

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE MIDDLE EAST

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The *fin-de-siècle* framework and Middle East history seems – at first glance – an incompatible pair. Muslims’, Christians’ and Jews’ daily lives are structured by a multiplicity of calendars in which the lunar year of Islam competed with a number of alternative calculations of time: the year 1900 in the Gregorian calendar corresponded to 1317 *hijri* and to 1315 in the *maliyye* year of the Ottoman fiscal calculation; it was the year 5660 in the Jewish and 6649 in the Assyrian calendars. Moreover, the religious festivities that were celebrated on different days within Muslim and Christian communities also articulated competing temporalities in the towns and cities of the Middle East around 1900 (Hanssen 2010). Despite this communal heterogeneity, forces of temporal homogenization and spatial differentiation were at work in the nineteenth century that generated an epochal consciousness above and beyond the mosaic of communal chronological frames.

This chapter is animated by the question of what a metropolitan paradigm of high modernity can offer towards understanding a semi-colonized region of the world that has endured much more than enjoyed the cultural products of the *fin de siècle* enumerated in this volume. One invidious, systematic and lasting Orientalist representation occurred in the “thriving *fin-de-siècle* marketplace of popular fiction” which produced Sherlock Holmes and other imperial Gothic novels like Rider Haggard’s *She* and Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of the Seven Stars* (Selim 2012). They bestowed Egypt with the enduring stereotypes of recidivist priests, lascivious queens and vengeful pharaohs inflicting apocalyptic punishment upon Western civilization, that have been perpetuated *ad nauseam* by Hollywood (Shaheen 2001). Cultural imperialism thrived in the *fin-de-siècle* milieu (Said 1993). But the story would be incomplete if we stopped our investigations there. For example, an ingenious Arabic adaptation of one Egyptophobic novel was serialized in Cairo’s *fin-de-siècle* press and converted the story of imperial anxiety into a nationalist tale of the Egyptian avenger. (Selim 2012, 21–39)

If, as Timothy Mitchell has cogently argued, modernity was a synchronic phenomenon that crystallised at the intersection between the West and the non-West (Mitchell 1999), then the *fin de siècle* ushered in a global shattering of epistemological certainties. Perhaps no single European intellectual personified this

fundamental reorientation of the moral and aesthetic compass more disturbingly than Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche sought inspiration outside the Western philosophical canon in a vain attempt to transcend the good and evil dichotomy in European civilizational thought. In his most iconic work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883) he identified this pre-Islamic Persian prophet as the source and epitome of the life-affirming eternal recurrence, the contingency of supposedly universal values and the auto-emancipatory will to power. In his subsequent work, most notably *The Anti-Christ*, he launched his assault on Christian “docility” and European “decadence” by a strategic valorization of Islam as master-morality (Almond 2011, ch. 8). Nietzsche’s Islamophilia drew on a few Wahhabi texts and a misreading of Islam as a medieval and manly religion void of any spirituality whose approach merely inverted the negative stereotypes of the Orientalism into positive ones (Orsucci 1996, 199–204). Nietzsche mobilized his twisted understanding of the virtue of Islam as a ‘barometer of difference’ to measure German boorishness, self-righteous European fads of progress and equality, and “life-denying” Christianity (Nietzsche 2005, 63).

Nietzsche’s maverick musings on Islam did not stick in Europe although, as we shall see, the idea of an authentic alterity was not far from the *salafi* reformist discourse in the *fin-de-siècle* Middle East. But what is perhaps his most apt concept for the political culture and intellectual history of the global *fin de siècle* is the notion of “transvaluation of all values.” Nietzschean transvaluation attempted to convert meek acquiescence to suffering, stigma and anxiety, like western(ised) decadence, social alienation, cultural backwardness, into power-seeking, discriminatory intellectual dispositions and ideological movements. Social Darwinism, New Imperialism, pan-Hellenism, pan-Islamism, pan-Asianism and Zionism all shared these dispositions. It is in this sense that I adopt Hannah Arendt’s periodization of the three decades before World War I as a distinct historical unit which “began with the scramble for Africa and ended with the birth of the [German and Slavic] pan-movements” and which she viewed as “continental imperialism.” At the same time, overseas empire’s like Great Britain “drew a sharp line between colonial methods and normal domestic policies, thereby avoiding with considerable success the feared boomerang effect of imperialism in the homecountry.” (Arendt 1976, 123, 155)

FROM THE PEARL OF PALESTINE TO THE PARIS OF THE CARIBBEAN

In 1317h (1900/01), the municipality of Jaffa – picturesque port-city and Palestinian intellectual hub – celebrated the opening of a new clock tower. Built in new Ottoman style and local material, it was an impressive structure. The carefully choreographed opening ceremonies in Jaffa and other towns and cities where similar clock towers popped up simultaneously marked the 25th anniversary of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s reign. The burgeoning Arabic newspapers of the day treated these Ottoman clock towers, some of which displayed both Islamic and Western time, as beacons of modernity that infused the people with pride of place and a sense of progress (Hanssen 2005).

Port-cities like Beirut and Jaffa represented the hybrid modernity of the Levant that elicited – as I will argue – much anxiety in the West and the East. One *fin-de-siècle* east-west nomad who has made both cities her home was the Zanzibari

princess Emily Ruete, née Sayyida Salme bint Sa'id (1844–1924). The French press hailed her as an “author of the World” for her autobiography of 1886. *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess* – probably the first by an Arab woman – was a tale of elopement with a Hamburg merchant, conversion to Christianity, pan-Islamic sentiments, assimilation to German culture but also of alienation, racism in Europe and stigmatization in East Africa. She found solace in the Levant, the place that resolved the many contradictions she had accumulated over the course of her life. Here she was “offered the opportunity to live *within* the two worlds that she knew so well, not simply *between* them as she had for decades.” (Prestholt 2013)

The Ottoman government had other reasons to celebrate the *fin de siècle*. The Tanzimat reforms at mid-century had stopped provincial governors' habits of marching onto their rivals' capitals and the last pockets of outlaw rebellion had been quelled in the Eastern Mediterranean to inaugurate what Engin Akarli dubbed ‘the long peace.’ (Akarli 1993) Moreover, the Ottoman empire witnessed a remarkable state-led, defensive modernization drive since state bankruptcy in 1875 had effectively put the state into receivership, and the Congress of Berlin of the same year took away most of the empire's European possessions (Blumi 2011). By the 1890s, agricultural and sericultural production recovered from the crippling fiscal controls of the Public Debt Administration imposed by the concert of Europe (Quataert 2000). Ottoman bureaucracy extended deeper than ever before into subjects' everyday lives. Cities and towns absorbed more and more people and nomads were forced to settle (Kasaba 2009). Public security improved and state education began to challenge the European and American missionary schools (Fortna 2001). Railways and telegraph lines connected Istanbul to Paris, Baghdad and Mekka, leading to what one scholar aptly called “instant communications” across the Middle East (Rogan 1998). Port enlargement projects invited international shipping to the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The new harbour fronts in Alexandria, Izmir and Beirut, in particular, became relay station for the incorporation of the capitalist world-economy into the Ottoman empire where imported commodities and exported materiel crossed over and where banks and insurance companies settled, and the leisured classes perambulated (Hanssen 2010).

Many Ottomans, especially the well-situated notable families, identified with Sultan Abdülhamid II's modernization drive. The walls and ceilings of the court-yard mansions in Damascus, for example, were adorned with paintings of the Ottoman technological icons of the age: steamships passing the gardens along the Bosphorus, locomotives speeding across bridges and bi-planes floating over the Damascus skyline (Weber 2002). Many walls also depicted Parisian scenes, including the house of the French president who had crushed the Paris Commune in 1871, Adolphe Thiers. Most enigmatically of all, a ceiling in the guest quarters of one mansion depicted the volcanic eruption of Mt. Pelée in Martinique in 1902. This catastrophe which buried alive over 30,000 inhabitants of St. Pierre, cultural capital of the island – dubbed “the Paris of the Caribbean” – became an instant news sensation and a harbinger of apocalypticism around the globe (Gordon and Witts 1969). Arabic newspapers reported on it only a few weeks after the eruption. For our Damascene family who commissioned the painting, perhaps this natural disaster was a reminder of the fleetingness of material progress and human happiness. The Red Crescent steamship in



Figure 17.1 Wall-painting of Mt. Pelée earthquake, Martinique, 1902, in Ulabi House, Old City, Damascus. Photographer: Stefan Weber, Collection Stefan Weber. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

the bottom right of the painting suggests that it was also an expression of the Ottoman humanitarian spirit and of solidarity with distant victims.

A LIBERAL AGE

In a collection of poetic portraits of contemporary Ottoman, Arab and European public figures – reminiscent of William Hazlitt’s *The Spirit of the Age* of 1825 – Khalil al-Khuri, the editor of Beirut’s first privately-funded newspaper *Hadiqat al-Akhbar*, hailed the general awareness of the coming of “the new age” (K. Khuri 1863). This sense of being part of a distinct epoch and modern times that Khuri’s *al-’Asr al-jadid* and the Damascene wall- and ceiling paintings invoked, acquired the Arabic sobriquet “*al-nahda al-’arabiyya*.” Translated literally as “rising-up,” the Nahda came to be scripted as cultural trope of “cultural renaissance” in 1892, by the time Jurji Zaydan wrote paradigmatically of “the latest Egyptian Awakening” in his journal *al-Hilal* (Zaydan 1892).

Wide-ranging social and linguistic reform efforts raised expectations among the enlightened and well-educated that the Nahda would live up to and revive the classical Arabic literary heritage. This epoch has become characterized as the liberal age since Albert Hourani published his magisterial *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (1962) in large measure due to the emergence of printing presses, translation projects, literary associations and schools, as well as the proliferation of newspapers and magazines throughout the Middle East.

In the 1890s, a women's press emerged out of the first female social gatherings and literary associations. The career of Esther Azari who was born into one of Beirut's moderate-income Sephardi families in 1873, was both exceptional and representative of the sense of "women's awakening" or *Nahdat al-Nisa'* as she called the association she founded in 1896. Educated like many of the brightest Arab boys and girls at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, she soon contributed articles to Zaydan's *al-Hilal* and Sarruf's *al-Muqtataf* in Cairo, and translated French novels for Hind Nawfal's *al-Fatat* magazine for "young ladies." She moved to Istanbul where her husband and fellow Syrian Protestant College graduate, Shim'on Moyal, obtained his Ottoman medical license. There they befriended the Egyptian satirist 'Abdallah Nadim who was visiting Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who was as we shall see, one of the key *fin-de-siècle* figures in the Middle East. When they moved to Egypt in time to participate in newspaper discussions of the Dreyfus Affair and the controversy generated by Qasim Amin's *The Liberation of Women*, she dedicated herself to editing her own journal and her translations and biography of her intellectual hero, Emile Zola (Behar and Benite 2013, 30–47). After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the Moyals moved to Jaffa where they were preoccupied with promulgating an Arabic Haskala under the umbrella of Ottomanism whose crowning expression of Sephardi identity was the Moyals' Arabic translation project of the Talmud (Gribetz 2010).

Two Arabic publications were particularly hotly debated in the press in 1900 and had a lasting impact. The first, *Lughat al-jara'id* was a scathing assault on "newspaper speak" and penned by Ibrahim al-Yaziji, journalist, grammarian and son of one of the formative figure of the Nahda's mid-century literary revival. The Nahda's print revolution had transformed Arabic from a sublime language of infinite associations and allusions that gave erudite listeners and readers heightened sensual experience to a mechanical medium of conveying and embodying reform messages. And worst of all, this reformed Arabic was full of grammatical errors and orthographical mistakes. (Sheehi 2004, 109) His fellow Syrian émigré in Cairo, Jurji Zaydan, likely realized that Yaziji's was an attack on his project of reaching a mass audience with his journal and popular novels of Arab and Islamic history. But Zaydan was not just interested in expanding the market for his literary oeuvre by simplifying Arabic. He cultivated the modern Arabic language for ideological reasons. He was concerned that the vernacularization of Arabic – advocated in some colonial corners – would lead to a political and cultural fragmentation of Arabo-Ottoman world and inhibit national aspirations (Hanssen 2014).

The second publication at the time was Qasim Amin's controversial *The Liberation of Women* (1899). The seclusion of women and polygamy, Amin (1863–1908) argued, may have made sense during times of war and tribal raids, but "we are now in an age, however, when people trust one another and social order has been established." (Amin 2000, 152) A French-trained, Egyptian lawyer, Amin – like many Arab and Muslim modernists before and after him – was caught in an intellectual bind: as a proud Egyptian he rejected racist claims of cultural inferiority by enumerating Islam's past achievements. But in the process, he adopted the very family values Western detractors deemed lacking in Egypt and the wider Muslim world. Much of the controversy centred on his chapter on "Women and the Veil" in which he invoked shari'a law to prove that unveiled women were not imitating the

West but rather embodied a long-lost Islamic tradition. The book was hardly radical by *fin-de-siècle* standards. Any emancipation of women was in the service of the family, the children, the nation and the spirit of the age. The new Muslim woman was free “to progress [through] independence of thought, will, and action, as long as this does not exceed legal limits *and maintains the moral standards of society.*” (Amin 2000, 130, my italics).

The individual woman’s rights to choose her own husband, her right to divorce, her right to education, to property and ultimately to vote, came with social responsibilities, evidence of maturity and obligations to themselves, to fellow women, to their families and their nation (Baron 2005). The way Amin framed evolution and freedom would have been familiar to British liberals like Charles Darwin and John Stuart Mill, whom he admired. But outside the anxious elite discourses about civilizational deficits, lower-class women had long defended their rights in the shari’a courts or participated in local protests and peasant rebellions. The growth of the Egyptian state in the nineteenth century reduced this room to manoeuvre and the British occupation in 1882 ushered in a nationalist cult of domesticity. Under colonial liberalism, women grew increasingly dependent on family support and “completely alienated – by language, culture, and experience, as well as gender – from the state apparatus.” (Tucker 1985, 196)

AN AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

Widening economic disparities between urban and rural populations and within cities brought about subversive, transnational movements towards the end of the nineteenth century. While Young Turk intellectuals plotted revolution in Paris and Geneva, European anarchists escaped state persecution in Alexandria where they mingled with Syrian radicals avoiding Sultan Abdülhamid II’s secret police (Khuri-Makdisi 2010). The large Ottoman public works and infrastructural projects produced a Middle Eastern proletariat of sorts which by the 1890s engaged in industrial action for better working conditions and mobilized against European investment companies, especially in port-cities (Quataert 2000; Beinin and Lockman 1988).

However, the first in a series of *fin-de-siècle* revolutions in the Middle East broke out in Iran in 1906 following a series of foreign concession scandals, the most notorious of which granted the British the right to exploit prospective oil reserves over most of Iran in 1901. Iran became a coveted site for European capitalists in the mid 19th century, as the Qajjar court sold state lands to associated urban businessmen while it auctioned off key sectors of agriculture, industry and infrastructure to British, Belgian and Russian companies. Wide-spread domestic opposition led, *inter alia*, by one Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–97) forced the government to rescind the sweeping Reuter Concession of 1872, in which the shah had granted the London-based entrepreneur Julius de Reuter the monopoly on Iran’s infrastructural and industrial development capacities in a short-sighted attempt to stem his court’s cash flow problems.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was to become a pivotal *fin-de-siècle* figure in Middle East and wider Asian politics. An Iranian Shia with unorthodox views, Masonic proclivities and insurrectionary tendencies, he acquired his anti-imperialism during his stay in India at the time of the Mutiny of 1857. Travels to Afghanistan, Russia

and Istanbul followed before he emerged in Cairo to agitate – with his British friend Wilfred Blunt – against British control in the prelude to the Urabi Revolt of 1881. That year, he refashioned himself as a pan-Islamist thinker with the publication of his widely-read *Refutation of the Materialists*. In it, he dismissed the gamut of naturalist and materialist philosophy, from Epicurus to Rousseau, Voltaire, and Darwin, as corroding humanity and as “sectarian” threats to social harmony and order. Communism and socialism claim to speak in the name of the poor and downtrodden, but in fact they merely advocated shamelessness, trustworthiness, and free reign of passions (Keddie 1968, 21–23, 73–84).

The unity and self-rule of the Muslim community became al-Afghani’s overarching political project. He espoused a vitalist and romantic understanding of Islam rather than the conventional theological or legal concepts (al-Azmeh 1993, chapter 2). During his exile in Paris in the 1880s, he mentored and politicized the foremost Egyptian reformer of Islam, Muhammad ‘Abduh, in the art of anti-imperialist pamphleteering. In a famous response in the *Journal des Débats*, he challenged Ernest Renan on his Arabophobe lecture “L’islamisme et la science,” in 1883. Significantly, he did so by accepting the false premise that science and reason marked Europe’s current superiority over Muslims before reminding Renan of the debt medieval Europe owed to the Arab renaissance. Oblivious to the Europeans’ debt to plantation slavery and capitalism, al-Afghani concluded that it did not logically follow that, even though unenlightened Muslim rulers and scholars have stifled free scientific inquiry in the recent past, a universal Islamic regeneration would be possible (Keddie 1968, 181–87, Massad 2007, 13–14).

Japan’s victory against the Czar’s army and the Russian revolution of 1905 inspired uprisings across Asia and radicalized the reformist oppositions in the Ottoman empire and in Iran (Kurzman 2008). In Tehran and Tabriz, in particular, societies of learning and grassroot councils (*anjumans*) paved the way for a nationwide constitutionalist movement that included the breadth of the Iranian demographic and ideological spectrum: Azeri, Georgian, Armenian, Azali Babis, Free Masons, social democrats, pan-Islamists, liberals and guild leaders (Afary 1996, 33–50). In the month of Muharram of 1905, the Tehran shopkeepers went on strike following senior clerics calls for an end to Belgian domination over Iranian customs and tariffs. More and more protesters sought sanctuary in mosques and the holy city of Qom before 14,000 subalterns famously camped in hundreds of tents in the gardens of the British legation in Tehran in the summer of 1906 (Afary 1996, 55).

The ailing Shah Muzaffer grudgingly acceded to the creation of a constitution and the elections produced a national consultative assembly in August 1906. It curbed the powers of the shah, introduced government accountability, and reigned in the foreign loans and concessions business (Afary 1996, 63). The constitutional era gave Iran a tumultuous parliament, a vibrant satirical press and women’s councils. Even though the Iranian democratic experiment was ultimately defeated by British and Russian interventions in 1911, the revolution itself was riddled with contradictions that were already visible in al-Afghani’s *Refutation*. Political interests diverged between the ‘revolutionary north’ and the ‘messianic south’, clerics and secularists, merchants and socialists (Bayat 1982). Socialists, especially in Tabriz, pushed for direct councils akin to Lenin’s idea of soviets, while the Shia clergy appealed for moderation and insisted on consultative precepts of Islamic political theory.

By comparison, the seeds for the Young Turk Revolution were planted in networks of clandestine cells which eventually merged into the more tightly organized party structure of the Committee of Union and Progress in 1906. Young Turks passionately debated the first constitution of 1876; closely studied the pitfalls of the French revolution; and analysed the Iranian constitutional movement. They saw in Japan's victory over the Czar's army a vindication of "eastern civilization" as a whole. It was proof that a parliamentary system, such as the Meiji restoration of 1868 had granted the Japanese, required a strong military in order to catch up with Europe. The broad popular base of the Russian revolution of 1905, in turn, appealed to Ottoman intellectuals who were as weary of military coups and constitutionalism from above as they were of European intervention and the disintegration of the empire along ethnic lines (Sohrabi 2002).

The Young Turk Revolution was planned by officers of the Third Army who were stationed in Manastir, Kosovo and Salonica. What started as a military mutiny in Macedonia triggered a popular rebellion. Their demands that the Ottoman parliament of 1876–78 be reconvened brought euphoric crowds into Istanbul's Grand Rue de Pera and other streets and squares. Sultan Abdülhamid II conceded to the popular demands and sacked his reviled entourage. He avoided deposition himself until after a botched counter-coup a year later. The empire-wide parliamentary elections energized Ottoman citizens of all stripes. But the second constitutional period was undermined by a coup d'état in 1913 that swept to power a triumvirate within the ruling Committee of Union and Progress following the loss of Libya to Italy and the secession of Albania and Macedonia in the Balkan War (Yavuz and Blumi 2013).

THE COLONIAL 'BOOMERANG:' FROM COMMON HUMANITY TO RACIST ANXIETY

In the earliest study to employ the *fin-de-siècle* paradigm to the Middle East, Edmund Burke III identified the period between 1890 and 1914 as the first crisis of the humanities in France and the birth of modern Orientalism. These developments were caused in large measure by the political assertiveness of the peoples on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean (Burke 1984, 213–26). Neither docile nor decadent, fatalistic nor fanatical, Arabs, Turks and Iranians seemed to be escaping in large numbers the categories that European culture and science had assigned to them. A few British liberals, like Wilfrid Blunt in Egypt, recognized Muslim aspirations and supported the Middle Eastern revolutionary movements of the *fin de siècle*. Some French Orientalists saw them as a great victory for France, where many Middle Eastern activists hatched their insurrectionary plans in exile. The 'springtime of the Muslim peoples' was seen as a vindication of French spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity at a time when this revolutionary legacy was threatened by conservatism and Antisemitism at home (Burke 1984).

European solidarity with emancipation movements abroad was limited. Rural anticolonial uprisings and attempts at independent state-building in the Middle East were brutally crushed and led to colonial occupations that lasted until the 1950s. The messianic Mahdiyya movement, which defeated the British army in 1885, maintained an independent Sudan for years before the slaughter of Omdurman in 1898, where British proto-type machine guns mowed down as many as 10,000 Sudanese armed

with spears and shields. Winston Churchill, a young officer who participated in the massacre, conjured up divine intervention: this “battle” had been “the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians,” while Kipling was moved to compose an ode to “the white man’s burden” (Lindquist 1996, 67–68).

For their part, many Egyptian nationalists embraced the British civilizing mission in the Anglo-Egyptian condominium of Sudan (Troutt Powell 2003). In Libya, the tribal Sanussiyya movement fought the Europeans for a decade before Italian’s aerial bombardment – another first in military history – paved the way for occupation in 1911 (Ahmida 2009, 73–102). In rural Morocco, the Hafziyya insurrection of 1907–8 gave Moroccans a brief respite from French assimilationist policies (Miller 2013, 76–87). But in 1912, Marshall Lyautey established a French protectorate whose colonial rule revolutionized urban design in the metropole and the colonies alike (Rabinow 1989, chapter 9). Lyautey’s paternalistic approach also godfathered the League of Nations Mandate system after World War I (P. Khoury 1987, chapter 3).

Europe’s encounter with the Middle East contributed to the growing levels of cultural pessimism and produced the promiscuous exoticism of André Gide, the disenchantment of Max Weber and Oswald Spengler’s despair at the decline of the West. Pseudo-sciences, like phrenology and eugenics, emerged as an attempt to master the “dangerously ‘restless’ and ‘advancing’ peoples” of the East. Contact with the East was deemed as a demographic threat to Europe and talk of “‘colonization’ of France by large numbers of Mediterraneans led to apocalyptic visions (Bayly 2002, 286). Within this atmosphere, European liberals sought out moderate Muslims and Arabs to prove that ‘they’ are just like ‘us’ and to parade them in their struggle against metropolitan racism.

As a response to the stirrings and awakenings in the Middle East, Orientalist institutions like the *Revue du Monde Musulman* (1906) in France, the *Moslem World* (1911) in the United States and *Die Welt des Islams* (1913) in Germany produced generally sympathetic scholarship on contemporary Muslim culture. These were exceptions in the growing sea of Islamophobia. Much as the Entente powers talked up conspiracy theories of a secret pan-Islamic, Asiatic fraternity poised to defeat the West (most notoriously in John Buchan’s best-selling *Greenmantle* of 1916) and much as the Germans tried to incite the Ottomans to wage *jihad* for them, no anti-Western uprising materialised during the Great War (Lüdke 2005).

TRANSVALUATION OF ISLAM: FROM INTERNAL CRITICISM TO CULTURE WAR

The critical interventions of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had bequeathed two *fin-de-siècle* movements of regeneration that confidently sought remedies for the apparent decline of Islam: pan-Islamism and Islamic modernism – or Muslim reformism. They overlapped in the works of some particularly influential *fin-de-siècle* public intellectuals, most notably Rashid Rida (1865–1935), but their diagnostic emphasis differed. For Pan-Islamists the problem was a question of numbers: European imperialism was able to impose its will on Muslims because the modern *umma* was fragmented. The priority was, therefore, to unify Muslims under strong leadership (Aydin 2007). Muslim scholars and journalists, like the charismatic Egyptian nationalist Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908), began to invoke *The Rising East* (1905,

Hourani 1962, 205); some traveled across the Indian Ocean to establish pan-Islamic and pan-Asian networks, like the Azhar-trained, Georgian polyglot Hajji Muhammad Ali (Bayly 2002, 307); others joined the armed resistance against the Dutch occupation of Java or the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911.

But pan-Islamists were more regularly mobilizing against Westernization in their own countries. In the Ottoman empire, European intervention and support for Christian subjects fuelled discontent against the Tanzimat reforms which were perceived as breaking the bonds of Islamic solidarity by appeasing the West and favouring non-Muslims. Sultan Abdülhamid II re-established national sovereignty, and his inner circle of pan-Islamic Sufis and well-connected Levantine career bureaucrats became the headquarters of the Ottoman version of the *fin-de-siècle*'s New Imperialism at home and abroad (Hanssen, 2011).

In contrast, Afghani's project of cultural autopsy shaped Islamic modernism. It also addressed the *umma* as a whole but was more concerned with the quality than the quantity of believers, more with theological *tawhid* – the unity of god and the sin of saint-worship – than with political *wahda* – the administration of the community of Muslims in one state or by one government. Modernists around Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905, Haj 2009) in Cairo, Tahir al-Jaza'iri (1851–1920, Escovitz 1986) in Damascus and Shukri al-Alusi (1856–1924, Fattah 2003) in Baghdad were engaged in a reform programme of internal criticism. The overarching question was how to improve contemporary Islam without sacrificing its sublime qualities. What started out as a theological debate, soon encompassed law, morality, the entire bio-political spectrum of social analysis and the very basis of religious and political authority.

The tumultuous career of Rashid Rida illuminates the gradual convergence of reformism, salafism and Pan-Islamism. Born into a family with a reputation of piety and noble birth in Tripoli, Syria, Rida was schooled and licensed by the renowned Darwinist Sufi scholar Husayn al-Jisr (Elshakry 2014). He became an avid reader of al-Afghani's and 'Abduh's Parisian pamphlets *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* and sought their patronage. In 1897, he followed 'Abduh to Cairo where he quickly established *al-Manar*, the journalistic voice of the Islamic reform movement. 'Abduh himself came to distrust political passions and withdrew into his position of Mufti of British Egypt where he set about redefining the Islamic canon through *qiyyas* – a method of rational analogy – with a view to fit the exigencies of the modern state. That the state in question was a colonial entity mattered less to 'Abduh than to the Pan-Islamists.

Rida was neither politically as unconventional as al-Afghani nor theologically as sound as 'Abduh. Yet, since 'Abduh's death in 1905, he fashioned himself as their intellectual heir even as he undertook a systematic transvaluation of the Islamic legal canon (Dallal 2000). Rida unplugged Afghani's romantic, vitalistic syncretism and 'Abduh's syncretic reasoning to pursue an Islamic politics of cultural purity (al-Azmeh 1993, chapter 2). Rida pursued the reform discourse of his mentors which he pegged to an inflated and simplistic notion of *al-maslaha al-'amma* – “the public interest” or “common good.” Even though this Islamic legal concept predated the emergence of the centralizing states of the 19th century (Opwis 2005), in the journalistic pen of Rida it became the “first and foremost mechanism [of deliberation] by which the modern ‘Salafi turn’ was effected . . . and allow him to expand Islam's jurisprudence into ‘all aspects of life’.” (Hamzah 2012, 106)

Rida embraced many shifting political causes. Having co-founded the Ottoman Society for Constitutional Government before the Young Turk Revolution, he quickly grew disenchanted by the CUP's 'Turkification' policies and joined Arab federalists. During the Great War, he supported Sharif Husayn's Arab Revolt against the Ottomans before railing against the Hashemites for their collusion with the British. Since Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate in 1924 and the Wahhabi conquest of Mecca 1926, he became a dedicated Panislamist, a spokesperson for Ibn Sa'ud and a sectarian polemicist against Shias, Copts and Jews.

Neither the Muslim *islahis* nor the *salafis* were traditionalists or conservatives, both of whom they vehemently attacked as brainless imitators responsible for the *umma*'s apparent decline. But the so called 'imitators' began to mobilize against the 'modernizers' in the 1900s. Their most prolific representative was Yusuf al-Nabhani. Al-Nabhani (1849–1932) was the chief judge at the Court of Justice in Beirut during Abdülhamid II's reign and a passionate polemicist against the modern age in general and European cultural encroachment in particular. In his *Shawahid al-Haqq fi al-Istighatha bi Sayyid al-Khalq* (1905), he expressed his aversion to the *salafi* creed, in both its Wahhabi and reformist varieties. Their internal criticism would not only weaken Muslim unity and play into the hands of European imperialists, it also stigmatized the time-honoured Sufi practice of saint-worship, dream interpretation and spiritual performance. (Ghazal forthcoming) Rida used his *al-Manar* to delegitimize Nabhani's credentials while Shukri al-Alusi responded from Baghdad to brand Nabhani as a lowly Sufi heretic (Fattah 2003).

Conservatives and Sufis were by no means 'luddites'. Like the liberal reformers and the salafists, the *mutadayyinun* – or self-proclaimed upholders of the pious tradition – realized the power of the printing press. In post-revolutionary Damascus, for example, a group of avowed traditionalists founded *al-Haqa'iq*, a pugnacious newspaper which sought to challenge *al-Manar*'s campaign of denunciation, represent their worldview and expose the *islahis*' and *salafis*' moral and cultural corruption (Gelvin 2012). What started out as a wave of internal criticism at the beginning of the *fin de siècle*, expanded into a full-out culture war towards the end. Two particular phenomena characterize this development. First, the purveyors of unadulterated Islam did not reason outside the *fin-de-siècle* dialectic of civilization and barbarism, degeneration and regeneration. Second, the 'culture war' was internal to the orthodox tradition and did not pit Sunnis against Shias or other non-Sunnis as seems to become the hallmark of the start of this millennium. On the contrary, Iranian marja'iyya, Indian deobandis and 'Ibadi scholars from Zanzibar invested time and money in the various reform projects of the age (Zaman 2012, Ghazzal, 2010, 62–64).

DISCOURSES OF DEGENERATION AND REGENERATION

At the root of all these ostensibly religious debates was a general anxiety about the pace and direction of change in the Middle East at the *fin de siècle*, rocked as it was by rapid urbanization, revolutions, nationalist ferment, rural uprisings and industrial action. This anxiety was not limited to the Muslim culture war but permeated the second generation of the Arab Nahda. As early as 1880, Nahda intellectuals warned against the social dangers of laziness in an epoch of ever tougher world-wide

competition. Jurji Zaydan made public morality one of *al-Hilal*'s mantras. In the medical vocabulary of the age, he spoke of social vices like excessive consumption of coffee and tobacco, hogging in coffeehouses, gambling and prostitution. Places of leisure were dens of social and cultural degeneration. The popular Karagöz, or shadow play, evenings were a contagious social disease while nights at the Cairo Opera were a morally-uplifting cultural panacea (Hanssen 2002).

Public morality came to be a defining feature of how *fin-de-siècle* intellectuals in the Middle East imagined class distinctions. The Egyptian working class, in particular, came to be both formed and contained (Lockman 1994). In 1911, Zaydan penned a brief history of working classes from ancient Greece to contemporary Egypt in *al-Hilal*. He extolled the national virtues of the Egyptian worker from the perspective of the benevolent entrepreneur who believed hard-work would be a sign of national vitality and defeat European stereotypes. Workers' rights were best represented by the magnanimous state and not the budding unions. Unlike Egyptian nationalists who had come to make common cause with striking workers after the Cairo Stock Exchange crash in 1907, Zaydan still deemed industrial action as "extremist" and a counter-productive luxury to the national goal of regeneration and catch-up with Europe (Zaydan 1911).

The anxiety about stagnation and degeneracy were at work in the Nahda's construction of a historical canon. Zaydan was paranoid about the effect of the Abbasids' love-and-debauchery poetry on the youth of his day, and he censored Abu Nawwas and other poets who celebrated homosexuality and sex with minors. Public moralists like Zaydan exhibited a sort of double consciousness. The social and sexual deviance in the Arabic classics did not fit the image of Arabs that the Nahda wanted to project and only confirmed the Western stereotypes produced by European sex tourists like Gustave Flaubert and Victorian voyeurists like the translator of *The Arabian Nights*, Richard Burton. Arab civilization became as much a source of inspiration to be revived as a subversive cultural reservoir to be censored (Massad 2006, 9–11, 57–60).

The fear of degeneration was also a major impetus behind the Islamic reform project in the *fin de siècle*. Muhammad Abduh constructed modern Islam as a cultural bulwark against the tide of what he considered looming degeneracy caused by extreme traditionalism and hyper-Westernization among his contemporaries. Only the hybrid thought space between *taqlid* ("imitation") and *taghrib* ("estrangement" as well as "Westernization") would emancipate modern Muslims from the totality of both (Haj 2009). Anxious though they were, 'Abduh's and Zaydan's quest for balance contrasted sharply with European fear of degeneration.

ANTISEMITISM IN EUROPE; SETTLER COLONIALISM IN PALESTINE

Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) was emblematic of racist responses to cultural pessimism in Europe. An 'assimilated' Austro-German Jew who moved with ease in the upper echelons of European capitals, Nordau (1849–1923) was the second most influential Zionist whose fame as a popular Social Darwinist, prolific journalist, polemical social critic and amateur psychologist, gave the first World Zionist Organization's congress in 1897, which he helped his friend Herzl organize, its

cultural caché. In his lecture at Basel, he spoke of his desire for a “normal existence” for “healthy” Jews. More than any other Zionist of the *fin de siècle*, Nordau embodied the Nietzschean transvaluation that drove Zionists to pursue auto-emancipation out of Europe. Nordau envisaged Zionism to produce a Jewry of muscle which would transform both the “assimilated” and the ghettoized Jews of Europe from a “parasitic” diaspora into a “virile” and “disciplined nation” capable of colonizing and cultivating their own land. The only way and place for Jews to escape European degeneration, with its anti-Semitic spasms, was Palestine. A Jewish state in Palestine would regenerate “old Europe,” overcome the ghetto and “*galut* mentality” of Jews, as well as the general “malaise of the *fin de siècle*” (Stanislowski 2001, 90–91, 241–43).

Some humanist intellectuals around Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927) and Martin Buber (1878–1965) promoted ideas of Jewish-Arab fraternity (Campos 2010). But they were soon side-lined as naïve and defeatist by labour- and militant Zionists around Israel's ‘founding father,’ David Ben Gurion (1886–1973), and Vladimir Jabotinski (1880–1940), Nordau's erstwhile disciple and inspiration for Israel's right-wing Likud party. A cosmopolitan thinker, gifted translator and bon-vivant playwright from Odessa, Jabotinski's approach to Herzl's and Nordau's Zionism was the polar opposite of Ahad Ha'am's. Jabotinski was a will-to-power nationalist, less interested in Jewish Haskala – European or Arabic – or the spiritual dimension of Judaism. He took Nordau's new muscular Jew to its unapologetically bellicose conclusion. The goal of Zionism was to expand the boundaries of Europe “to the Euphrates,” in his fanciful recollections (Stanislowski 2001). He acknowledged that “every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement” but insisted that only after Arabs had accepted defeat would a dialogue be possible and desirable (Shlaim 2000, 11–16).

Arab intellectuals responded to this settler colonial threat with growing alarm. Leading Nahda figures like Esther Moyal, Jurji Zaydan and Rashid Rida understood the Jewish plight in Europe, had defended Dreyfus, admired Emile Zola, and abhorred the antisemitism of some European missionaries in the Levant (Haim 1955). The influential Cairo-based scientific journal *al-Muqtataf* warned its readers in 1898 that Zionists were no new missionaries but a nationalist movement claiming the land of Palestine. One of its editors, Shahin Makaryus channelled Zionist race-thinking but – in a secular and Darwinian ‘transvaluation’ – argued that as “Caucasian semites were primordially and civilizationally linked to Arabs (Gribetz 2010). The Aleppan author ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (d. 1902) imagined a pan-Islamic assembly modelled on the World Zionist congresses (al-Kawakibi 1931). And the Maronite Negib Azoury, Ottoman official in the province of Jerusalem and early Arab nationalist, considered Zionism an imperialist conspiracy in his *Le réveil de la nation arabe* of 1905. But it took the emergence of a Palestinian press after the Young Turk revolution to launch a systematic analysis of the colonial nature of Zionist settlement and intermittent calls to resist it. The two journals *al-Karmel* (1909) and *Filastin* (1911) pressured Palestinian parliamentarians in Istanbul to mobilize the Ottoman public. It was in these public exchanges that a specifically Palestinian form of Arab nationalism began to challenge not only Zionism but also existing urban, parochial or pro-imperial identities (R. Khalidi 1997).

CONCLUSION

The *fin de siècle* was a time of mixing, effervescence, experimentation, violent uprisings and bloodless coups in the Middle East. The realization that people around the Mediterranean and in the wider Muslim world aspired to similar ideas of freedom, equality and democracy threatened to break down the barriers that colonial privilege, Orientalist stereotypes and Hamidian censorship had erected in the course of the 19th century. This chapter has been arranged around social and textual ‘vignettes.’ They have illuminated what I consider three foundational dimensions of the Middle East at the *fin de siècle*: a resistant object of Western Orientalism, European capitalism and colonial expansion; a disowned key to understanding the formations of modernity in the European metropole itself; and communities of discourse with their own self-reflective consciousness.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the Middle East at the *fin de siècle* was brimming with democratic movements, modern moments and radical visions, all of which were crushed by the New European Imperialism at one point or another between the Ottoman-Russian War of 1878 and World War I. Recording the dynamic developments in this period is not to dabble in the ‘could-have-beens’ of nostalgic or counter-factual history; nor was the point of this chapter to excavate political or intellectual essences that existed all through the 20th century that we were too distracted from noticing. Too much has changed in the Middle East since WWI, not all for the worse. From its early optimistic articulations of a new age in the 1860s to the pessimistic heralds of the end of an era in the 1910s, the Middle East was populated by men and women of letters who articulated a sense of contemporaneity, of belonging to a modern and global age.

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