reputation to be best able to understand both the reasons for progress and decline because he knew Europe so intimately, as if being part of it, and could see Islam from a distance, as if looking from the outside. The questions sent to Shakib Arslān were: What are the reasons why Muslims, "not least we, the Muslims of Java and the Malay peninsula", have arrived at such a weakness and *inḥiṭāṭ* in religious and worldly affairs in spite of God's promise to give glory (*ʿizza*) to the prophet and the believers? What are the reasons why Europeans, Americans and Japanese have achieved such "huge progress" and "can Muslims do the same if they follow them in these causes (of progress) while at the same time holding on to their religion (Islam) or not?" Already the questions reflect a European understanding of Islam's problem with modernity, coined for example by scholars like Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (d. 1936)[98] who was in the Netherlands East Indies from 1898 to 1905 and helped to crush the military resistance in Aceh. The formulation of the two questions reflects how the sheikh from Borneo had implicitly accepted the outsiders' perspective on Islam as a valid standpoint; the enquirer accepted that the problem *they* had with Muslims was equivalent to the problem 'Islam' had with modernity. In his answer, Arslān clearly addressed the semantic asymmetry with which Europeans' and Muslims' behaviour was described. The badge of fanaticism (*taʿaṣṣub*), he wrote, would stick to Muslims forever, although the Europeans were the real fanatics who sent their missionaries to fight Islam and their artillery to fire at Muslims, while claiming that they were 'tolerant', 'advanced', 'civilized', and 'contemporary'.[99]

*I.3 The al-Afghani-Renan Debate: A Re-Examination*

The debate between al-Afghānī and Ernest Renan stands out not only as the first debate between a Muslim and a European intellectual, it is also an instructive example for lasting misperceptions surrounding al-Afghānī's position. Al-Afghānī was, without any doubt, an ardent anti-imperialist who tried to forge different anti-colonial alliances in Persia, Afghanistan, Iraq, India, Egypt, Russia, Istanbul, London, and Paris; yet, the misfortune of most of his activities doesn't make him an unsystematic thinker.[100] Joseph Massad's recent discussion of the debate

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[98] On the influence of Snouck Hurgronje on the formation of Oriental studies see for example Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 157-213.

[99] Arslān, *Li-mādhā*, 53f.

[100] See for example the summary by Mishra, *From the Ruins*, 119: Afghānī "was not a systematic thinker [...]; he was consistent only in his anti-imperialism, for which cause he cumulated a variety of resources. [...] In the end, one may be left with an impression of a tre-

between al-Afghānī and Renan is informed by the frame that most Arabs failed to question notions like decadence and decline and merely echoed Orientalist prejudices. Massad not only thinks that al-Afghānī's response "shared many of Renan's conclusions"[101] regarding the state of Muslim countries as well as the "responsibility" of the "Muslim religion" for "why the Arab world still remains buried in profound darkness",[102] he also accuses al-Afghānī of deploying Social Darwinism as the basis of his refutation of Renan.[103] Al-Afghānī's acceptance of the idea of development somehow seems to minimize the fact that al-Afghānī "disagreed"[104] with Renan on his "racialist premises"[105], if I understand Massad correctly, just because al-Afghānī had "universalized"[106] (what seems to be a post-colonially unacceptable flaw) the repression of science by religion since he had compared Islam's record to Christianity's and declared that the evolutionary ba-sis of "all nations" which "have emerged from barbarism and marched toward a more advanced civilization" was religious education, not "pure reason".[107]

Nikki Keddie, writer of the most comprehensive studies on al-Afghānī,[108] fo-cuses in her analysis on the fact that al-Afghānī's answer to Renan never appeared to have been wholly translated into any Eastern language because it seems to have not pleased Muḥammad ʿAbduh.[109] She therefore thinks that al-Afghānī's text was directed at an elite Western audience and "not intended to meet the eye of the pi-ous"[110] and that for him, like for many other "philosophers and heretics in the Muslim world [...], it was quite proper to speak and write something other than one's true beliefs if this would lead to a desirable goal".[111] Keddie also believes that al-Afghānī "was just as categorical as Renan about the hostility of the Muslim relig-ion to the scientific spirit"[112]. Keddie's impression is that al-Afghānī's approach "seems *more* in line with twentieth century ideas than Renan's original argu-ment".[113] Yet, her advice is that he should have been more apologetic.[114] She also

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mendous energy and enthusiasm rather than thoughtfulness: a vitality that could not be fruitfully directed."

[101] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 12.
[102] According to Afghānī's wording, see Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 88.
[103] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 12 and 14.
[104] Ibid, 12.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī"*; idem, *An Islamic Response*.
[109] Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 90 and 94. Also compare Kedourie, *Afghani and ʿAbduh*, 44f.; Ende, "Waren Ğamāladdin al-Afġānī und Muḥammad ʿAbduh Agnostiker?". On the dif-ferences between Afghānī, ʿAbduh, and Rashīd Riḍā see Ryad, "Anti-Imperialism".
[110] Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 84.
[111] Ibid, 89.
[112] Ibid, 85. Maybe Massad adopted this judgment from her.
[113] Ibid, 86. Italics in the original.

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believes that Renan, in his rejoinder to al-Afghānī's answer, granted justice to many of al-Afghānī's points because he praised him as "fellow rationalist and infidel".[115] It passed unnoticed to Keddie that what Renan wrote was a rather dubious praise since he not only compared himself to al-Afghānī by arguing that the latter belonged to the individuals "who separated themselves from Islam as we separated ourselves from Catholicism".[116] He further explained that al-Afghānī had been able to do so because he was "entirely divorced from the prejudices of Islam"[117] since he stemmed from the Aryan races neighbouring Upper India that had preserved their spirit under "the superficial layer of official Islam".[118] Although al-Afghānī "disagreed" (Massad) with Renan on racism, al-Afghānī was proof of Renan's "great axiom" that "religions are worth only as much as the races that profess them".[119]

Both Keddie's and Massad's perception miss the epistemological level of al-Afghānī's counter-argument and the fundamental difference between his and Renan's explanation of decline since al-Afghānī (1) differentiates between nominal Muslims and Islam, (2) explains decline politically rather than culturally, (3) is highly sceptical about Social Darwinism, and (4) denies that Christianity is any better than Islam in dealing with science.

Al-Afghānī's understanding of religion was certainly functionalist[120] as Islam meant three things to him: it formed the ethical basis for individual behaviour, the culture of society on which peaceful coexistence was based, and beyond this, it was a civilization which in practice had fallen into disarray because of Muslim disunity and weakness. Especially in the *Refutation of the Materialists* he argues that religion is necessary to foster several virtues like shame, trustworthiness, and trust between human beings on which human society is built.[121] Thus, according to al-Afghānī's texts, the decline of Islam was due to a general paradox of religion. Although religion is a moral and social necessity, its institutionalized control can stifle its very spirit. Al-Afghānī criticizes how religion, which should give guidance to the believer, all too often turns into an instance of social control for religious authorities: "Yoked like an ox to a plow to the dogma whose slave he is", the true believer "must walk eternally in the furrow that has been traced for him in advance by the interpreters of law. Convinced, besides, that his religion

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[114] Ibid, 90: "Afghānī could quite easily have limited himself to noting the glory of Muslim Arab scientific achievement in the past and to maintain that true Islam had been distorted in more recent centuries, but he chose rather to attack Muslim religion in strong terms."

[115] Ibid, 85.

[116] Ibid, 93.

[117] Ibid, 92.

[118] Ibid. It is unclear whether Renan really knew that Afghānī was most probably from Persia.

[119] Ibid. My slightly adjusted translation from the French original.

[120] This fact seems to cause irritation for many observers, such as Pankraj Mishra who doubt whether it is "an entirely accurate claim" to see Afghānī as the founder of modern political Islam – "for a man whose own relationship with Islam bordered on the instrumental", see Mishra, *From the Ruins*, 120.

[121] Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 73–84, 130–174 ("The Truth about the Neicheri Sect").

contains in itself all morality and all science, he attaches himself resolutely to it and makes no effort to go beyond".[122] Although this is what happened to Islam as a religion, al-Afghānī does not see anything specifically Islamic in it – "all religions are intolerant, each in its own way".[123] The difference between the Muslim and Christian religion is merely that modern science in Europe has freed itself from the tutelage of religious institutions, while Muslim societies have "not yet" achieved this freedom; there is no inherent characteristic of Christianity which makes it prone to progress and dynamism. In contrast to him, Renan believed that Muslims were more distant from modernity and science than any other religion. For Renan, the previous flourishing of science and philosophy under Muslim rule was not due to the Islamic religion: "Do not let us honour it then for what it has been unable to suppress".[124]

As an anti-colonialist, al-Afghānī was not only worried about a rigid but also a too lenient understanding of Islam. The later Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan[125] and his 'materialist' supporters formed his 'inner enemies', not because of the liberality of their educational reform project in Aligarh, but because they mislead Muslim minds and sow discord, according to al-Afghānī. Khan's acceptance of British rule only serves British interests and leads to the Indian Muslims' submission after they have made a stand in the mutiny in 1857:

> These materialists became an army for the English government in India. They drew their swords to cut the throats of the Muslims, while weeping for them and crying, "We kill you only out of compassion and pity for you, and seeking to improve you and make your lives comfortable."[126]

Having read François Guizot (d. 1874)[127] who considered religion – and not the atheist spirit of the French Revolution – the backbone of European civilization, al-Afghānī thought that Islam could form a counterforce to European colonialism because Islam had previously formed a civilization uniting Arab and non-Arab peoples. In contrast to Europe, Islam had lost this unity; hence, al-Afghānī's insistence on re-unification.

Already at the end of *Refutation*, al-Afghānī had addressed the question of why Muslims were in such a sad condition "if the Islamic religion is as you say".[128] There his answer was "when they were [truly] Muslims, they were what they were

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122 Ibid, 87.

123 Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 87.

124 See Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 110.

125 Ahmad Khan was an official in the East India Company during the mutiny and refused to join the rebellion stating: "British sovereignty cannot be eliminated from India", see Mishra, *From the ruins*, 58.

126 Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 71.

127 François Guizot's *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) was translated into Arabic in 1877. For Guizot's influence on Afghani see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 114; Ende, *Europabild und kulturelles Selbstbewußtsein*, 105; Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 240.

128 Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 173.

[...]" and he quoted the Koranic verse "Verily, God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly" (13:11). In his *Answer to Renan*, al-Afghānī returned to the same question and gave a more detailed answer. As "Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion, [...] Muslim religion has tried to stifle science and stop progress"[129], al-Afghānī explains and repeats: "Here the responsibility of the Muslim religion appears complete [...] This religion tried to stifle the sciences and it was marvellously served in its design by despotism".[130]

Here, al-Afghānī does not demand that "Muslim society" free itself from religion (which he thinks might be the result of Ahmad Khan's reforms), but from religious tutelage and despotism both of which restricted knowledge production and hampered progress. Al-Afghānī tells the story of Caliph al-Hadi who put to death 5000 philosophers in Baghdad. Conceding "the exaggerated number", he argues that "analogous facts" can be found

> in the past of Christian religion [...]. Religions, by whatever names they are called, all resemble each other. No agreement and no reconciliation are possible between these religions and philosophy. Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part.[131]

At this point, al-Afghānī sees no simple solution for the conflict between religion and freedom of thought:

> Whenever religion will have the upper hand, it will eliminate philosophy; and the contrary happens when it is philosophy that reigns as sovereign mistress. So long as humanity exists, the struggle will not cease between dogma and free investigation, between religion and philosophy.[132]

Thus, al-Afghānī speaks up against Renan's naïve Social-Darwinist optimism. Renan not only believed that "the civilizational role of Christianity was replaced by the modern sciences",[133] but also made the case for a "divination of science" and declared "the progress of reason to be his religion".[134] Al-Afghānī was more sceptical and saw the struggle between religion and philosophy as

> a desperate struggle in which, I fear, the triumph will not be for free thought, because the masses dislike reason, and its teachings are only understood by some intelligences of the elite, and because, also, science, however beautiful it is, does not completely satisfy humanity, which thirsts for the ideal and which likes to exist in dark and distant regions that the philosophers and scholars can neither perceive nor explore.[135]

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[129] Ibid, 183.
[130] Ibid, 187.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 106.
[134] Ibid. In *L'Avenir de la science* (written in 1848/9, published only in 1890).
[135] Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 187.

For al-Afghānī, what would be ideal would be an equilibrium between religion (faith) and philosophy (free thought); however, this equilibrium is permanently endangered by the excesses on both sides. Although two of these four arguments were also used by European scholars to characterize the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire (Oriental despotism, the religion of Islam),[136] al-Afghānī rejects a Muslim exceptionalism. By generalizing his argument, he denies that the decline, which has affected the Islamic civilization, is specific to the history of Islam because it can also be found elsewhere.

Keddie's interpretation misses this point because there is no symmetry in al-Afghānī's argumentation. The reasons for rise and decline are different, according to al-Afghānī. He does not argue, as she wants to claim, that Islam was the reason for the rise as well as for the decline of the Islamic civilization.[137] Quite the contrary: although religion was the primary reason for its rise, secondary aspects of religion (control, misuse, misunderstanding, ossification, degeneration) led to civilizational decline.

Although Keddie's question about the avoided translation of al-Afghānī's text is an interesting point, it is a weak foundation on which to ground the whole interpretation of the debate. The structure of al-Afghānī's argument, for example his critique of nominal Muslims and institutional Islam, did not remain unknown to the Arab or Islamic world, but mainly corresponds with what ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā had to say about the state of Islam and Muslims, although they obviously drew different consequences from it. Afghānī, the pan-Islamist activist, differed in this from ʿAbduh, the religious and social educator, and Rashīd Riḍā, the ideological seeker.[138] Afghānī's viewpoint was not only continued by Shakīb Arslān,[139] but even echoed by the Iranian intellectual ʿAlī Sharīʿatī (d. 1977).[140]

Massad's judgement that al-Afghānī had adopted Social Darwinism from Renan is also misleading. The idea of social progress through knowledge can already be found in the seminal texts written by aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1873) and al-Bustānī

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[136] Compare Montesquieu's understanding of Islam in Konrad, "Von der ‚Türkengefahr'", paragraphs 23–29.

[137] Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 90: "The 'Refutation' stresses the worldly achievements of Islam, while the 'Answer' stresses another aspect–its stifling dogmatic rigidity. [...] Afghānī is in each instance giving a one-sided presentation that is, however, accurate within limits. It seems quite true that the religious-ideological impetus given by early Islam was an important factor in the early flowering of its civilization, but that, on the other hand, the rigidification of dogma helped bring about decline and continuing stagnation."

[138] See Ryad, "Anti-Imperialism".

[139] Arslān, quoting the same Quranic verse as Afghānī, adds that it is wrong to believe that being a Muslim means praying, fasting and waiting for God's help to achieve victory, see Arslān, *Li-mādhā*, 14, 20. He further writes that "the decay (*al-fasād*) has reached a degree that the biggest enemies to the Muslims are Muslims themselves", see ibid, 36.

[140] See Ali Shariati, "Critical Attitude toward the West and the Idea of Western Decadence", 319, where he describes the modern development as a trajectory from the liberation of the mind from the tutelage of religion to the suppression of religion and freedom in the name of science.

(d. 1883), the so-called first *nahḍa* generation, which dealt with the advance of modern Europe, before Darwinism flooded the scene. Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī and al-Bustānī were convinced that self-respect and religion had to be distinguished from scientific progress. Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī clearly explains that excelling in science is different from being a Muslim.[141] Likewise, Buṭrus al-Bustānī criticizes that one often hears Arabs boast of their forefathers who gave sciences and arts to the world, "but the fact that our forefathers reached the highest level of science, does not make us scholars, and there is no reason for pride if we ourselves are not like them".[142]

Aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī introduces his account of his stay in Paris with a description of how humankind developed from a primitive to a cultivated state by accident, reasoning, agreement or revelation.[143] He distinguishes historically and geographically between 'primitive man' (like in Sudan), who does not read or write, 'barbarians' (like the Bedouin), who enjoy a certain amount of learning, and 'civilized countries' (like Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Maghreb, the Persians, the European countries and America), which are characterized by sciences, manufacturing, trade and law. Although the Islamic countries stand out in their knowledge of Sharīʿa, they have neglected other sciences and "need the foreign countries to acquire what they do not know".[144]

In the same vein, al-Bustānī introduces his subject with some general remarks on the nexus between knowledge, the civilization process, and political circumstances.[145] He states that knowledge grows gradually by individual and collective efforts. As this growth may only be partially possible in a single brain, the collaboration of many brains is necessary, which is not within easy reach without the collaboration between different tribes and peoples. Although several factors are responsible for a different disposition for sciences between peoples and individuals, al-Bustānī singles out "freedom of thought" as a "major requirement" to comprehend truth and science because "enslaved thought cannot be receptive for knowledge, as it ought to be".[146]

The idea, that education and freedom of thought formed the most important factors for progress and that their lack was the reason for decline, had become a truism by the end of the 19th century. The secular intellectual Jūrjī Zaydān subscribed to this idea just as Tawfīq al-Bakrī did, the representative of Sufi Orders in Egypt.[147] The term "Islam" came to hold a double meaning in this discussion: a

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[141] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, 19. To dispel the idea that unbelief might lead to excellence, he compared the supremacy of the Europeans to ('ignorant') Copts; see Woltering, *Occidentalisms in the Arab World*, 47.

[142] Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, 4.

[143] Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, 5–7.

[144] Ibid, 7.

[145] Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, 2–4.

[146] Ibid, 3.

[147] On Zaydān see Philipp, *Ǧurǧī Zaidān*, 33. See al-Bakrī, *al-Mustaqbal li-l-islām*, 26–48. On Bakrī see De Jong, *Ṭuruq and Ṭuruq-linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, 125–188.

"religion" which had to be reformed according to the requirements of the time and a "civilization" (*ʿumrān, tamaddun*) that formed an integral part in the development of humankind. Also, the term Islamic civilization (*tamaddun islāmī*) acquired two meanings: first, it historically played a mediating role between antiquity and the modern Western civilization by way of knowledge transfer; second, it formed one of the world civilizations that had developed through different stages and started to be revitalized by borrowing from Western civilization in the present period.[148]

As the civilization which was founded by the Arabs was designated as "Islamic", the further question was: How much Islam was embedded in so-called Islamic civilization? In this respect, al-Afghānī's terminology is also leading the argument because he determined philosophy (in the sense of free thinking) as a major characteristic of the civilizational process, thus implying that a harmonic relation between philosophy and religion was a prerequisite for a thriving culture although the two terms were often seen as confrontational. It is certainly no accident that in the first year of its publication Rashīd Riḍā subtitled his journal *al-Manār* with the words: "a monthly journal that studies the philosophy of religion (*falsafat ad-dīn*) and matters of society and civilization (*shuʾūn al-ijtimāʿ wa-l-ʿumrān*)".

As philosophy and religion are often seen as incommensurable since al-Ghazālī's condemnation of peripatetic philosophers (see below), the term "philosophy of religion" comes as a surprise and stands out for a subtitle of an Arabic religious journal. The term seems to be a loan translation from its European coining. Schleiermacher subdivided theology between a philosophical, historical and practical branch in the first edition of his Encyclopedia.[149] He positioned philosophical theology above Christianity – in contrast to historical theology which was placed inside it. In order to decide what the essence of Christian piety was, he explained that it was necessary to take a view from above, go beyond Christianity and compare it to other forms of belief.[150] The comparison to other religions became constitutive to understanding the diversity and kin relations between different Christian communities although the academic field of a history of religions was only just beginning. With his interest in non-Christian religions, German theologian Otto Pfleiderer (d. 1908) was the first scholar to write a study on the essence and history of religion (1869) with two volumes, one on philosophy, the other on history. He presented religion as the solution for the basic contradiction between infinity and finiteness, between freedom and dependence. This history of religion leads upwards from archetypes over pagan to monotheistic forms of religions. Christianity forms the "absolute" religion because of its

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[148] Philipp, *Ğurğī Zaidān*, 58–61 and 86–92.

[149] See Hjelde, "Die Geburt der Religionswissenschaften aus dem Geist der Protestantischen Theologie", 9–28.

[150] Ibid, 18. Schleichermacher's original wording was: "Um auszumitteln, worin das Wesen der christlichen Frömmigkeit bestehe, müssen wir über das Christenthum hinausgehn, und unseren Standpunkt über demselben nehmen, um es mit anderen Glaubensarten zu vergleichen."

"perfect" harmony between freedom and dependency which is only relatively marked in Islam and Judaism.

The appropriation of the term by Rashīd Riḍā, by whatever way,[151] certainly reflects the conviction that religion plays a formative role for societies and civilizations, be it in the European or Islamic contexts. For him, a philosophy without recourse to religion was a "deficient philosophy".[152] It was Rashīd Riḍā's conviction that it was necessary to fight 'atheists' and 'conservatives' alike because the former wanted to abolish Islam, while the latter wanted to conserve it. Therefore, he fiercely attacked Egyptian 'atheists' who were convinced of following the European model when they held the view that religious education was dispensable in the Egyptian school system. He not only argued for the opposite but underlined that most Europeans were well aware of the necessity of religion and the valuable role which religious education played for society.[153] A similar argument can also be found in Shakīb Arslān's essay.[154] In this respect, Rashīd Riḍā, like al-Afghānī, underlined the importance of religion for social cohesion, which is visible in his lauding of Christian and secular writers when they defended religion and Islam, like the publisher of *al-Muqtaṭaf*, Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf, who argued that "the rejection of God is the road towards the destruction of human civilization",[155] or the main Arab representative of evolutionary theory, Shiblī Shumayyil (d. 1917), who stated that "it was not Islam, nor the Qur'an; but the power of the Sheikhs which kept the *umma* weak",[156] thus defying Lord Cromer (d. 1917), the British consul general in Egypt, who had imputed that Islam as "a social system has been a complete failure".[157]

## II. A Critique of Scholarly Narratives on the Differences between Europe and Islam

Although the idea that Islam was in decline was informed by a variety of sources, it is justified to reduce this complexity to three main lines of religious, cultural, and political argumentation. Firstly, a Protestant notion of religion stood for the need of religious reformation of Islam. Secondly, the Renaissance embodied the re-discovery of the Greek-Roman heritage which formed – in contrast to Arab-Muslim culture – the springboard for rationality and modern sciences in

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[151] I have found no explanation in *al-Manār* for the use of the subtitle nor for its later omission.

[152] See for example Rashīd Riḍā, "at-Taʿlim ad-dini".

[153] Ibid.

[154] For Arslān, Muslims should learn their lesson about the importance of Christian missionaries for colonialism and the role of religion in Europe and Japan, see Arslān, *Li-mādhā*, 52–57, 77–95.

[155] Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity*, 85.

[156] Ibid, 86.

[157] Ibid.

Europe.[158] Thirdly, colonization stood for the European power to force its ideas, viewpoints, and conceptions upon Muslims. These three lines of argumentation are used in a two-fold way. They are meant to mark the difference between an either 'enlightened' or 'powerful' Europe and Islam or describe how Arabs and Muslims reacted (or should react) to emulate European examples. Either, as men of religion, they followed (or should follow) a Protestant model of religion by striving towards the reform (*iṣlāḥ*) of Islam or, as secular intellectuals, they worked (or should work) for a revival (*nahḍa*) of Arab culture or, as anti-colonial fighters, they discarded (or should discard) European views altogether. The following argument instead holds (1) that the narratives of European difference and supremacy also point at communalities, entanglements, and ambivalences, and (2) that Arab-Muslim attitudes were not so neatly separated because the adaption and rejection of European models were not mutually exclusive, but often went hand in hand. Most of those who drew on European examples also discussed them critically and whoever discarded European models, imitated their claim of universality and singularity in an Arab-Islamic garment.

## II.1 The Ambivalence of Protestantism and the Concept of Religion

When Max Weber argued in *Protestant Ethic* (1905) that Protestantism and Calvinism possessed ingredients,[159] which made the believers strive towards rationality and capitalism and which could not be found in other world regions or religions, he poignantly summed up the viewpoint of his time and formulated a thesis which kept historians of the Middle East busy to this day.[160] In this context, the first question for debate is whether the movements of religious purification which can also be found among Muslims are directly influenced by Protestant examples or are simply structurally analogous or have nothing to do with them at all. The second question resulting from the first is whether an Islamic reformation is conceived of as fundamentalism or its 'liberal' opposite; the answer to this question determines whether existing 'puritanical' reform movements inside Islam are seen as wished for or not.

Because the prevailing scholarly opinion in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century was that the absence of reformation and enlightenment were characteristic of Islam, well-intentioned Orientalists of the second half of the 20th century started to search for and find Muslim Luthers in order to oppose common Euro-centric ('Orientalist') scholarship.[161] Stauth for example shows that Malaysian leaders drew

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[158] Jakob Burckhardt's study *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) played a central role in this understanding of history and the notion of renaissance.

[159] He thought of scripturalism, the uncertainty of salvation and the doctrine of predestination which led to inner-wordly asceticism, see Sukidi, "Max Weber's Remarks on Islam".

[160] See for example Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme*; Huff and Schluchter (eds), *Max Weber and Islam*; Turner, "Islam, Capitalism, and the Weber Theses".

[161] See the polemic on this point by Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand*, 53f.

on Max Weber's Protestant "working ethos", equalled it with Muslim virtues and tried to put it into practice in the second half of the 20th century for the sake of an Islamic modernization; Sukidi compares "Muslim Puritans" among Indonesian traders of the 20th century with the Calvinists, while Arjomand sees radical Shiite *ʿulamāʾ* during the Iranian revolution as an equivalent to Calvinist preachers; Goldberg finds general parallels between Egyptian Sunni radicals and 16th century English puritans both of whom reject submission to a civil state, while Tucker compares the reign of the Taliban to the reign of the Anabaptists in Muenster.[162]

The Reformation analogy has been in use since the 19th century among European and Western observers as well as among Muslims,[163] so that six tendencies can be distinguished on which to judge the similarities and differences between Islam and Protestantism in different ways. One can find the opinion that Islam (1) already had a reformation or (2) is just undergoing a process of reformation or that it (3) should or (4) should not aim at reformation or that (5) there was no need for a reformation because the analogy is out of place or (6) that the Reformation moved Christianity closer to Islam. Diachronically, Western perceptions of Islam also underwent changes from the 19th to the end of the 20th century. 19th century scholarship often equalled Islam with Sufism and understood it as a mainly mystical and irrational religion – a naive immediacy with God, untouched by reason.[164] Or, as is the case with German theologian Otto Pfleiderer, it recognized Sufism as an alien element inside Islam proper, representing the creative spirit of an "Aryan Islam".[165] In the 20th century, a market for new spirituality has emerged with a Western from of neo-Sufism, [166] while public opinion, in the face of so-called Islamic terrorism, is mainly concerned with Muslims' too literal, rigid and rationalized understanding of religion, lacking almost any spiritual quality.

It can safely be said that the use of analogies to Protestantism does not follow from a historical analysis of the multi-layered processes leading to confessionalism and the formation of the European state-confession system. However, there is a scholarly consensus in religious studies that the modern understanding of the category "religion", in spite of all its complexities, is both a relatively new product of European thought and a central category of European knowledge orders, which

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[162] Stauth, "Protestantisierung des Islams"; Sukidi, "Max Weber's Remarks on Islam"; Arjomand, "Iran's Islamic revolution", 390; Goldberg, "Smashing Idols and the State"; Tucker, "Primitivism as a Radical Response to Religious Crisis".

[163] See Kurzman and Browers, "Introduction: Comparing Reformations"; Powers, "You Say You Want a Reformation?".

[164] Already in the 1820s, the theologian Friedrich August Gotttreu Tholuck conceded the spiritual quality of Sufism, but constructed it in opposition to 'rational' Christian mysticism. Sufism was in need of a rational justification, which "no Oriental" was capable of giving; see Klinkhammer, "Zur Performativität religionswissenschaftlicher Forschung", 144–146.

[165] Mazusawa, *The Invetion of World Religions*, 197–204.

[166] Klinkhammer, "Sufismus im Westen"; Sedgwick, "Against the Modern World"; idem, "The reception of Sufi and neo-Sufi Literature"; idem, "Western Sufism and Traditionalism".

have been spread over the globe in the course of the colonial expansion in the 19th century and helped to model non-European religions according to a Christian ideal and measure them against it.[167] As the modern category of "religion" generally reflects a Protestant understanding of individual faith and internalization ("sense of infinity") accompanied by historical criticism of text, dogma, and institution, it is justified to ask what kind of impact Protestantism had, through scholarly and missionary efforts, on modern Muslim understandings of "religion". On the other hand, highlighting the centrality of Protestantism for the construction of modern religions often overlooks the ambivalences inherent in categories like "Protestantism" and "religion". As there was no single Protestant notion of religion or of Islam, one is tempted to ask what a "Protestantization" of Islam might mean, whether there was really a "Protestant template"[168] Muslim reformers could follow or whether such a template really caused fundamental changes in modern Islam, given the historic resemblance between the two 'monotheistic' religions. The following remarks are, therefore, meant to unpack the notion of a "Protestantization of Islam", by distinguishing Protestant perceptions and their possible impact from Muslim adoptions of a modern concept of religion.

As Masuzawa, Schulze, and Jung have shown,[169] mainly Protestant theologians and Orientalists from Western Europe have shaped a "for the most part, consistently negative"[170] idea of Islam in the 19th and 20th century. Schulze even tried to estimate the number of Protestants among European scholars.[171] Most of them believed that Islam was a stagnant and lesser productive civilization whose cultural kernel was a political religion. Islamic culture was either too religious or too political, according to whether it was judged from the viewpoint of politics or from the viewpoint of religion. Its sole merit was to preserve Greek philosophy through the Dark Ages and pass it on to Europe in the Renaissance, as Hegel had already explained.[172] As many 19th century scholars mixed theories about the evolution of cultures and religions with the science of languages, they often held the view that Christianity in Europe had overcome its Semitic origins, while Islam was recast as

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[167] See for example Beyer, "The Modern Emergence of Religions"; Kollmar-Paulenz, "Außereuropäische Religionsbegriffe"; Burgunder, "Indischer Swami und deutscher Professor"; Nehring, "Aneignung von ‚Religion' – postkoloniale Konstruktionen des Hinduismus"; Klinkhammer, "Zur Performativität religionswissenschaftlicher Forschung".

[168] Büssow, "Re-imaging Islam", 274, 277, 296.

[169] Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Schulze, "Islamwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft"; idem, "Islam und Judentum im Angesicht der Protestantisierung der Religionen im 19. Jahrhundert"; idem, "Die Politisierung des Islams im 19. Jahrhundert"; idem, "Mass Culture and Islamic Cultural Production in the 19th Century Middle East", 189–222; Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*.

[170] Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 121.

[171] Schulze, "Islamwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft", 151. According to him, 60 percent of all European Orientalists in 1900 were Protestants; he further estimates that 80 percent of the religious scholars were Protestants in the whole 19th century.

[172] See for example Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature'", 142.

"a prototypically Arab – hence Semitic – religion".[173] In this context, some scholars started to downplay Christianity's intimate relation to Judaism and Islam and instead judged it like newly discovered Buddhism's relation to Hinduism. Neither Christianity nor Buddhism thrived in the place of its origin, and both lost their ethnic character, becoming universal religions and surmounting their predecessors; Islam was seen as a national religion that had simply transgressed its proper boundaries.[174] By disengaging Christianity from its Judeo-Semitic origins, these scholars also held the view that it had emerged from the "far richer soil of the late Hellenic world".[175] Therefore, it followed that Christianity was permanently rejuvenating and recreating itself because of its inherent productive contradictions.[176] It was divided in the "myth" (like the life of Jesus and the doctrine of the Trinity) and the historicity of the texts so that even if the historical-critical analysis might refute the historical facts mentioned in the texts, there still remained the myth – a tension which was missing in strictly-monotheistic Islam. As theologians and scholars understood Islam as an unappealing case of monotheism, it was not integrated into the field of religious studies, but 'deserved' an academic discipline of its own. In grand theories like Ernst Troeltsch's history of religions or Max Weber's sociology, hints at Islam have only an exemplary nature and never build up an original argument or guide a research question. Even in the works of Mircea Eliade on religion and of Jan Assmann on canonization and scripture, one is "struck by the virtual absence of Islamic materials".[177]

One of the few scholars of religious studies in the 20th century with a genuine interest in Islam was Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who was also a Presbyterian minister.[178] His view of the Islamic decline reveals an implicitly Protestant undertone. According to him, Islam's crisis with modernity is fundamentally different from the Christian one because the Muslim understanding of history is different.[179] As Islam's rise went hand in hand with worldly power, expansion, and success, prior to the 19th century Muslims have never understood 'the two realms' as contradictory. Only when success took sides with Europeans and Americans did the situation become a fundamental challenge for Muslims and their view of Islamic history.[180] That Muslims lag behind "is ultimately a contradiction in terms, if Islam means what it purports to mean".[181] Something has gone wrong "not only with the

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[173] Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 179.
[174] Ibid, 186–206.
[175] Ibid, 191.
[176] Schulze, "Islamwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft"; idem, "Islam und Judentum im Angesicht der Protestantisierung der Religionen im 19. Jahrhundert".
[177] Al-Azmeh, *The Times of History*, 102.
[178] On Smith see Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic".
[179] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*.
[180] Ibid, 110.
[181] Ibid.

Muslim's own development but with the governance of the universe",[182] writes
Smith: "For many Arabs the problem is no longer that the Islamic dream is unreal-
ized. [...] The new challenge to the Arab world is in the fear of the recognition
that the dream may be invalid".[183] The Muslim, and especially Arab, reaction to
this challenge is, according to Smith, insufficient, psychologically defensive ("glori-
fying [the past] is of necessity self-defeating"[184]) and does not contribute to under-
standing "the obviously crucial question as to how or why Arab science de-
clined".[185] Confronting modernity, Muslims lack an example on which they could
build. From the former fundamental crisis, the fall of Baghdad in 1258, Islam re-
emerged stronger because the conquerors converted to Islam, built new empires,
which made Islam a world religion, and contributed to the spread of Islam among
non-Arabs and the flowering of Sufism. Yet, this example does not offer any rem-
edy because the current crisis seems to be a lasting one: modernity will not convert
to Islam, and it is difficult to see how Islam could transcend its boundaries once
again.[186]

Smith's view presupposes a clear-cut separation between two entities called Is-
lam and modernity. His argument that modernity will *not* convert to Islam might
be obvious, but what about Islam's conversion to modernity? Certainly, Muslim
reactions to the dynamism of modern times were, in their diversity, not very dif-
ferent from the reactions of members from other religions. Tawfiq al-Bakri, the
representative of the Egyptian Sufi-brotherhoods, promised in his booklet *al-
Mustaqbal li-l-islām* (1892) that the future belonged to an equally rational and
spiritual Islam. Mohammed Webb concluded after the Parliament of Religions
that it had given a severe blow to organized religion, meaning Church-
Christianity, thus hastening "the dawn of the day when Islam will be the universal
faith".[187] Convinced by this belief, he opened headquarters in New York, soon af-
ter the Parliament had ended, to engage himself in missionary activities in the
United States.[188] And a quotation attributed to Muḥammad ʿAbduh is too good
not to mention in this context although it may be invented: "In France (or:
Europe), I saw Islam without Muslims. In Egypt, I see Muslims without Islam".[189]
This quote – once again – differentiates between Islam and Muslims and proposes
that the boundaries between the entities called 'Europe' and 'Islam' are more fluid
than one-sided ascriptions of superficial materialism and backwardness.

Smith's account of Muslims' extraordinary crisis can be counted among ap-
proaches influenced by modernization theory, which has been grounded on the

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[182] Ibid, 112.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid, 118.
[185] Ibid, 120.
[186] Ibid, 32–40.
[187] Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 242.
[188] Ibid, 244. The headquarters were closed down in 1896 after they had proved to be a failure.
[189] Elmessiri, "The West and Islam"; Armstrong, "Foreword", xi.

premise of a diminishing space for religion and Islam in modern societies. The formula of a "Protestantization" of Islam offers a formula to get to grips with the enduring, yet changing importance of religion in the modern world as well as with the emergence of a rather uniform worldwide understanding of religion.[190] In the following, I discuss three different attempts (by Schulze, Büssow, and Jung) which try to substantiate a "Protestantization" of Islam, thus pointing at fluidity and global convergence where others see a relatively distinct Islamic tradition.

Schulze summarizes five different ways in which Protestantism has become a paradigm to interpret aspects of Islam: (1) to designate a certain Islamic tradition as Protestant (like Wahhabism); (2) to assume a structural identity between Islam and Protestantism; (3) to argue for or against religious reform in Islam; (4) to draw parallels between 19th century Islamic reform and the Lutheran reformation; (5) to talk about the secularization of Islam.[191] Although he focuses on the diversity of biased meanings and usages of the term "Protestantism" in relation to Islam, he also insinuates that these attributions had a strong impact on Muslims' self-understanding. Yet, Schulze's considerations also allow the opposite conclusion: If Wahhabism as well as secularism can be interpreted as Protestant and if Protestantism can be seen as the counter draft or the model of Islamic reform, then the term "Protestantism" does not designate a specific impact, but an amphiboly which summarizes contradictory tendencies under one catchphrase. Schulze mentions the journalists Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (d. 1902) as examples for an adoption of the Protestant language of the internalization of religion, which was alien to Islam.[192] However, this standpoint seems debatable because the differentiation between inner (*bāṭin*) and outer (*ẓāhir*) religiosity has already been part and parcel of the formative period of Islam and the differentiation between theologians and jurists.[193] The emergence of a multifaceted phenomenon like modern Salafism with its puritanism and scripturalism can certainly not simply be traced back to a Protestant impact or explained by drawing on yardsticks brought from the outside, but must be read as the result of a complex, often confusing process of re-construction and self-styling.[194] Rashīd Riḍā's turn to the Wahhābiyya in the 1920s had certainly as much to do with political than with religious reasons.[195] Al-Kawākibī, one of the most influential writers in ʿAbduh's circle, was influenced by the Italian enlightenment philosopher Alfieri and the British anti-imperialist writer Wilfred Scaven Blunt, a pupil of Catholic colleges. From the first one, al-Kawākibī adopted the critique of despotism, which he implicitly directed at the Ottoman sultan-caliph; from the second

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[190] See Beyer, "The Modern Emergence of Religions".
[191] Schulze, "Islam und Judentum", 165.
[192] Ibid, 155.
[193] Johansen, "The Muslim *Fiqh* as a Sacred Law".
[194] Lauzière, "The Construction of *Salafiyyah*".
[195] Riyad, "Anti-Imperialism".

one, he adopted the idea that the caliph should be a kind of a Muslim Pope and Mecca be turned into a Muslim Vatican where a Muslim conclave should elect an Arab caliph during the pilgrimage session.[196]

Johann Büssow, applying Schulze's approach to one of ʿAbduh's works, *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, tries to substantiate that ʿAbduh's work "followed"[197] or "bears close resemblance to"[198] a "Protestant template of religion". We are told that "the foundations of an individualized idea of religion are laid"[199] because ʿAbduh uses the word *dīn* (religion) to express a "basic characteristic of human existence"[200] – an inner experience, hidden from reason, as well as a path of knowledge – and because ʿAbduh holds that "religious hierarchies will become meaningless",[201] if true Islam is realized again. Büssow further implies that ʿAbduh "was convinced that a very far-reaching convergence already existed between Islam and some forms of Protestantism",[202] and quotes a paragraph in which ʿAbduh writes about the Reformation that "some reformist sects have indeed reached articles of faith that agree with those of Islam. [...] What they believe, distinguishes them from Islam only by name and by certain rituals, but not by meaning".[203] Yet, Büssow neither discusses the fact that ʿAbduh repeated this narrative in his work *al-Islām wa-l-Naṣrāniyya* (1902), instead adding a negative judgement about Protestantism,[204] nor is he interested in the wider context of ʿAbduh's text.

However, it is equally possible to view ʿAbduh's text about similarities between Sunnī Islam and Protestantism from the opposite angle – as part of a Muslim discourse on whether the Reformation moved Christianity closer to Islam.[205] Al-Afghānī already articulated the idea that the secret of Europe's success was grounded on Martin Luther's religious group that had claimed the right to rationally criticize Christian sources and dogmas as well as any kind of authority.[206] Since this was equal to the true spirit of Islam, the statement that today's Muslims were also in need of a Martin Luther "was a favourite theme of al-Afghani's"[207] and he himself "seems to have hoped to play the role of a Muslim Luther".[208]

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[196] Kawākibi's two books are *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād wa-maṣāriʿ al-istiʿbād* and *Umm al-qurā* (1899); for the influences on him see Haim, "Alfieri and al-Kawākibi" and idem, "Blunt and al-Kawākibi"; for Blunt's influence see also Kramer, *Islam Assembled*, 10–25.

[197] Büssow, "Re-imagining Islam", 274.

[198] Ibid, 296.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid, 295.

[201] Ibid, 297.

[202] Ibid, 292.

[203] Ibid, 293. The quotation leaves out "with exception of the certainty of Muḥammad's message".

[204] Although he mentions this ibid, 316, Footnote 138.

[205] Kurzman and Browers, "Introduction", 3; Paulus, *Amīn al-Ḫūlī*, 36–38.

[206] Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism*, 72.

[207] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 122.

[208] Keddie, *An Islamic response*, 82.

Later on, the Indian philosopher Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938), the Turkish nationalist Ziya Gökalp (d. 1924), and the Egyptian writer ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (d. 1964) no longer speculated about similarity, but argued that Europe's imitation of the Islamic civilization had culminated in the Reformation. For them, it represented a total break with traditional Christianity, which they identified with the priesthood, the separation of spiritual and worldly powers, the inquisition, and the papacy.[209]

The first Arab author who critically engaged himself with the family resemblance between Islam and Reformation in a more comprehensive way was the Egyptian Professor of Arabic Literature Amīn al-Khūli (d. 1966) from Azhar University. He hailed from the circle of ʿAbduh's students and tried to explain the similarity, to which ʿAbduh had only hinted in passing, in a lecture published in 1939.[210] Al-Khūli drew connecting lines in material, spiritual, philosophical and daily-life matters between Islamic contexts and Pre-Reformation as well as Reformation movements. In the epilogue, however, he criticized several additions by the editor (Rashīd Riḍā) to the seventh edition of ʿAbduh's *Risālat at-tawḥīd*, among them a subheading proclaiming "the adoption of the religious reformation from Islam". He noted that such a formulation – in spite of all the similarities he himself had expounded – was neither justified according to the subject matter nor to the original text.[211]

On the one hand, the Muslim discourse about Protestant similarities with Islam aims at the cultural debt Europe owes to Islam[212] – in spite of Europe's perceived disdain for most things Islamic. On the other hand, there is, with a small number of exceptions, indeed a lack of academic reconstructions of Islamic influences on European religious history and the Reformation. Christiane Paulus, who translated Khūli's text into German, traces this disinterest back to (1) the "cultural strangeness" of Islam for Protestant theologians who have not yet seen the closeness of Islam and (2) the notion that European history is often understood as a process, that is developing from within itself and leads to a moment of self-liberation in the end.[213] Similarly, Frédéric Guerin holds that mostly "insiders", theologians and church historians, write the history of the Reformation.[214] Although they have readily acknowledged that the Reformation was a global phenomenon, they have been "more concerned with assessing its global impact than with exploring extra-European influences",[215] thus simply underlining the Protes-

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[209] For Iqbal and Gökalp see Kurzman and Browers, "Introduction", 3f.; for ʿAqqād see Haarmann, "Die ‚Persönlichkeit Ägyptens'", 116f.

[210] Paulus, *Amīn al-Ḫūli*, 38. He was invited to a conference of the International Association of the History of Religions in Brussels in 1935 where he lectured in Italian.

[211] Ibid, 112f.

[212] Haarmann, "Die ‚Persönlichkeit Ägyptens'", 116.

[213] Paulus, *Amīn al-Ḫūli*, 174.

[214] Guerin, "Re-Orienting the Reformation?", 39f.

[215] Ibid, 39.

tant self-understanding of its own central place in the formation of the modern world.[216] Against this whole background, the talk about a "Protestant template" of modern religion and Islamic reform adds to a widespread traditional narrative and neglects Muslim as well as scholarly attempts to show the long-lasting entanglement of Muslim and European histories.[217]

In a more comprehensive, yet different way, Dietrich Jung has attempted to shed a light on the (unintentional) collaboration between Protestant theologians, Orientalists, and Islamists. Jung argues that these three groups created the "essentialist image of Islam" – what was formerly known as Islamic fundamentalism or Islamism – in rival complicity. Muslim reformers since the 19th century juxtaposed Islam "as an apparent double antagonist"[218] with modernity and liberal Protestantism. Among Muslims, the idea "gained hegemony" that Islam was "an all-encompassing way of life" and that it was – "in contradistinction to the Christian faith"[219] – more than merely a religion. By this approach, Jung is able to explain why Sayyid Quṭb warned against a reformation of Islam because he saw Protestantism as the gateway to secularization and the schizophrenia of the sacred-secular divide.[220]

However, Jung discovers – literally on the last page of his study – that essentialist Islam "does not represent 'true Islam' in any exclusive way"[221] since "the broad variety of thoughts and streams"[222] also comprises "liberal voices",[223] whereas the militants only form a minority. Jung primarily describes modern Islam as the result of a juxtaposition with liberal Protestantism. Therefore, a phenomenon like "liberal Islam" plays no central role in his considerations or is placed somewhere outside or at the margin of the entanglement of Muslims with Protestantism (he is not clear in this respect), although it may also appear as a clear expression of such an entanglement and its possibly divergent consequences.

Whether Muslims followed (according to Schulze and Büssow) or opposed (according to Jung) a certain blueprint of Protestant religion, depends on how this blueprint is defined. However, there is no unanimous Protestant or Western understanding of the relation between religion and modernity. Rather, it ranges from Max Weber's dictum of "disenchantment" to his Calvinist "spirit of capitalism", or, put differently, from the diagnosis of a pending spiritual decay to the search of the religious imprint of modern culture. Above this, there was a European religious diversity. Neither did Protestants form a unity nor was Catholicism without influ-

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[216] See for example Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt*; Graf, *Der Protestantismus*.
[217] See lately Berger, *A Brief History*.
[218] Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 154, 270.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid, 270.
[221] Ibid, 272.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.

ence. Both Renan, student of a Catholic college, and Durkheim, theoretician of the sociology of religion, argued from a secularized Catholic rather than from a Protestant understanding of religion. The discussion between the Greek Orthodox secularist Faraḥ Anṭūn (d. 1922), who subscribed to Renan's call for *laicité* in France, and Muḥammad ʿAbduh, who pleaded for a guiding role of religion in society, can be seen as a re-enactment of the conflict between French laicism and its religious opponents in the Egyptian context.[224]

Likewise, the category of "religion", proffered by European and Western scholars to soften pure materialism and murmur about universal brotherhood (as was the case with the Parliament of World Religions), is itself highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it unites cultures and peoples under one category, but also ranks them according to their modernity. On the other hand, it forms a gateway for criticism of Western modernity in which Protestantism either stands as an example or a counterforce. Thus, the category of "religion" reinforces the dividing-lines that it is deemed to surmount: it is not only what all cultures have in common, but also what separates them because of their presumably rational or irrational, successful or decadent, peaceful or belligerent character. "Religion" can be seen as the cause of progress in one case or as its obstacle in the other; as the cure or the expression of decline; as the healing of or the salvation from modernity; as the opponent or the supplement to materialism.

Although Protestant theologians tried to present their belief as a spiritual correction of a one-sided materialist modernity and at the same time appropriate for the modern age, Protestantism was no longer the only choice for Westerners looking for spiritual guidance. They instead drew on non-Christian traditions like the group of writers and philosophers who shared the dream of the unity of humankind and argued for the basic identity of all religions in order to speak out for peace among the peoples.[225] Some avant-garde artists as well as critics of modernity from the Theosophical School at the turn of the 20th century came to see Oriental mysticism and spirituality either as a supplement or a counter-model to Western rationality.[226] Some of their adherents as well as sympathizers of perennial philosophy and traditionalism converted to Islam and created a Western Neo-Sufism, which in turn had an impact on Muslims in non-European societies.[227]

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[224] For an analysis of the debate see Flores, "Reform, Islam, Secularism".

[225] Zilkowski, "Waking Up From Akbar's Dream".

[226] For the influence of Helena Blavatsky (d. 1891), occultism and theosophy on the avant-garde artists see Bauduin, "Science, Occultism and the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century"; Lachmann, "Kandinsky's Thought Forms and the Occult Roots of Modern Art"; Dalrymple Henderson, "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art"; Schirn Kunsthalle and Veit Loers (eds.), *Okkultismus und Avantgarde*; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de la Ville de Strasbourg et al. (eds.), *L'Europe des esprits ou la fascination de l'occulte, 1750–1950*.

[227] Ernst, "Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy, and Islamic Studies", 176–181; Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*; idem, "The reception of Sufi and neo-Sufi Literature"; idem, "Western Sufism and Traditionalism".

Beginning with the end of the 18th century, a fascination with Oriental religions
had spread in Europe: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism were 'discovered' and
studied because they were seen as (partially even 'original') examples of 'pure' rea-
son or 'pure' spirituality.[228] This Western fascination did not remain hidden from
Orientals, so that they re-imported the imagined Oriental spirituality in a more au-
thentic version of itself. A gifted speaker like the Swami Vivekananda, for example,
picked up on a German Orientalist's ideas about the rationality of the Vedas to
impress his audience at the Parliament of World Religions.[229]

That the Protestant perception of non-Christian religions was rather ambivalent
was already apparent at the Parliament of World Religions where the ambivalence
was embodied by the Protestant tandem who presided over the congress. Its idea-
giver was the Swedenborgian Charles Carroll Bonney who believed that each reli-
gious system stood "in its own perfect integrity" because there were "common es-
sentials by which everyone may be saved, in all the religions", including Islam.[230]
The Swedenborgians in general understood their own church as the basis of a uni-
versal faith. One of Bonney's incentives to organize the parliament was "to unite
all religions against all irreligion".[231]

In contrast to Bonney, the president of the parliament John Henry Barrows op-
posed the idea of a universal faith and called Christianity the fulfillment of all re-
ligions.[232] Barrows' Christian universalism was "more repudiative of existing Juda-
ism, Islam, and other non-Christian faiths" and he was "overt about the need for
mild aggression".[233] A principal motivation behind ensuring extensive Asian par-
ticipation was to diffuse "the potentially insurmountable tensions of any meeting
between Catholics and Protestants [...]. It required a parliament of all religions to
bring together the first modern parliament of Christendom".[234] Barrows' own
church, the Presbyterian General Assembly had denounced the anticipated parlia-
ment in advance as "uncalled for, misleading, and hurtful" because it might give
the impression that Christianity "may not be the only Divine religion".[235] From
this background, Barrows could feel united in his disdain for Islam with his fellow
believers and the audience, but the attention which the Hindu and Buddhist
speakers from India attracted and which made the parliament a media success
posed a serious problem to him. In his concluding remarks, he favourably quoted

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[228] See App, *The Birth of Orientalism*. For a positive judgment of the "purity" of early Hindu-
   ism (and its subsequent decline) by Kant see von Glasenapp, *Kant und die Religionen des Os-
   tens*, 33.
[229] Burgunder, "Indischer Swami und deutscher Professor".
[230] Marty, "A Cosmopolitan Habit in Theology", 168. The Swedenborgians, or Church of the
   New Jerusalem, numbered 7,095 members in the 1890 census.
[231] Burris, *Exhibiting Religions*, 148.
[232] Zilkowski, "Introduction", 9f.
[233] Marty, "A Cosmopolitan Habit", 169.
[234] Burris, *Exhibiting Religions*, 153.
[235] Marty, "A Cosmopolitan Habit", 169.

a statement by another pastor that "the difference between Christianity and the other religions is that we have something that they have not. We have the Christ, the revelation of God, the ideal Man, the loving and suffering Saviour".[236] The underlying problem was that Barrows' theory that all other religions were "fulfilled" in Christianity had backfired during the meeting. Speakers like

> Vivekananda, Dharmapala, and Shaku Soen promptly appropriated this formula for themselves and reversed the Christian claim, developing 'fulfillment' theories from their own faith perspectives. Barrows' associations with those three men were ridden with bitter tensions in the years following the parliament.[237]

In several instances, in which we find Muslims dealing with a "Protestant template of religion", we can also assume that they were motivated by a wish to defeat Christian missionaries with their own weapons (maybe we should count ʿAbduh's treatise among these examples). As early as the mid-19th century, Muslims in India confronted a surprised Protestant missionary, who tried to prove the superiority of Christianity, with some results from higher Biblical criticism. They could argue that Protestants themselves had admitted that the Christian belief was historically questionable and self-contradictory and, thus, used scriptural criticism against Protestantism for the sake of an Islamic apology, not as an example to follow. The controversy, which was translated in several languages, found broad reception throughout the Islamic world.[238]

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt earned a great deal of its popularity in the 1930s when it started a campaign against Protestant activities for orphans and children. On the one hand, they achieved the displacement of the missionaries from the education and social welfare sector; on the other hand, they copied their approach and tried to Islamically missionize Egyptian society with the help of a network of social institutions.[239]

## II.2 The European Claim to the Greek-Roman Heritage

The arguments put forward by Protestant scholars about the importance of Protestantism for modern Europe were not purely religious but meant to describe the birth of modern Europe. Another form of argument connected modern culture with the European Renaissance and the Greek heritage and excluded Islam from this plot, although renaissance thinkers were indebted to Arabic translations of Greek texts. With his book *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (1852), Ernest Renan played a

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[236] Zilkowski, "Waking Up From Akbar's Dream", 322.
[237] Ibid, 323. Borrows stated: "Swami Vivekananda was always heard with interest by the Parliament, but very little approval was shown to some of the sentiments expressed in his closing address". Vivekananda (d. 1902) represented Hinduism, Anagarika Dharmapala (d. 1933) Sinhalese Buddhism, and Shaku Soen (d. 1919) Zen Buddhism.
[238] Schirrmacher, "The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism".
[239] Baron, *The Orphan Scandal.*

prominent role in drawing the picture of a war against Aristotelian philosophy in all Muslim countries after al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) had condemned Muslim peripatetic philosophers as infidels.[240] Renan drew on the results of the German Orientalist August Schmölder's research (1842) after which al-Ghazālī's position became known to European historians of philosophy.[241] In spite of Ignaz Goldziher's (d. 1921) work about the assimilation of the Greek heritage into Islamic thought, it took until the second half of the 20th century before the indebtedness of Islamic culture to the Greek heritage and al-Ghazālī's tolerant position towards philosophy were appreciated.[242] In the meantime, al-Ghazālī's verdict was seen as a sign of a general cultural decay and insufficient apprehension of the heritage of antiquity.[243] This allowed historians and philosophers of religion to trace the incompatibility of Islam with modernity back to a rather early stage.[244]

A case in point to illustrate this debate is the argument offered by C.H. Becker (d. 1933), one of the founding fathers of Islamic studies in Germany, who presented three similar, but divergent judgements about Islam's attitude towards the Greek heritage between 1907 and 1931.[245] In his first lecture, he argued against the 'old-fashioned' exclusion of the Orient from world history, saying that Islam and Christianity equally drew on Hellenistic traditions; not only did Islam have Christian roots but 'the essential roots of the Christian Middle Ages' were also laid in the Orient. In the 1920s, he openly subscribed to German philosopher Ernst Troeltsch's (d. 1923) idea of 'closed cultural spheres', but still held the opposing view to Troeltsch that the cultural border did not run between Europe and Orient, but between Europe and Islam on the one side and Asia on the other, because Islam was to be understood as the bridge between Orient and Occident. The difference between Europe and Islam was just a historical gap because Europe had managed to achieve a 'rebirth of antiquity' as a result of Christianity's 'rupture with antiquity' whereas in Islam antiquity merely lived on; without a rupture there was no need to re-cover and re-create it. Troeltsch's objection to this argument was that "this simply means that things were different in Islam from the very beginning". Becker also used binary oppositions – rupture and re-creation vs. continuity and stagnation –, but his underlying assumption was that Islam was capable of modernization. He thought that there would be a 'rebirth of the Orient' in analogy to the renaissance in Europe because Islam 'had adapted to various conditions in the

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[240] Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz im Islam*, 5.

[241] Ibid, 4.

[242] Ibid, 3, 6, 8.

[243] Ibid, 5.

[244] See Schäbler, "Humanism, Orientalism, Modernity".

[245] For a more detailed analysis of the following remarks see Essner and Winkelhane, "Carl Heinrich Becker (1876–1933), Orientalist und Kulturpolitiker", 171–177; and Schulze, "Religionswissenschaft und Islamwissenschaft", 186f. On Becker see also Haridi, *Das Paradigma der „islamischen Zivilisation"*. On Becker's position in the field of Islamic studies see Jung, *Islamists, Orientalists*, 157–213.

course of the centuries'. Finally, in 1931, Becker called the modern Orient 'degenerated and passive' and based his judgement on 'the missing reception' of the antique heritage; in spite of common roots, 'the Oriental soul' felt no need to deal with this heritage in a creative way so that Islam 'is nothing else than a living, but continuously Asianizing Hellenism'. Becker formulated the same idea about the importance of the Greek heritage in three different constellations and combined it with three different judgements leading from Islam's similarity over difference to decadence.

Such an argument was meant to explain why the Muslims' way of dealing with the antique heritage did not give birth to a humanism and why Islamic civilization was, in the end, not equal to European civilization.[246] In a similar fashion, as was the case with the Protestantism analogies, scholars of Islamic studies tried to establish since the 1960s that one can find elements of an "Islamic humanism" predating the European Renaissance. They mostly identified this humanism in Islam as a rational and anti-religious, little "Islamic", movement.[247] Although these new attempts were directed against the traditional Euro-centric historiography, their historic re-construction still fed the dominant narrative of Islamic decline because such a humanism in Islam had not overcome the "dark" Middle Ages – as was the case in Europe –, but was itself overwhelmed by scholastic religious thought.[248]

The newly emerging Phil-Hellenism in 19th century Europe, that saved a central place for the Greek heritage in European self-understanding, was among other things sparked by the Greek independence struggle (1821–1830). Paradoxically, the European insistence on the importance of the Greek heritage did not remain confined to Western Europe, but led to a rising interest in different regions of the Ottoman Empire, from Albania to Egypt, an interest that was often accompanied by the ideas of the enlightenment and nationalism.[249] Starting in 1834, new Ottoman and Arabic translations of Greek classics were published, and irrespective of their religious background and political orientation, Arab intellectuals of the 19th and 20th century shared an enthusiasm for the Greek heritage.[250] When the Arabic translation of the Iliad by Sulaymān al-Bustānī was published in 1904 in Cairo, the guest list of the banquet encompassed the poet Aḥmad Shawqī, the journalists Fāris Nimr and Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf, the writer Jūrjī Zaydān, the Islamic modernist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and the later political leader Saʿd Zaghlūl.[251] Another example for this appreciation of the Greek heritage was renowned liberal Egyptian scholar and politician Aḥmad Luṭfi as-Sayyid (d. 1966), the first president of Cairo

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[246] Schöller, "Zum Begriff des 'islamischen Humanismus'", 302f.
[247] Ibid, 298–301.
[248] Ibid, 295.
[249] Kreutz, "The Greek Classics".
[250] Ibid, 87.
[251] Ibid.

University, who translated works by Aristotle into Arabic (from French) and was nicknamed "the teacher of a generation" because of his intellectual impact.

In the course of time, the enthusiasm for the Greek classics also acquired a critical undertone regarding their presumed Europeanness. When Tawfiq al-Ḥakim (d. 1987), one of the founding fathers of the Egyptian theatre, adapted Oedipus, he claimed in the introduction that a "religious sentiment" (shuʿūr dīnī) was pivotal in the Greek play and that he as an "Arab Easterner" (sharqī ʿarabī) understood the Greek heritage far better than modern poets in the West because he had preserved this kind of "religious sentiment" which had vanished in the West.[252]

The European understanding, which claimed Greek thought as a unique "European" breakthrough in the history of humankind, was thus questioned. This questioning was justified in so far as new scholarship has underlined the Oriental influences[253] on ancient Greece and the relationship between the "Greek religion"[254] and the tragedies. Contrary to popular opinion, ancient Greece represents a breakthrough in self-reflective thought not because it symbolizes a triumph of rational reflection, but because it was "continuously involved in 'religious problematization'"[255] which probes the limits of human reasoning and the ambivalence of life and has not lost its attraction to this day.

In a similarly paradoxical way, European historians discussed the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire – an important historical question for (Western) European self-perceptions because it posed the question about continuities and discontinuities and about the longue durée of culture and economy in the Mediterranean. As much as Edward Gibbon[256] had argued in 1782 that Christianity contributed as a factor of effeminacy to the fall of the empire because the Romans were no longer able to withstand the rise of Germanic peoples in the North and Arabs in the South, it was also somehow suggesting that the religion of Islam was held responsible for the decadence of Muslim Empires, as for example Renan did.[257] What Gibbon achieved is that he integrated Islam into the historiography of Europe and gave it a prominent, yet negatively connoted place. He assumed that Islam would be taught in the schools of Oxford if the battle of Poitiers (732) had been lost and

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[252] Ibid, 89. In contrast to al-Ḥakim's assertion see Walbridge, "Explaining Away the Greek Gods", on the question of how much early Muslims knew or were interested in Greek polytheism.

[253] West, The East Face of Helicon; Burkert, The Orientalizing Revolution; Burkert, Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis.

[254] Clay, The Wrath of Athena; Schmitt Pantel, Religion in the Ancient Greek City; Parker, Athenian Religion: A History; Rose, Sons of the Gods, Children of the Earth; Sourvinou-Inwood, Tragedy and Greek Religion.

[255] See Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution, 324–398, here: 357.

[256] Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

[257] Certainly, such a parallelization had its limits, as Shakib Arslān, Li-mādhā, 116f., remarked, because European history as a whole has never been characterized by a general decadence of Christianity in the same way as Muslim history by the decadence of Islam.

ended his work with the fall of Constantinople (1453). Historians have argued against the underlying theory of catastrophe by pointing out that Roman culture did not end with the decline of the Western Roman empire but lived on through a period which could be dubbed as "late antiquity" (according to Jacob Burckhardt who influenced Max Weber). Islamic culture, however, was for a long time not integrated into this formula of "late antiquity".

In works published between 1917 and 1938, Belgian historian Henri Pirenne (d. 1935) argued that the Mediterranean formed a common cultural space that was damaged by the Arab conquests because they cut the trading lines on the Mediterranean and turned the sea from "a road of communication" to "an insurmountable barrier". Thus, Muslim expansion stood for a dividing line separating the Northern and Southern part of the Mediterranean as well as antiquity and late antiquity.[258] Pirenne's thesis has been discussed and disproved in most of its details. Yet, the symbolic meaning, which he attested to the Muslim expansion, has not become outdated, but remained 'controversial', since scholars still discuss whether Islam played a decisive role in the birth of modern Europe or whether Muslims simply passed on to others useful knowledge that was somehow lost within their own culture.[259] This whole discussion has only recently been called into question in a more systematic way with the argument that Islam can be seen as an integral part of late antiquity,[260] not its outsider or a demarcation line. From this point of view, it is paramount to underline that not only Roman law, Scharia and European legal systems have interacted,[261] but that there have been multi-facetted mutual influences in different fields, from agriculture over economy, science, trade, and art to architecture.

Pirenne's ideas did not go unnoticed. Egyptian socialist Salāma Mūsā (d. 1958), stemming from a Coptic family, drew on Pirenne when arguing in 1927 that Egyptians belonged to Europe, but that their intermixture with inferior (Arab and African) races caused harm to their cultural self-conscience.[262] Mūsā's assertions triggered an uproar and a vivid debate on whether Egypt belonged to the Mediterranean or the Oriental cultural sphere – the same question that had aroused Khedive Ismail's as well as C.H. Becker's interest.

In his *Mustaqbal ath-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (1938), Ṭāhā Ḥusayn argued with and against Pirenne and addressed in detail the issue of the common Greek-Roman

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[258] On Pirenne see Lückerath, "Die Diskussion über die Pirenne-These".

[259] For this extensive discussion see for example Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*; Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*; Graham, *How Islam Created the Modern World*; Goody, *The Theft of History*; Berger, *A Brief History*.

[260] See for example Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*.

[261] Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law*; Makdisi, "The Islamic Origins".

[262] Mūsā, *al-Yawm wa-l-ghad*, 232–238. Compare Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte*, 51 and 87. On Mūsā's fascination with eugenics see Gershoni, "Liberal democracy versus fascist totalitarianism in Egyptian intellectual discourse".

roots of Christianity and Islam by arguing that Egyptians culturally belonged to Europe and were closer to Europeans than to Indians and Chinese.[263] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn used the concept of decline in two ways: as a warning against a future menace and as a lesson from history. His starting point was that the political independence of Egypt alone was not the end of development because civilization (ḥaḍāra) was based on culture and knowledge (thaqāfa, ʿilm); yet, many Egyptians were convinced that they had reached the end of their path with independence. "But I fear that we will lag behind (nataʾakhkhar), where we should move on, and that we are declining (nanḥaṭṭ), where we should be striving upwards".[264] From this background, he called the cultural belonging of Egypt the most important question to be answered,[265] because many Egyptians believed that a close connection to Europe would destroy their identity and religious life.[266] He tried to refute the Western as well as Arab misunderstanding that Egypt was part of the Orient and as such separated from Europe.[267] The purpose of his argument was to make clear that Egyptians, by adopting European knowledge, education or material inventions, did not betray their identity, but acted in accordance with their ancestors who had also been in permanent exchange with other peoples and cultures.[268]

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn had started his academic carrier teaching Roman and Greek studies at the University of Cairo in 1921 and had written several studies on ancient Greece as well as translated some antique texts. He even held the view that Greek and Latin were so important for the Egyptian heritage and identity that they had to be taught in school.[269] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn argued that Islamic and European histories followed a similar path, yet he showed his disappointment with European scholars who had studied this similarity but denied it in the end.[270] Both Islam and Christianity, he wrote, were formed in the Near East and equally influenced by Greek philosophy. After the fall of Rome, Muslims preserved the Greek heritage and handed it down to the following generations, yet they were called 'Orientals'. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn criticized the tendency of treating the historical role of (German) barbarians and Turks in a different way. Whereas the barbarians were said to have been unable to destroy the spirit and reason of Rome so that the renaissance could flourish anew, the Turks were said to have corrupted the Islamic spirit and caused cultural inḥiṭāṭ. Opposing this difference, he explained that there

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[263] The thesis of this book was rejected by Arab nationalists who criticized Egyptian nationalism as "pharaonism" or "neo-shuʿūbiyya", see Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte*, 87 and 234f.
[264] Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal*, 4.
[265] Ibid, 7.
[266] Ibid, 53.
[267] Ibid, 15–17.
[268] Ibid, 57–64.
[269] See Kreutz, *Understanding the Other*.
[270] Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal*, 17 and 17–29 passim.

was no absolute good or evil on earth since the lives of individuals and communities were a mixture of good and bad sides. Therefore, it was not "the absolute evil" which caused superiority (as in the European case), nor did "the absolute good" lead to decline (as in the Muslim case).[271] To understand the reasons for European progress would therefore also not entail becoming a Christian.[272] Adopting European things did not mean dissolving Egypt's identity because its religion, language, history and culture still remained different.[273] As the two main objections by some of his fellow Muslims were that (1) European civilization was plainly materialistic and that (2) even some Europeans were critical of their own culture, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn argued that European civilization was a result of its reason *and* spirit and that even every European critic still strove for perfection.

Albert Hourani's remark that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn subscribed in his essay to "a commonplace"[274] of his time – that the domination of the Turks had destroyed Arab-Islamic civilization – takes Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's points out of context. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn conceded that Turkish rule may have corrupted some foundations of the Islamic civilization, yet he also underlined that Islamic civilization was not an exclusive product of Arabs alone, but of many different influences (Persian, Roman, Greek, Turkish). Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's intention was not to rebuke the Turks for their decadence, but Western scholars for their tendency to treat similar historical events in European and Islamic contexts differently. To subsume Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's argument in an anti-Turkish Arab nationalism means reading nationalist intentions into his criticism of European cultural critiques.

## II.3 The Post-Colonial Critique and the Undecidedness of Progress and Decline

Whereas the analogies of renaissance (or *nahḍa*) and reformation (or *islāḥ*) measure Islam against humanist or Protestant ideals, the post-colonial critique of Orientalism is mainly based on the argument that such comparisons serve the construction of the image of a backward Islam in contrast to a dynamic Europe. Accordingly, the semantics of "decline" corroborates the idea of a stagnant, premodern Islam and contributes to what Edward Said has called "a Western style for domination [...] and having authority over the Orient".[275]

Yet, the anti-Orientalist approach does not help us understand the Arab adoption of decline in an appropriate way. However justified the critique of Western Orientalism may be, the assumption that the Arab talk about *inhitāt* can be excoriated as mere mimicry of European judgements because of its Orientalist imprint is neither sufficient nor convincing: either it denies the existence of the problems

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[271] Ibid, 53.
[272] Ibid, 54.
[273] Ibid, 62–64.
[274] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 331.
[275] Said, *Orientalism*, 2f.

which were discussed under the heading 'decline' or it attributes the awareness of such problems to a 'false consciousness'. In his attempt to expose Arabs' failed adoption of European concepts (like 'homosexuality'), Joseph Massad, for example, argues that Arab writers approached the subject of decline

> by adopting and failing to question these recently invented European notions of 'civilization' and 'culture' and their commensurate insertion in a social Darwinist idiom of 'evolution', 'progress', 'advancement', 'development', 'degeneration', and most important, 'decadence' and 'renaissance'.[276]

Massad continues:

> Influenced [...] by the Orientalist judgment that Arab culture had 'degraded' to an age of 'decadence' under the Ottomans, most Arab writers since the middle of the nineteenth century were overcome with a sense of crisis concerning the Arab present, its 'culture', its 'language', its political and economic order, its 'traditions', its views of its own 'heritage', even 'Islam' itself, in short, a malady that afflicted the whole of Arab Islamic 'civilization'. The diagnosis would echo Orientalist judgment of the Arabs, including 'backwardness', 'decadence', 'moral decline', 'irrationality', and most of all, 'degeneration', resulting from centuries of Ottoman rule characterized by stasis at best or retardation of things Arab (and sometimes Muslim) at worst.[277]

Massad suggests that certain terms and concepts were coined to impute a crisis to the Arabs, but he cannot explain (beyond delusion and manipulation) why certain terms came into use and why certain questions vexed many intellectuals,[278] he merely delegitimises the terms and questions and, thus, most of the Arab intellectual work of a century and a half. He even accuses the post-1967 Arab intellectuals of using the same worn-out European concepts as their predecessors of the 19th and early 20th centuries.[279] This form of criticism can be traced back to Edward Said's *Orientalism*. As argued elsewhere,[280] Said's motivation for writing his literary polemic was mainly contemporary (the Six-Days-War of 1967 and the question of Palestine). He dealt with European works from the colonial period which constructed Arabs and Muslims as the decadent 'other', but his overall aim was to expose the reasons for the current difficulties in speaking im-

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[276] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 5.

[277] Ibid, 8.

[278] For example: Is the prevailing cultural crisis merely the result of imported, wrong expressions? Or of misguided attempts to harmonize tradition with modernity instead of staging a decisive rupture with the past? Or of a misguided rupture with tradition instead of cherishing the heritage like the Europeans do? Or of talking about the heritage instead of putting its teachings into practice – but what teachings and how? For an overview of the different positions see Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*.

[279] Massad accuses the Abdallah Laroui, the Communists Hussein Muruwwa, Tayyib Tizini, and Samir Amin, the Freudian Marxist George Tarabishi, the Marxist Yasin Hafez, and the scholar Aziz al-Azmeh; only the Communist Mahdi Amil had realized that "it is the present, not the past, which is culpable" for backwardness, "as the present causes the past to remain within it, not vice versa"; see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 18–28.

[280] Sing and Younes, "The Specters of Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism".

partially about Palestine, Arabs and Muslims.[281] In the last chapter of *Orientalism*, Said bemoaned that Arab intellectuals had acquired European concepts (such as 'backwardness' and the 'Arab mind') and thus self-Orientalized themselves and their societies.[282] He gave the impression that the ideas which drove European imagination about Islam had reached Arab intellectuals who had begun to 'internalize' them.

Dietrich Jung who aims to correct and outdo Edward Said's approach with his study on the entanglement between Protestantism and Islam has proposed a similar, yet opposite argument in order to show how modern Islam(ism) is indebted to Orientalism. Whereas Said and Massad hold that many Arab intellectuals simply echoed Orientalist stereotypes in an uncritical way, Jung believes that some of them formulated inversed copies of European prejudices – a process which unfortunately produced an equally essentialist mirror-image of Islam. From this point of view, Jung explains: "Contrary to the European model of a history of progress, the Muslim reformers constructed Islamic history as a history of decay".[283] This narrative of decay was compatible with "a traditional template of interpreting Islamic history".[284]

In contrast to these anti-Orientalist views, my argument is twofold. Firstly, although a notion of *inḥiṭāṭ* was certainly not unfamiliar to Arab and Muslim writers before the 19th century, "decline" was a new concept in cultural criticism in the 19th century and its meaning differed from Khaldounian thought, the classical call for permanent religious *tajdīd* or political reform.[285] This new concept entered Arab and Muslim thought in various contact zones where Arabs or Muslims met with representatives of Western supremacy and Orientalism.

Secondly, a post-colonial focus on Orientalist misrepresentations misses the point that, when Europeans encountered the Oriental other, they also met themselves and their own ambivalences about progress and historical myths.[286] Thus, scenarios of spiritual and moral as well as political and economic decline were

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[281] Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 214; compare Sing and Younes, "The Specters of Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism", 173f.

[282] See Said, *Orientalism*, 322–325, where he writes (322): "Orientalism flourishes today in the forms I have tried to describe. Indeed, there is some reason for alarm in the fact that its influence has spread to 'the Orient' itself: the pages of books and journals in Arabic (and doubtless in Japanese, various Indian dialects, and other Oriental languages) are filled with second-order analyses by Arabs of 'the Arab mind', 'Islam', and other myths."

[283] Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*, 242.

[284] Ibid. He refers to concepts like *tajdīd*, *iḥyāʾ* and *iṣlāḥ*.

[285] The idea that once mighty dynasties easily fall prey to their own wealth, to moral decadence and political disarray in the end, goes back to Maghreb historian Ibn Khaldoun from the 14th century. The call for permanent religious reform is already acclaimed in the *ḥadīth* collections according to which God is said to send "to this *umma*" someone who will "renew its religion" (*yujaddid dīnahā*) at the beginning of every century. And as opposition and reform movements are known throughout Arab and Islamic history, the prevalence of conditions in need of improvement can be taken for granted.

[286] Stauth, *Islam und westlicher Rationalismus*.

ubiquitous throughout the modern history of Europe and the USA. In a superficially gilded age, many Europeans and Americans talked about a smouldering moral crisis, and apocalyptic zealots were anticipating the coming of the end of the world.[287] The Germans, for example, legitimatized their enthusiasm for World War I as a struggle to save their "culture" from the encroachment of Anglo-Saxon materialistic "civilization", and many intellectuals of the inter-war-period cherished the idea of the "morbid".[288] The undecidedness about the factors for progress and the relationship between "modernity" and "religion" has not been laid to rest to this day. While some scholars defend Weber's view, others challenge it as Eurocentric. Some explain the reasons for Western progress, while others warn against the danger of decline. Especially with regard to China's decline after 1800 and its recent economic rise, historians discuss whether Europe's take-off rested on its own creativity or on the exploitation of the world, whether it marks a sustainable, structural difference to other world regions, or whether the increase of inventions and production will continue or soon come to an end.[289]

For many intellectuals and scholars in the West, the conundrum that begged an explanation was certainly less the presumed decline of Islam than the ascendancy of Western Europe and the USA to global power from the 18th to the 20th century because this development was not only represented by scientific and technological dynamism, but also by unprecedented destructiveness. Progress was not unanimously welcomed, instead a lot of ink has been spilled over the discontents of modernity, beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau through Sigmund Freud up to postmodern thinkers.[290] Although Indian Muslim Abul Hassan Nadawi (d. 1999) did not behave very differently, when he collected all possible charges against modernity after World War II in his *What the World has lost with the Decline of Islam* (1950, with a foreword by Sayyid Quṭb)[291] and pleaded for a return of Islamic leadership in the world, this might appear – in Western eyes – as a typical expression of anti-modern Islamic resentment.

Against this background, the thesis of this chapter is that the pair of decline/*inḥiṭāṭ* expresses a communication process about "civilization and its discontents" (Freud), perceived social, cultural or religious differences and the reasons for them. Understanding this communication as a language game means looking at the ways in which a concept like "decline" worked in different con-

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[287] Schipper and Plasger (eds.), *Apokalyptik und kein Ende?;* Wieser, *Abendländische Apokalyptik.*

[288] Overy, *The Morbid Age;* Piper, *Nacht über Europa;* Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History.*

[289] Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations;* Acemoğlu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail;* Ferguson, *The Great Degeneration;* Rode, *Der schleichende Niedergang des Westens;* Gimpel, *The End of the Future;* Bongiovanni, *The Decline and Fall of Europe;* Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now;* Duchenese, "Between Sino-Centrism and Euro-Centrism".

[290] Koselleck, "'Fortschritt' und 'Niedergang'", 227.

[291] Nadawi, *Islam and the World.* The Arabic edition appeared in Cairo in 1950, the first English edition in Karachi in 1959. On Nadawi see Hartung, *Viele Wege und ein Ziel.*

texts. The meaning of the term is not defined by its relation to a clearly defined, visible object out there in the world, but through a social praxis that makes communication about "decline" meaningful for the speakers when they address different, yet similar issues.

This approach tries to overcome the shortcomings of the three ways of explaining the persistent Arab use of *inḥiṭāṭ* which can be termed – drawing on Wittgenstein's terminology – materialism, psychologism or denial. The materialist explanation treats European inventions, technology and military or political superiority as "phenomena" that attest the different European position in the modern age. The psychological explanation holds that these facts correspond to a "humiliation" for Muslims; the word "decline" would then designate the relation between the visible forms of inferiority and the psychological humiliation. The anti-Orientalist criticism vehemently opposes the concept of "decline" as such by simply denying that words like backwardness or *inḥiṭāṭ* correspond to a real thing. Anti-Orientalist critics treat these words as an obsession produced by the words themselves.

The case looks different from the perspective of language games. Although "decline" seems to refer to a certain issue, it is – according to Wittgenstein's bon-mot – "not a something, but not a nothing either". Its meaning neither corresponds to technological inferiority nor to psychological humiliation, nor is it a designation for the causal link between the two, nor an empty signifier. Its meaning is its usage that allows for different possibilities and sequences of language games on religion, culture and modernity.

This does not mean that the use of the term *inḥiṭāṭ* was always right, appropriate and reasonable or that every interpretation was as good as any other. Since the term only offers a formula for interpreting and apprehending reality, its use by different authors does not prove the objective existence of *inḥiṭāṭ* in various fields from politics to literature, but simply confirms the prolificacy of the term. All the different usages offered explanations about the course of history, the present state, and conceptions for a better future, no matter how realistic, pragmatic or utopian they were. Yet again, this does not mean that the term *inḥiṭāṭ* was harmful because it obviously did not show a clear way out of the Arab or Muslim crisis. Failure cannot necessarily be attributed to the falseness of ideas and notions. Even if the *nahḍa* generations' ideas were absolutely right and unambiguous, other factors which lay beyond the intellectuals' endeavour – like foreign policy, power struggles and economic issues – have to be taken into consideration when one tries to explain the absent success of ideas and intellectuals.

## Conclusion

19th century European cultural critique of an entity called Islamic civilization initiated global language games on cultural differences, the role of science and religion in the modern world, the volatile course of world history, the discontents of a ma-

terialist world view, and the legitimacy of power asymmetries. Arabs and Muslims who were confronted with European prejudices, colonialism, and a sense of superiority in different contact zones tried to participate symmetrically in this debate, although the possibility of articulating their views was asymmetrically distributed between them and Western floor leaders.

Just as the self-perception of Europeans has been shaped by contact and exchange with the non-European world since the Early Modern Age, Arab and Muslim self-perceptions were created through dialogue with the European other. European self-perceptions turned around the idea that Europe owned something which the rest of the world did not have;[292] Arab and Muslim self-perceptions were mainly busy with the idea of loss[293] and the question of how to regain the absent in the presence of the Europeans. In other words, without addressing decline and joining the corresponding language game, Arabs could neither hope to overcome the language of decline nor imagine themselves as modern, nor de-provincialize Islamic history nor strive for cultural sovereignty.

Stephen Sheehi has argued that "lack" has become an inherent part of the modern Arab subjectivity and has been written into it by Arabs themselves since the 19th century.[294] As Sheehi writes, this kind of Arab self-diagnosis is neither proof of the Arab failure to enter modernity, nor a simple reflection of Western ideas about Islamic deficiency; it was the price Arabs had to pay for their admission ticket to modernity in their endless struggle with the ineluctable West. Their desire to become modern meant separating themselves from their past and the other's presence and re-connecting with both of them because "the measure in which one separates one's self from the past is the measure in which one remains bound to it"[295] and the measure in which one overcomes European concepts is the skill with which one masters their usage.

Since most Arab authors argued within the frame of decline, but against its contents, their use of *inḥiṭāṭ* affirmed the validity of the European concepts and historiography on one level, while trying to subvert them on another. For most Europeans, the main intellectual starting point for using the concept of decline was to explain and legitimatize the singularity and supremacy of Western Europe especially during the long 19th century. However, their perspectives on the relationship between religion, culture and modern civilization have never been unified. Neither did all theologians and religious scholars nor all philosophers and social scientists share a common view of their own religious heritage, not to mention Islam. By exposing the decline of Islam, some of them defined technological, economic, and political differences as culturally and ultimately religiously determined, while oth-

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[292] Reformation, enlightenment, rationality, technology, industrial revolution, capitalism, democracy – to name a few candidates.
[293] Leadership role, independence, science, knowledge, centrality, wealth, military strength.
[294] Sheehi, *Foundations to Modern Arab Identity*.
[295] Sacks, "Futures of Literature", 36.

ers believed that culture and religion were only a by-product of social and economic structures. Thus, European supremacy followed from its outstanding material base as well as from its cultural software, from its technology as well as from its rational religion, from its ingenuity as well as from its history. This kind of argument made representatives of Western modernity unassailable,[296] yet attested to a certain amount of undecidedness about the primary and secondary factors (essential traits and conditional factors) for the progress of their own civilization as well as for the decline of other "cultures". As European scholars testified to forms of "progress", they were also forced to define forms of "decadence" which could result from decline as well as from progress. Therefore, the discrete charm of language games over decadence and decline was that they were compatible with a variety of concerns and viewpoints; with slight shifts of stress, optimists as well as sceptics and enemies of modernity could use the same vocabulary.

From this it follows that decline and *inḥiṭāṭ* were not thorough descriptions of reality, but frames to understand historical trajectories of *longue durée*. The talk about them was born out of a specific situation and fulfilled an existing intellectual demand. It was the dramatic changes of the 19th and 20th centuries, which made the talk about decline meaningful for its speakers, who tried to put historical and present events in a meaningful order. To achieve this, the two main strings of argumentation followed along the line of a history of religions or a philosophy of history. The combination of political, religious and cultural factors allowed for complex arguments as in the case of al-Afghānī, who declared that the (religious) reasons for the rise of Islam were different from the (cultural and political) reasons for its decline. Likewise, simple models of progress or decline were questioned, as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn did when he highlighted that the different trajectories of European and Arab 'civilizations' were both a mixture of positive and negative 'cultural' aspects.

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