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Enlightened Tensions: Jewish Haskalah and Arab-Muslim Nahdhah

Preamble

Over many decades now, European historians have debated what the Enlightenment meant and whether there were one or many Enlightenments, almost as much as they have debated the date on which such a phenomenon began and the impact it exerted on the West. The impact of the Enlightenment on non-Western cultures has, however, received little attention. Only ethnic groups living within Europe, the Jewish communities in particular, have been at the heart of the debate. There came those who argued that any history of the big change would be short-sighted, perhaps meaningless, if it did not pay close attention to the involvement of Jewish intellectuals in enlightening Europe and being enlightened by the developments in it.[1] The role played by one Jewish figure, Spinoza, is seen as central in this context. The Jewish/Dutch philosopher, according to this standpoint, not only pushed back the date when the Enlightenment really began, but was also pivotal in initiating that change. Provided that this view of Spinoza's role is considered, one can easily see that a form of Jewish enlightenment became a major force in propelling Europe into a heightened rationality and secular change. As the argument here goes, however, the main impact of the Haskalah targeted Jewish communities more than Europe at large.

As the debate continues, however, other manifestations of the impact left by the Enlightenment remain largely out of the purview of European consciousness and concern. Among th[illegible] there is the impact of the Enlightenment on the Arab and Islamic world during the nineteenth century. Despite the close historical ties between Europe and the Arab World over many centuries, Arab-Islamic culture has remained almost limited to the scholarly attention of European specialists known as Orientalists or Arabists whose works rarely fell within the mainstream of cultural and scholarly debate in the countries where those specialists lived and worked. Yet even the work of such specialists, prodigious though it was, remained generally less interested in the changes that swept the Arab World in modern times under var-

1 George Steiner, A Kind of Survivor, in: ibid, Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman, New York 1967, 140–154, here 146.

ious labels: "nahdhah" (revival), "islah" (reformation), "tanweer" (enlightenment), depending on varying perspectives. The work of the great majority of those specialists remained focused on the classical periods of Arabic culture. There were of course a few exceptions but they were insufficient to fill the big gap in Europe's awareness of what has been going on in the Arab World in modern times.

This is all the more interesting and curious because the Arab revival is usually linked to no less famous a personality than Napoleon who invaded Egypt in 1798, having already left a conspicuous impact on the Jewish Haskalah. Yet obviously that was not enough to generate equal interest in the impact of the Enlightenment he brought with him to Arab communities at the time. Another reason that might have attracted European scholars of the Enlightenment, particularly those concerned with the Haskalah, to the Arab version, was the striking proximity between the two versions, the Arab and the Jewish, although the proximity will, or should, attract attention to the yet more revealing differences attendant upon that proximity. Jewish and Arab leaders of change during the nineteenth century responded to the European intellectual and artistic movement in ways that showed how cultures that saw themselves both within and outside Europe might respond, showing in other words both inclusive as well as exclusive elements in each.

In the following remarks, the intention is to examine certain aspects of the two versions of enlightenment, the Arab and the Jewish. My focus will be on the comparable aspects, particularly with regard to the Arab-Islamic "nahdhah" which is less known to European readers. At the same time, the comparative method should be helpful in bringing into relief phases of the phenomenon that wouldn't be so easy to notice. This can be done by focusing not only on the analogous aspects but also on the distinctive features of each movement. While sharing so many aspects of change, the two phenomena or versions of enlightenment depart from each other in significant ways that should not be overlooked.

Cultural Adjustments

In essence, what happened both among Arab and Jewish communities was a process of adjustment, an attempt to fit into a world changing and pressuring them to change. That change necessitated some basic decisions that threatened long-cherished ways of living and thinking as much as it promised new venues in life styles and cultural creativity. But as those ways differed, the distance crossed to achieve them and the price paid widened accordingly. For both groups, the issues involved were as crucial as identity,

freedom, and power. Yet the priorities or the hierarchy in which those issues could be arranged and dealt with differed according to various factors that comprised geographical, historical as well as socio-cultural elements.

To approach the Jewish Haskalah from a comparative perspective, one must notice from the beginning that whereas the Jews initiated the change process from the standpoint of minorities scattered over Europe, minorities that for centuries were forced into ghettoes and subjected to various types of humiliating treatment, the Arabs were dealing with the new developments as communities living not in Europe but on its periphery, not too far but not in the midst either. On the other hand, the fact that bad memories lingered, in the Arab background, from the past (the Crusades) and were kept alive and even strengthened throughout the nineteenth century by European colonialist advances, created a shared experience of pain with the Jewish communities, a shared experience of hostility toward Europe and at best a great deal of ambivalence toward the West. This shared experience, however, differed both in kind and degree. Whereas both groups had little choice in adapting to the deep and wide changes affecting Europe, one, the Jewish, had far fewer options than the others who lived largely on the opposite side of the Mediterranean. The geographical element was crucially important in determining the response.

In one of the earliest responses to the Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn did not hesitate to base his attitude on a strong awareness of the geographical element. The Jews, who had just been emancipated under the impact of the changes sweeping Europe then, had to make use of the new freedom and privileges in consideration of the fact that they were still living in the midst of societies that looked closely at how those long-ghettoed communities would behave, societies that did not wholeheartedly embrace the change in a minority status. The Jews were closely watched and examined. Mendelssohn's own ordeal in the well-known exchange with Johannes Lavater in the 1760s is a strong case in point. It was a development that the Jewish thinker feared would bring harm not only to himself but to the very process of Jewish emancipation and the readjustment efforts he was championing. "In an effort to erase the stereotype of the disputatious or illogical Jew, [Mendelssohn] avoided public debates on religious issues that could upset the delicate balance of toleration."[2] In later years, other Jewish reformists, like Israel Jakobson and Abraham Geiger, would go even further in advocating radical changes to Jewish ways of life and their attitudes to European cultures.

2 Klaus L. Berghahn, Lavater's attempt to compel the conversion of Moses Mendelssohn abuses the friendship cult surrounding Jewish and Christian intellectuals, in: Sander L. Gilman/Jack Zipes (Eds.), The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096–1996, New Haven/London 1997, 61–67, here 64.

During the torturing exchange with Lavater, Mendelssohn was aware "that his existence depended on the benevolence of the Prussian state."[3] This knowledge was almost totally absent from the Arab adjustments to the European Enlightenment. Despite the fact that many of the Arab reformists in the second half of the nineteenth century approached the Enlightenment with a sense of urgency, it is difficult to find any one looking at the process as having the same level of absolute pressure. The radical reformers, who may be considered comparable to Jakobson and Geiger, like the Syrian/Lebanese Buturs Al-Bustani, Francis Marrash and Shibli Shmaiel, saw the matter from an angle manifestly different from that of their Jewish counterparts. The fact that those Arab reformists belonged to Arab Christian minorities may explain some of the attitudes they undertook, but there was certainly much more to those attitudes than that.

The early exponents of reform in the Arab World included both Christians and Muslims. They were unified by the sense that the Arabs needed to catch up with European civilization. However, each of the two groups had concerns or priorities not altogether identical with the other. The major areas of communal activity and the systems governing them were of concern to all. Leaders on both sides wanted to see reforms in the areas of education, the political system, the laws, religious life, the economy. Differences were in the reasons for change and the goals contingent upon such change. The Muslim majority wanted to see changes that protected people and their culture both from local corruption and foreign intervention as much as they wanted to see the Muslim and Arab World restored to its former glory. The Christian minorities had the same objectives in mind, but in addition they wanted laws that protected their identity against the threat which came from the inside more than from the outside, that is from Muslims themselves. In order to achieve that, they became vigorous proponents of secularization, something that Muslim leaders of reform accepted, but not without reservations. The Christian stress on Arab identity was one major channel to realize a secular state, and in order to do that they were ready to downplay and even compromise their religious affiliation.

Most of the issues sketched out here should be familiar to students of the Jewish Haskalah and the reformation process it initiated. What may not be as familiar but of significance nonetheless is the analogy between the European Jews and the Christian Arabs. Both the minority status and the relationship to the biblical heritage are especially important here. The emphasis on race or ethnicity is another common ground. However, whereas the Jews saw their religious affiliation as Jews combining the two identities, the religious and the racial under the umbrella of ethnicity, the Christian Arabs saw a separation

3 Ibid.

between the two affiliations and used them in ways that served different cultural and political agendas. To identify themselves as Arab was important for minorities that needed protection in overwhelmingly Muslim communities; the Arab identity of those communities provided such protection.

In Europe, Jews faced a different situation from that of the Christian Arabs. Neither racial identification nor religious affiliation provided protection against fanaticism or even cultural bias. The only hope was either to water down such differences and hang all hopes on an enlightened Europe that rationalized religion and believed in universal human values according to which reformed Jews could be accepted, or to emphasize ethnic differences and thus find a refuge outside the West. To stay European, Jews had to play down religious differences and seek more common grounds with European Christians. This was what reformers such as Israel Jakobson and Abraham Geiger opted for. The other option was what the Zionist movement stressed: leave the West and head to Palestine to found an ethnically-based homeland (with ethnicity here combining the racial and the religious).

In these contexts of similarity and difference, one aspect calls for attention: it is the way intellectuals from each side showed interest in the other. There were Jews who developed an interest in the study of the Arab and Muslim World, and Arabs who showed interest in the Jewish heritage. The level of interest and specialization may not have been the same, but the exchange of interest itself is of great significance to a better understanding of the cultural contexts shaping the way each group saw the other, as well as of the individual bents of mind interacting with those contexts. Abraham Geiger's Orientalism, manifest in his studies of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad and an offshoot of a larger German movement, is perhaps the most prominent example here. On the other hand, we find a leading Arab reformer such as Butrus Albustani translating the Torah into Arabic. The motivation behind the two acts of cultural intervention was not the same, but the acts themselves are hardly meaningless.

What remains for us now is take a closer look at some of the major issues in the way Jews and Arabs/Muslims reacted to the European Enlightenment and to each other. The discussion of the issues will bring in some of the major developments and figures who were active in those developments.

Haskalah: The Two Roads Taken

The Jewish response to the Enlightenment, the Haskalah, moved in two directions: it sought to adopt European culture, on the one hand, and, on the other, it sought to adapt Judaism and Jewish heritage to the kinds of change

sweeping Europe. Mendelssohn's efforts in the latter third of the eighteenth century moved along those two directions. Although he refused to embrace Christianity, he was out in the open embracing Western philosophy and befriending secularist German writers such as Lessing. What was seized upon as a contradiction by some European Christian intellectuals who may be described as not so friendly, such as Lavater, was presented as perfectly in harmony with the givens of the Enlightenment. Therefore, Mendelssohn, in his response to the challenge, could only argue within the parameters of the same discourse. Judaism, he argued in his defense of why he stayed religiously Jewish, was a rational religion. This was in his book on Jerusalem where the Jewish faith appeared largely as a version of Deism, a rationalized interpretation of religion that Mendelssohn knew was respected by an enlightened Europe.[4]

This adaptational strategy targeted most urgently the educational system governing Jewish schools before the emancipation. That system had to move away from its religious core toward modern, secular knowledge. First in Germany then in other European countries, the changes started by incorporating numerous and deep changes that brought Jewish students to modern science and other branches of secular knowledge. Absolutist rulers in places such as Bohemia and Moravia were instrumental in imposing such changes that prohibited the teaching of Talmudic studies before secondary school. In 1820, Francis I of Austria decreed that rabbis were to study science and the language of the country in prayers and sermons. The role played by absolutist political power was also important, as we shall see, in understanding how a secularizing process started in Arab Muslim countries such as Egypt toward the beginning of the 19th century. But there was an important difference. The consistency, steadiness and political decisiveness that characterized the change in Europe resulted in a faster, deeper and more comprehensive transformation of European Jewry.

As we shall see, there is nothing in the modern history of the Arab and Muslim world comparable to the deep transformation witnessed by the Jewish communities in Europe during the period from 1770 to 1870. Although the two movements took similar paths, there was an obvious difference in terms of the impact of each, and the comprehensiveness and speed with which the Jewish Haskalah took place. According to Jacob Katz, in his well-known study of Jewish emancipation, the changes that took place in Europe during that period affected all Europeans. Their impact on the Jewish community, however, went beyond what other Europeans experienced: "[W]hereas the European nations were transformed economically, political-

4 Moses Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism, trans. by Allan Arkush, Hanover/London 1983.

ly, and socially, the change seems to have gone deeper in the case of the Jews, transmuting the very nature of their entire social existence."[5] Among such transmutations were those affecting Judaism itself, not simply on the level of rituals, but also in matters that affected the essence of religion. "Apart from a response to the prevalent esthetic and ecclesiastical norms of religious practice," writes Michael A. Meyer, "modernization also implied confronting Judaism as a system of belief with dominant currents in Christian theology and academic philosophy."[6] The impact of Kant on a rationalized view of Judaism and the rehabilitation by Jewish intellectuals of Spinoza, who was long considered an outcast and heretic,[7] were part of a transformation that led more recently to the crowning of the Jewish philosopher as the leader of a "radical enlightenment" that is more in keeping with postmodern thinking.[8]

Among the leaders of the earlier phase of change were people like Israel Jakobson and Abraham Geiger. Whereas Jakobson worked hard to implement reforms in the forms of worship to bring them closer to Christian forms, the latter was busy highlighting the ways in which Christianity was not only derived from Judaism but was actually inferior to the older faith from an "enlightened" standpoint. Jesus Christ, he argued, was a member of the Pharisees who, according to the Jewish reformer, advocated a liberal agenda among the ancient Hebrews, something that showed not just Christianity, but the best part of it, the liberal-minded that is, to be a mere offshoot of Judaism and, of course, the Jews as much more liberal and progressive than Europeans used to think. Geiger's discursive argument went further to show European Christians that Judaism was in fact far more advanced in rational thinking than Christianity advocated, as in the view held by each religion regarding progress itself, a hot issue in enlightened Europe. Whereas Judaism saw no limits to man's potential for progress, Christianity kept him tied to the past through the dogma of original sin which renders the future a decline downturn rather than a movement upward or forward.

By arguing for a liberal and progressive Judaism, Geiger was then not targeting Christian Europe so much as liberal and enlightened Europe, the Europe that he saw rising and determining the future both of Christians and

5 Jacob Katz, Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870, Cambridge, Mass., 1973, 1.

6 Michael A. Meyer, Reform Jewish Thinkers and the German Intellectual Context, in: Jehuda Reinharz/Walter Schatzberg (Eds.), The Jewish Response to German Culture. From the Enlightenment to the Second World War, Hanover/London 1985, 64–84, here 64. Meyer cites the influence of Kant on a rationalized view of Judaism.

7 On both the impact of Kant and the rehabilitation of Spinoza, see, among others, Michael A. Meyer, The Jewish Response to German Culture, 65.

8 Jonathan Israel, Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750, Oxford 2001.

Jews. Yet basically his argument only reiterated what Mendelssohn had been saying to European Christians in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. In *Jerusalem* (1783), Mendelssohn highlighted a secular and deist Judaism. He told his not-so-sympathetic audience, an audience that notably included his friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, that his religious and cultural background was not as backward and primitive as many were arguing, but even more progressive and liberal-minded than they imagined. Like many other German Christians, not least Lavater, Lessing articulated the enlightenment contention that since humanity was progressing, Judaism, predating Christianity, could only be viewed in linear fashion as a primitive religion that was outdated and should be abandoned.[9] One of the ironies in the German anti-Jewish attitude was the adoption of Spinoza as witness to the primitivism of Judaism. Despite Spinoza's declared conversion to Christianity, he was generally viewed as Jewish, a thinker whose testimony was therefore all the more convincing.[10]

Yet it was Jewish reformers who, perhaps more than their Christian counterparts, turned out to be in greater need to adopt Spinoza. Some reformers saw in the seventeenth-century philosopher a luminary post in the history of the Jews. A leading figure in secular thinking, Spinoza proved that Jews could produce individuals who were capable of breaking out of traditional, religious culture that Jews had been producing for centuries and for which they had for long been stigmatized. Jewish reformers needed figures in their history to prove the potential for reform. So along with Maimonides, Spinoza became an icon for liberal thinking. Among those who wholeheartedly embraced the Spinozistic moment were Berthold Auerbach and Moses Hess. Hess's Zionist brand of reform argued for Jewish nationalism, but that brand simultaneously maintained a line of reformist discourse that Hess shared with other reformers such as Geiger. This line recalled Spinoza from his early status as a Jewish outcast to assume a new role in which he reinforced reform. The early Jewish philosopher does this in his capacity as a celebrated, unrelenting critic of narrow, mythically-oriented religious thinking, a critic who simultaneously attests to the superior potential of the "Jewish spirit." Of course, these Jewish intellectuals were not solely responsible for such rehabilitation since Spinoza had received great praise earlier from people like Hegel, himself an important influence on nineteenth-century thought including that of Jewish figures such as Geiger and Hess.

9 Meyer, Reform Jewish Thinkers, 66. Meyer points out that Jewish reformers adopted Lessing's views regarding the historical status of Judaism after rejecting them first, but only to argue that Judaism maintained a progressive spirit.

10 "In Germany, Spinoza's thought enjoyed considerable popularity beginning with the last decades of the eighteenth century," Meyer, Reform Jewish Thinkers, 66.

In Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), we are told that "Christianity represents a departure from the classical essence of both Judaism and Paganism." Yet whereas Paganism, represented by Greek culture, disappeared Judaism maintained its essence "because the Jewish creative genius did not exhaust itself in its creation"[11]. Ultimately this creative genius found its expression and embodiment in one figure, Spinoza, who came to usher in an end-of-history sort of finale:

> "And finally, when after long struggle between the pagan world of sensuality and barbarous force, on the one hand, and the spiritual, mystic Jewish view on the other, the sun of modern humanitarian civilization shed its feeble rays upon a better and more perfect world, it was a Jew who was able to signal to the world the final stage of the process of human development has begun."[12]

About four decades earlier, Hess had signed another work, *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837), under the pen name "a Young Disciple of Spinoza." This constituted an early token of admiration for the role played by the Dutch philosopher in what Hess and many of his contemporaries saw as a confirmation of a pioneering, even superior Jewish role in reform. This was of course a big leap from the time when Spinozism was seen even by Jewish intellectuals as an accusation.[13] Mendelssohn had to defend his friend Lessing against an accusation by Friedrich Jacobi that Lessing had adopted Spinoza's pantheistic philosophy. The times had obviously changed.

The change, however, was not enough to enable the Jewish literati to pass simply as Europeans. During the nineteenth century, non-Jewish intellectuals could still demand that their Jewish counterparts "discard all traces of Jewishness before they could be embraced as allies."[14] In 1837, the same year as Hess's *The Holy History of Mankind*, Berthold Auerbach published a novel entitled "Spinoza" projecting the historical figure of the philosopher. In the novel, Auerbach imagined an ideal scenario where Spinoza "becomes the exemplar of anti-Orthodoxy and religious tolerance under the banner of an enlightened Reform Judaism as embodied in his friend Abraham Geiger."[15] Yet this scenario only threw into high relief the opposite situation

11 Moses Hess, Rome and Jerusalem, New York 1994, 139 f.
12 Ibid., 138.
13 According to Jonathan I. Israel, Spinozism was used both in France and Germany during the Enlightenment "to denote virtually the whole of the Radical Enlightenment, that is, all deistic, Naturalistic, and atheistic systems that exclude divine Providence, Revelation [. . .] rather than a strict adherence to Spinoza's systems as such," Israel, Radical Enlightenment, 13.
14 Hans Otto Horch, Berthold Auerbach's first collection of Dorfgeschichten, appears in: Gilman/Zipes (Eds.), The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought, 158–163, here 160.
15 Ibid.

depicted in another novel by Auerbach, where the German-Jewish poet Moses Ephraim Kuh encounters enormous difficulties trying to achieve the goals of the emancipation.[16]

It was, however, left to another, more prominent Jewish poet to highlight these plights in a manner that brought into the Jewish/Christian tensions other cultures for company. Heinrich Heine's interest in a figure from the Islamic/Andalusian period named Al-Mansur provides an interesting and significant case of cross-cultural contemplation of the nature of tensions arising from religious difference and the possibilities of tolerance. In two works, a play and a poem (both titled *Almansor*), Heine looked into the ancient Muslim who became a ruler in Al-Andalus toward the end of the tenth century. The focus here is on an imaginary situation where Al-Mansur is defeated by his Christian opponents and forced to embrace Christianity, but the significance lies in Heine's sympathetic attitude toward the Muslim. In that attitude lies, most likely, Heine's vision of the Jewish in the Muslim, his sense of the close similarity between the historical Muslim situation, where an individual from a triumphant culture loses his status and becomes part of a persecuted minority, and that of European Jewry over many centuries. Al-Mansur's compulsory Christianization is an instance all too familiar in the case of numerous Jews including Heine himself. According to one critic, Heine's poem is the most perfect rendition of his disappointment at the failures of Jewish conversion, the failures, that is, of a substantial segment of Jewish reform.[17]

Failure, as much as success, is of course at the heart of all reform movements. In the Jewish version, the successes of Zionism, as championed by people like Hess, are unimaginable without the failures of the efforts of people like Geiger. Despite major differences, this tension is very much the dynamic spirit of reform in its Arab-Islamic version.

Nahdhah: Indigenous and Foreign Change

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Arab-Islamic world witnessed two types of reform movements, one indigenous and the other initiated by foreign intervention. The first was spearheaded by a fundamental/puritanical sort of reform (*salafi*) that sought to reform religious belief and practice by taking them back to the way they were supposed to be during the age of Prophet Muhammad. It was led by Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab

16 Dichter und Kaufmann (1840); see the commentary on both novels in Horch, ibid.
17 Siegbert Salomon Prawer, Heine's Jewish Comedy. A Study of his Portrait of Jews and Judaism, Oxford 1983, 85–87.

(1703–1792), an Islamic cleric form Najd, in the heart of Arabia, and received political support from a local ruler to spread from there to various areas in the Muslim world. Later on, other religious reform movements began in various Muslim countries, but they did not always share Ibn Abdulwahhab's brand of fundamental reform, particularly its local focus and isolationist ideology. In fact, some of them moved almost in the opposite direction, trying to bridge the gap between Muslims and Western civilization.

The other type of reform sprang in Arab and Muslim countries that had closer contact with the West. In the Syrian/Lebanon enclave as well as in Egypt, particularly the former, contacts with Western countries date back to early periods. The presence of Christian/Jewish minorities in both areas, in addition to commercial ties, made it natural for both to stay in almost continuous multifarious contact with Europe. But it was the intervention of the French in Egypt toward the end of the eighteenth century, and the activity of American Protestant missions in Lebanon during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, which elevated the relations with the West to unprecedented levels. Printing, publishing, translating, all flourished in a wide spectrum of activities that resulted in the transfer of numerous scientific, artistic, and literary works from Europe. Motives and responses to such activities varied widely, from those who were highly enthusiastic to those who were ambivalent and in some cases fiercely hostile.

Ambivalence and hostility were found in the religious camp that generally maintained a conservative attitude in what it saw as an unreserved rush toward Western cultures. Yet there were those in that camp who adopted a stance to Western modernity so moderate that it encouraged cross-cultural contact as long as fundamental aspects of the Islamic faith and Arab culture were not compromised. It is this latter stance that played a richer and more versatile role in the reform process. It was championed by two figures: Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838–1897) and Muhammad Abdou (1849–1905). Al-Afghani, who, as his name indicates, was born in Afghanistan, played a huge role in instigating a reform movement from an Islamic standpoint, but which differed from the similarly religious Wahhabi movement in Arabia in its wide-ranging vision and impact. In his travels that took so many years of his life visiting several Muslim and European countries, including Turkey, Egypt, France and England, Al-Afghani was active in lecturing, engaging in dialogues and lobbying rulers to implement ideas about the need to open channels with the civilized West despite its hegemonic attitude toward the Muslim World.[18] Al-Afghani based his argument on the premise that there

18 In an article entitled: Muhawarah bain Ashsharq wa Al-Gharb [A Dialogue between East and West], Al-Afghani imagines the East making a visit to the West and engaging in a dialogue about the achievements of each. The conclusion is that West acknowledges its

was no other way to overcome the political, economic and cultural decline in Muslim countries. Yet Al-Afghani's severe criticism of local rulers in Egypt and Persia was based on the contention that they were among the obstacles to positive change or "nahdhah." In the long run, this critical attitude brought his demise at the hands of the Ottoman emperor who held him in what has been described as "a golden cage" where he virtually lost his mobility.

With someone like Al-Afghani one can see a major difference between the sort of enlightenment he was working to realize and what Jewish reformers were busy doing at the time. What Al-Afghani, along with other reformers in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria/Lebanon, were after was political reform on the one hand and a general socio-economic and cultural resurgence, on the other. Unlike Jewish reformers, Muslim and Arab reformers wanted political independence from Western colonialist powers, i.e., Great Britain and France. For the Jews this wasn't on the agenda at all. Even the Zionists who sought independence in the form of a political homeland in Palestine did not think of fighting Western countries to achieve that. On the contrary they sought help from those very powers fought by the Arabs and Muslims. In his argument for such a homeland, Moses Hess talks about the Jews forming an advanced post that would be of help to France in the Middle East.

Yet, as we saw earlier, the Arabs and Muslims, like the European Jews, had their misgivings toward certain aspects of Western culture, although this was a highly relative and variable issue as different groups and trends looked at the West with different backgrounds and agendas in mind. A major issue in Arab-Muslim enlightenment, the "nahdhah," was what to borrow from the West, and how. The obvious advantages of Western technology was hardly an issue: the printing press that came to Lebanon in the 17th century and to Egypt with Napoleon in 1798, for example, was welcomed by everyone, as were armaments and other tools.[19] But there was a fierce fight when it came to usages that those tools could be deployed for: what the press was to publish and what the arms were to be used for. Unlike the Jewish experience of Western technology, which hardly differed from that of any other sector in the West, the Arabs and Muslims experienced such innovations as foreign, as interventions in their daily lives toward which they had to adopt an attitude.

weaknesses and the virtues of its guest, in: Muhammad Kamil Al-Khateeb (Ed.), Ash-sharq wa Al-Gharb, Damascus 1991–1996, part 1: 1870–1932, 96–106, here 106. Such an argument was not unusual at the time. Another writer in *Al-Muqtataf* newspaper insisted in 1885 that "we Orientals have nothing to worry about from the West because we are older in civilization even though we are not exempt from some of its harms," ibid., 53.

19 Lateef Zaitouni, Harakat Attarjamah fi A'sr Annahdhah [Movement during the Age of Nahdhah], Beirut 1994, 15.

The role of governments was another area where one can see distinctive aspects of enlightenment movements as they evolve according to local forces. Whereas European rulers played a manifest and powerful role in implementing enlightenment changes, in the Arab and Muslim World this role was generally limited, since it was relative. The only place where politics interfered to bring about major change was Egypt. Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali (1769–1849) virtually imposed a series of changes that brought Egypt much closer to Europe. He sent the first batch of students to study in France, set up a translation institute and imported a great deal of European innovations in almost all fields. His despotic rule allowed no dissent, yet despite his ability to do what he pleased, much of the momentum for change he worked for came to a halt as soon as he died. The only exception here were the reforms carried out under one of Ali's sons, Abbas, though the focus in that period was mainly on the economic infrastructure.

Among the students Muhammad Ali sent to France was Rifa'a Attahtawi (1801–1873), a young graduate of religious schools who came back to lead a translation movement and to publish a number of books, among which was the famous *takhlis al-Ibriz fi takhlis Pariz* (The Extraction of Gold in the Summation of Paris). Now Attahtawi is widely regarded as a symbol of the opening up of Arab culture in the direction of the West, almost an Arab Mendelssohn or Jacobson. The irony in Attahtawi's case was that he went to Paris in the capacity of a mere religious "imam" (a prayer leader), yet he proved to be more effective than those he was supposed to serve. Yet the more telling irony was that the religious scholar turned out to be the most vigorous voice of liberal reform in Egypt. His line of reform was continued by the little younger Ali Mubarak (1822–1892) who also went to France and became an even more established exponent of modern science. The list of innovations and reforms that Mubarak championed is a long one: it includes laying the foundation for a university college and the Egyptian national library, the building of bridges on the Nile, the planning of streets in Cairo, in addition to playing a central role in the Suez Canal opening.

The smoothness with which reforms of the kind initiated and supervised by Muhammad Ali contrasts sharply with the numerous difficulties that people like Al-Afghani and his disciples faced at almost the same time as they worked on reforms that touched on the political system, on education, religion, and cultural life. Al-Afghani, for instance, created an uproar when in one of his lectures in Istanbul he appeared to his audience to equate philosophy with religion. Apparently he thought that the example of ancient Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who had engaged in arguments aimed at bridging the gap between philosophy and religion, would help to make his remarks acceptable. Yet neither that nor the political support

that the leading reformer was receiving from the Turkish ruler Ali Pasha was enough.[20]

Al-Afghani's problems were all too familiar in the case of his most prominent disciple, the Egyptian Muhammad Abdou, who undertook a wide-ranging reform project in his home country Egypt but was also aiming at the larger Arab and Muslim context. Abdou's reforms targeted the political and legal systems as well as education, the press, and the way Muslims should deal with minorities and foreign cultures. Some of his ideas enraged the religious authority in Alazhar – the supreme center of religious power in Egypt – which in turn instigated the political authority to act, resulting in a trial and an expulsion outside the country. Both the religious and political authorities found his calls for modernization, not to mention his insistence on justice and for measures against corruption, both offensive and dangerous. Abdou's major contribution to reform, however, came from his call for a more tolerant interpretation of Islamic teachings, whether in interpreting the Quran or in the Shariaa law. It was an effort similar to the one undertaken by ancient Muslim philosophers emulated as we just saw by Al-Afghani.

A case in point here is the attitude adopted by Abdou, as by Al-Afghani before, toward non-Muslim minorities. He called for justice and freedom both for Christians and Jews, and even took pride in so doing. During his trial he defended his nationalist record by saying:

> "Can anyone raise doubts that ours was a purely nationalist struggle when it received support from all races and religions? Muslims, Copts [i.e., Egyptian Christians] and Israelis [i.e., Jews] have risen in support of that struggle in unique enthusiasm and with all force as they believed it to be between the Egyptians and the British."[21]

Like Jewish reformers, Abdou was highly interested in bringing change to the educational and legal systems. However, his strong faith prevented him from going too far in secularization, so he advocated an adaptational stance that allowed a process of selection and modification of Islamic laws according to the formula: "laws change as nations change."[22] This, he argued, meant avoiding the adoption of European laws, since laws, as he insisted, fit the social environment where they were invented. He wanted to preserve the essence of Islam, but, like Mendelssohn before, he was aware that a great deal of European thought, such as the theories of someone like August Comte, was so important for the renewal of intellectual and educational life. Hence the tension and sometimes even the contradiction, that characterized his proposals and struggle to implement them.

20 Albert Hourani, Al-fikr Al-Arabi fi A'sr Annahdhah 1798–1939 [Arab Thought in the Age of Renaissance 1798–1939], Beirut 1986, 138 (First edition 1977).

21 Abbas, M. Al-Akkad, Muhammad Abdou, Cairo (n.d.), 152.

22 Hourani, Al-fikr Al-Arabi fi A'sr Annahdhah 1798–1939, 170.

Unlike their Jewish counterparts, Abdou and other Islamic reformers did not find themselves in dilemmas where they had to write apologies for their faith. Yet the presence of other religions in the Arab World and outside made it unavoidable to argue for the validity even superiority of Islam. Both Al-Afghani and Abdou engaged in dialogues with prominent Christians both inside and outside the Arab and Muslim World. In their trips to London and Paris they had exchanges with Herbert Spencer and Ernest Renan, who exerted strong influence among Arab and Muslim literati inside the Arab World. At the same time, there were those exchanges with Arab Christian intellectuals who undertook reform projects that at times shared the same concerns and goals of their Muslim colleagues, but diverged from them significantly at others. The exchange between Abdou and the Lebanese Farah Anton (1847–1922) is a famous instance of such exchange. That exchange is also significant for another reason: it highlights a major similarity with Jewish reformers, namely the rehabilitation of certain figures from tradition who are seen to bolster the cause of reformers.

In 1903, Farah Anton published a book on the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd in which he introduced the ancient thinker to an audience largely unfamiliar with him.[23] Ibn Rushd's life and thought are summarized from a highly enthusiastic standpoint. In fact, Anton was championing Ibn Rushd, in whom he saw an early beacon of liberal and rational thinking. The fact that Ibn Rushd was Muslim was all the more reason to embrace him, as it demonstrated the absence of prejudice on the part of a Christian Arab, besides the strong evidence that Ibn Rushd provided of rationalism and liberal thinking emanating out of mainstream culture. Muslims themselves, Anton wanted to say, have championed the very ideas flowing into the Arab and Muslim World from Europe. Enlightenment thinking, then, is more homegrown than a foreign import.

Anton's book came first in the form of serialized articles in the journal he established and edited in Egypt to which he had emigrated from Lebanon in 1879.[24] It was a book meant to be an intervention in the reform movement aiming at strengthening and speeding up a process of secularization that was facing a great deal of opposition particularly the radical wing of that process in which Anton was a major activist. The fact that Anton drew unreservedly from Ernest Renan, particularly in the latter's work on Ibn Rushd, was seen by conservatives as well as moderate reformers, such as Muhammad Abdou, as a blatant and unjustified attempt to push Arabic culture toward unwanted

23 Farah Anton, Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatuh [Ibn Rushd and his philosophy], Beirut ^{3}2007 (First edition 1903), 45 ff.

24 In Alexandria, Egypt, Anton started this journal entitled *Al-Jamia'h*. When Anton traveled to the United States in 1907 to stay for a few years he started the same journal there. When he came back to Egypt he again republished it.

secularity. The exchange that ensued between him and Abdou after the publication of Anton's ideas demonstrated the tensions and wide gaps that persisted in the reformation movement. Anton's reiteration of Renan's ideas regarding so many issues, but mainly religion, drew a reply from Abdou that developed into an exchange that Anton himself published as a supplement to his book. Among the issues that Abdou found unacceptable in Anton's book was the idea that Islam was irrational and thus against the development of philosophy, a charge raised first by Renan. Abdou's reply did not simply defend Islam but accused Christianity of being the irrational religion, an argument that Anton had not raised in the first place. For Anton, as for Renan before the problem is religious faith as such.

But, it is interesting that Anton's rejection of Abdou's argument did not prevent him from celebrating his differences with the Muslim scholar and reformer. However, his attitude was part of a double-edged discourse that a Christian had to deploy. On the one hand, he wanted to emphasize the importance of tolerance, accepting opponents' opinion; on the other, he was seeking refuge in an opponent whom he knew would defend him in a cultural context where the mainstream was hostile to his own ideas. This is why in the dedication of his book he stresses the need for "the wise people in the East" to stand up for their ideas, "as reform can be built only on them": "For this reason, we wrote this book under the protection of such wise people."[25] Anton was well aware of those who were too conservative to accept him; not only that but they might cause trouble for people like him. One such figure was another Lebanese reformer, Rashid Ridha, who was a disciple of Abdou and a major voice in reform, but whose "salafi" (fundamental) belief turned him from a former friend of Anton's into an enemy.

Ridha's Lebanese origin made him an exception in a minority of intellectuals who championed a brand of secular reform. Most of the others, whether they worked in Lebanon or came to Egypt, were Christian. Among them was Butrus Al-Bustani, a multi-talented man who started so many changes, including the first Arabic translation of the Torah and the first modern Arabic encyclopedia. Others were more focused on the secularization process. Francis Marrash and Shibli Shmaiel were instrumental in introducing modern European science and philosophy: Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Buchner, etc. Yet interesting and perhaps ironic is that some of those were ready, despite their secular and even atheistic stand, to defend Islam itself when the attacks came from a European who represented colonialist aggression. An example is when Shibli Shmaiel, who championed Darwinism in the Arab World, took issue with the British governor of Egypt, Lord Cromer, when the latter

25 Farah Anton, Ibn Rushd, 45 f.

accused Islam of social failure. The problem, Shmaiel retorted, lay in Muslim scholars (*ulema*) and not in Islam itself.[26]

Conclusion

Shmaiel's attitude is hardly unusual for someone who belonged as he did to a minority. His was not a defense of Islam per se as much as it was, on the one hand, a rejection of colonial intervention in what he saw as local culture, and, on the other, an emphasis on what was likely to bring him closer to that local or mainstream culture, given what that closeness entailed in terms of protection against extremism. In other words, his defense is similar in nature to Anton's "admiration" of Abdou's Islamic stand. It is also not too different from what European Jews were all too familiar with. The minority tactic that both Lebanese intellectuals found almost unavoidable would not have seemed too strange to many European Jews. The ordeal of someone like Mendelssohn, though not identical, is not too distant in the horizon, nor is the situation that Heine, as we saw, found himself in when he visualized Al-Andalus where a Muslim undergoes forceful conversion. Reform has its tensions almost wherever and whenever it occurs.

There are, however, conspicuous and important differences. Despite occasional religious tension, non-Muslim minorities in the modern Arab/Muslim World, be they Christians, Jews or otherwise, hardly found themselves in the situation where they had to convert to Islam, certainly nothing comparable to what happened to Jews and other minorities in Europe even after the European Enlightenment. Besides, minorities in the Arab/Muslim World, particularly Jews, needed no emancipation as no ghettoes existed in the first place (persecution was not absent but, again, in no way comparable with what happened to European Jews). In the Arab/Muslim World, reform, as we have seen, was a joint effort by Christians as well as Muslims.[27] True, motives for reform varied from one group to the other, but they nonetheless had so much in common. This was of course also the case in Europe, as Jews and Christians joined effort to achieve an enlightenment beneficial to both. Yet the nature of the enlightenment differed widely as we move from Europe

26 Hourani, Al-fikr Al-Arabi, 300.

27 Jewish minorities in Arab countries played a minor role in the changes, especially in comparison with the role their counterparts in Europe played. Jews, mainly in Egypt, contributed almost exclusively to the development of the arts: music, the theater and cinema, as their minority status and the cultural situation improved enough to absorb their contribution. Among the major figures in this field are: Yaqoub Sanou' (theater), Daoud Hosni (musician) and Laila Murad (singer and actor).

to the Arab/Muslim World. Whereas European Jewry, or the majority of them, worked for internal changes that had no or little impact on the political or economic systems, as those were the exclusive business of Christian, non-Jewish governments, both the Christian and Muslims in the Arab/Muslim World aimed for more comprehensive and drastic changes in their respective communities.