

Salma AL REFAEI  
University of Bucharest  
Bucharest, Romania  
salma\_al\_refaei@yahoo.com

## THE EMANCIPATION OF EGYPT: A QUEST FOR MODERNITY UNDER ISLAMIC AND EGYPTIAN VALUES

**Recommended citation:** Al Refaei, Salma. “The Emancipation of Egypt: A Quest for Modernity under Islamic and Egyptian Values”. *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 9.1 (2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2023.15.13>.

**Abstract:** The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were pivotal in Muslim Egypt’s history as they shaped and influenced not only Egyptian society, but also the Muslim community at large. If the West went through various modernizing movements and experienced a fast advancement, then the East in general and Egypt in particular were marked by the colonial rule, the Orientalist discourse and an identity crisis that threatened their religion. In this context, Islamic Modernism came as a response to the threat posed by the modern, civilized West and it focused towards proving that Islam and modernity could be reconciled. In this sense, my paper aims to show that the contributions of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Gamal Abdel Nasser are notable – the formers tried to reshape Egyptian identity in modern terms, while the latter focused on Egypt’s national identity and the modernization process in the Postcolonial era.

**Keywords:** Islamic Modernism, Egypt, Postcolonialism, Muhammad ‘Abduh, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

### Introduction

The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries witnessed many tempestuous events that shaped the world as we know it today; dynamic alterations such as the decline and eventual fall of the Ottoman Empire, the colonization of Muslim lands, two world wars, major divisions among the Muslims and a relentless quest for unity, the emergence of

pivotal ideologies such as Capitalism, Communism, Materialism and other political changes which reordered the very fabric of the world's reality at large and that of the Muslim community in particular. The most immediate consequence was that the Western world was remarketed as being civilized and highly advanced in all aspects, leaving the Eastern side of the world far behind, moving at a much slower pace, unable to keep up with the dramatic shifts in the political, economic and academic spheres. Islam entered a race against the clock in trying to find its rightful place in the newly shaped world, but for quite some time it could not establish itself in this modern context; the rapid shifts managed to outpace it. Where did Islam fit into the new world and could Islam and modernity be somehow reconciled?

The complexity of a religion such as Islam and its webs of influence can hardly be put into a few words without sacrificing some aspects of it in favor of others. Since its birth in the seventh century, it has undergone many changes and it has fanned outwards into the hearts of people living across a vast spectrum of races and ethnicities. Its history spans out over the course of 1400 years and it is, mildly put, a very tumultuous one, but at the same time a most intriguing one. For all Muslim countries, religion plays a visceral part in forming the people's identities and that is because it is the nucleus of their lives. Islam is not only a religion to them, but also a part of who they are because most of their social actions are influenced by the values that Islam preaches. Their personal lives cannot be separated from their religion because it is not simply a fleeting feeling of their heart, it is deeply embedded in the core of their being. This is also the case of Muslim Egypt, which constitutes the focus of this paper. Its intense history and the clash of different ideologies is what triggered a number of reform movements, which have shaped the country and its people as we know it today. The infiltration of the superior modern Western forces set in motion a series of crises – be they related to identity or to Egyptian society, those turning points awakened an urgency for different reforms that would revive religion and society. While the West rejoiced in the impressive advancements that it made in science, technology, education and thought, the East was left behind. The Enlightenment, followed by Modernism and then by Postmodernism gave the West the necessary tools to develop as a civilization. The doors to Modernism in Egypt were opened by a few brilliant individuals who played an important role in the advancement of the country either on a political level or on a societal one.

This paper will focus on two key figures: Muhammad ‘Abduh and Gamal Abdel Nasser. If the former contributed to a reform that aimed to renew education and religion and fit them into a modern context inspired by Western ideals, the latter targeted a reform which sought modernize Egypt by preaching its ethnic values and limiting its affiliations with the West. Even though their imprint was left during different periods of the twentieth century, their role in the postcolonialist era of Egypt is fundamental and the purpose of this inquiry is to bring to the fore the various sources and ideologies that permeated Egypt’s society and contributed to its nuanced advancement towards modernity. The first part focuses on the factors that culminated in an identity crisis amongst the Muslims of Egypt, caused by colonialism, and on the birth of Islamic Modernism. The second part addresses the postcolonial period and the political and economic reforms that forwarded Egypt on a global scale. In the quest for modernity and for its underlying meaning in the history of Egypt we can see that at first it sought to fulfill a universal desire – the need to fit Islam into the modern context, while later on it was marked by the desire to address a more particular and immediate concern – Egypt’s national identity.

### **The first specks of Modernity in Egypt – Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha and his contribution**

After the French were expelled from Egypt in 1805, Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha (r. 1805-1841), an Albanian officer, seized the power. He is referred to as “the founder of modern Egypt” due to the dramatic reforms that he implemented in order to modernize the country (Yusuf 356). Still, no matter how much effort was put into a renewal of the country, the Orientalist perception prevailed and Egypt’s Muslim population was viewed as uncivilized and essentially backward. Compared to the West, the Egyptians stood on a weaker position in every aspect and it entered a period of severe decline. The new rule set on a course to transform a backward country into one that could be powerful enough to withstand any assaults from Europe and at the same time maintain its *de facto* independence. In the light of this desire, Muḥammad ‘Alī launched Egypt’s first industrialization efforts, based on the models and practices from the West, he encouraged the cultivation of cotton, for which Egypt would come to be well-known on a

global scale and many more. His attempt to modernize his nation proved that he felt that it was what the country needed in order to flourish and establish itself.

In order to do that he implemented several reforms in agriculture, where he embarked on extensive irrigation projects, in the military sector where he created a native army of Egyptian *fallāḥīn* – Arab peasants, farmers or agricultural laborers – who were trained by European military experts and this modernization led to the development of ordnance factories. However, his reforms were achieved at the cost of his people: “his Europeanizing zeal needed a new bureaucracy which in turn called for a «new educational» system instead of the traditional one” (Yusuf 357). Around this time many Egyptians were sent abroad to receive a Western education and upon their return to the country they were put in leading positions across various sectors. As the years passed, this in turn led to the establishment of a new tradition of secular education, which was new in the history of Muslim Egypt. Muḥammad ‘Alī was a big supporter of this type of education, which included linguistic and musical studies among other disciplines. Moreover, he founded modern hospitals for soldiers and civilians and these measures were “quite unheard of by most Egyptians at the time” (Yusuf 358).

Muḥammad ‘Alī was definitely a force of modernization in Egypt’s history, his energetic reforms contributed greatly to a fundamental reshaping of the country, but, as it would turn out to be, Egypt needed more in order to become modern. The society needed a better environment to thrive, one that would allow religion, a part of their identity, to coexist with the modernized world – a desire that proved to be problematic at first. The clash with the modernized West paved the way for modernity in Egypt and at the same time it triggered an identity crisis amongst Muslims. This encounter with the other brought about a need for reforms on the social, political and cultural levels in Egypt, which consequently gave way to a gaping disparity that engulfed the minds of the Muslim intelligentsia at the time. When it came to religion, this led to the establishment of two opposing camps among the *‘ulamā*: one that outwardly expressed their agreeable reaction in response to the Western challenges and the other that fostered a hostile response to everything the West represented (Yusuf 355).

### **Identity crisis and the birth of Islamic Modernism**

The concept of modernity as a force of revolution on various important societal planes was shaped differently in the two corners of the world. “Modernity, or the modern age is usually defined as a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period” (Khan et al. 64) and it is marked by the notable human advancement in science, the industrialization of society and the progress in thinking. In its widest sense, modernism helped forward the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by affirming the creational power that humans can have. Modernist movements in the West constituted an innovative and radical way of approaching art, architecture, music, literature, culture, and in the twentieth century the stressed was placed on freedom of expression marked by experimental concepts and ideas that were meant to revitalize the society and move it forward into a newly shaped world (Khan et al. 65). Modernity in the West made a clear distinction between these advancements and religion; although it didn’t discard Christianity completely, quite the contrary – it tried to integrate religion into the fast moving pace of progressive thought, but it drew a clear demarcation between religion and everything else that was a part of the Modernist movement.

Such an attempt would prove futile in the case of the Muslim thinkers because for the Muslims, religion plays an immense part in the shaping of their identity both as individuals and as a community, and the separation of religion from the other aspects would have resulted in their view in a complete abandonment of Islam, which the intellectuals wanted to avoid in the first place. What they had to do was find a way to marry religion with all the other principles that modernity advocated for; that is, show that Islam could be modern. Thus, Islamic Modernism, compared to the Western counterpart, is fundamentally a religious reform which had the purpose of freeing it from the shackles of a rigid orthodoxy and integrate it into the modern world: “Islamic modernism was a response both to the continued weaknesses and to the external political and religio-cultural threat of colonialism” (Khan et al. 65). In other words, their primary task was to prove that being Muslim and being modern were not two opposing ideas, which they did not have to renounce their religion and culture in favor of being modern – they could and should be both.

In the midst of these opposing attitudes, a few Muslim thinkers of great value left their imprint in such a powerful way that they managed to establish new important and

much needed modern reforms; with their words and influence stretching like a ripple across time and space. In Egypt, this was achieved mainly, but not only, by Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), whose ideas reverberated across the Egyptian borders and into the other Muslim countries; his influence came at the right time and was the spark that ignited new reforms and movements and his impact is celebrated even today in the Muslim world. In the discussion about Islamic Modernism, there are a few names that must be remembered alongside ‘Abduh’s: Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Ameer Ali, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. Out of these, the contributions of the ‘Abduh and al-Afghānī will be mentioned in this paper, with a thorough exposition of ‘Abduh’s legacy in the destiny of the Muslim world, while the other one will be briefly mentioned in order to better understand the context of thought in that period of Egypt’s history.

The study of Islamic Modernism poses some difficulties, as few Islamic thinkers would consider themselves Islamic Modernists (Khalid Masud 237). For a very long period of time it was thought that Islam and modernity could not be compatible as modernity meant a significant intellectual advancement, but secular, of the West, one that Muslims were not ready to implement because it would have symbolized a denouncement of their “true nature”. In this sense, the twenty-five years before and after 1900 marked a turning point in Egypt’s history, as this period paved the way for various reforms that would revitalize Islam and update it to a modern context without dwindling its true nature or morphing it into something that it is not. One of the best examples that showcases the depth of these reforms is Egypt is a cradle for modernist discourses that modeled the Muslim identity without invalidating its core beliefs and principles. However, to understand the extent of those reforms, we must first see what caused the identity crisis among the Muslims Egyptians in the first place.

The origins of Islamic Modernism can be viewed in correlation to at least four interrelated factors, which cumulated in the response of the aforementioned Muslim thinkers. First, the eighteenth century was marked by a deep sense of decline in the Muslim world in general (Khalid Masud 240), which awakened an urgency for a change. As a direct consequence, this sense generated various reform movements in the nineteenth century, but it “was further aggravated by the colonial rule on the Muslim world in the nineteenth century, either directly, as in India and Egypt, or indirectly, as in

Iran and the countries under the Ottomans” (Khalid Masud 240). The justification of the colonial rulers is what warped the perception that the world had of Muslim countries in general, and that the Muslims had of themselves in particular. In other words, the description of the political and social Muslim systems as essentially backward, uncivilized and unreasonable and of Islam as being incapable of accommodating the challenges that arose in the new modern world is what caused an identity crisis among Muslims, which was especially the case in Egypt. In the advanced countries of the West, many Orientalist thinkers depicted Islam as a stifle of reason and science and as inherently incapable of being, simply put, modern.

Thirdly, the wave of Christian missionaries that came with the colonial rule attacked the Muslim beliefs in Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an by reducing everything that Islam stood for to a few preconceptions related to *jihad*, slavery, and polygamy. The conclusion that they agreed upon and that further deepened the identity crisis felt by the Muslim community at the time was that “Christianity was a superior religion, as it did not allow such beliefs and practices” (Khalid Masud 241). Finally yet importantly, the young generation of Muslims who were sent abroad for educational purposes believed that modernization meant Westernization and they started to disregard and ridicule their own religion. These factors simultaneously contributed to the gradual shattering of Muslim identity, and the question that was on everyone’s lips was how and where could Islam fit into this new world? Islamic modernists regarded this as a threat to the cultural and religious identity of their people and found it necessary to cast light onto Islam and discard the doubt surrounding the possibility of it being modern. Thus, they acknowledged two main concerns that were required to achieve their goals: a reform in education and a new theology; in this context, Islamic Modernism came to being.

### **Al-Azhar University**

Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī, better known as ‘al-Afghānī’ (d. 1897) was a Pan-Islamist political activist and modernist who had a great influence over the Muslim world in the nineteenth century, as he was the first Muslim modernist that embarked on a wide variety of political activist undertakings (Yusuf 358). One of his closest disciples, and one of the central figures of this paper, was Muhammad ‘Abduh. During his companionship

with al-Afghānī, the two of them traveled abroad to France where they spent two years. During that period, they both gained a good command over French and an important understanding of Western education and sciences and of their value. “Abduh witnessed the imperialist period of the French and the English in Egypt and therefore wanted to liberate Egyptians from their occupation. Through his religio-educational reforms, he strived to evade the decadence of the Muslims (...) ‘Abduh sought to revive religion and purify it of unfamiliar things” (Hamid 2).

The two of them organized a secret Muslim society, which focused on the unity and reform of Islam. Even though the extent of the society remained quite obscure, it is clear that under its auspices one of the most influential Arabic periodical came to be, which was devoted to an exhaustive analysis of the weaknesses that Islam had and advocated for ways to overcome them. The language used belonged to ‘Abduh, while the thoughts were al-Afghānī’s. Over the course of the years, their relationship started to deteriorate as al-Afghānī became more preoccupied with the political destiny of Islam, whereas ‘Abduh was more interested in a reform that would focus on education and religion. Muhammad ‘Abduh is regarded as the “father of Islamic modernism” (Hamid 1) and is ranked among the epitomes of the modern Muslim world. His most celebrated theological work, *Risālah al-tawḥīd*<sup>1</sup>, in which he attempted, perhaps for the first time in the modern history of Islam, “to construct a kind of systematized and humanist theology consistent with modern concepts (...) he tried to reformulate the fundamental positions of Islam in not too technical terms as far as possible” (Yusuf 360). Some of the main themes he focused on are the Unity of God (*tawḥīd*), the foundation of morals, prophethood, the Qur’an, and the religion of Islam in general: “‘Abduh did not make any significant attempt to break away from orthodox Islam, and his definition of *tawḥīd* signifies his attitude and respect” (Yusuf 360).

‘Abduh called for social reform which would be achieved through independent thinking. He strived to dismantle the *taqlid* (blind following) and to instill the urgent need of combining the traditional with the modern (Khan et al. 67). In order to achieve this, he realized that he had to target Al-Azhar University; if it would go through a reform, then it would set the tone for Muslim education everywhere. Al-Azhar University

---

<sup>1</sup> “Treatise on the Unity of God” (Yusuf 360).



is a public university in Cairo and it is the oldest and most renowned center for Islamic studies and it is regarded as a legendary hub of Islamic education in the Muslim world, as its graduates are the most enlightened scholars on all matters Islamic. Undoubtedly, Al-Azhar University has been a flourishing center of learning, but over the course of time, it lost much of its vitality and was reduced to a position where it could not play an active role in the regeneration of society: “The syllabi were reduced to a sterile repetition of scholastic medieval dogma. The traditional sciences – based on divine revelation and, therefore exempt from any criticism – became finally established as the basis of Azharite study” (Yusuf 360-1). Muhammad ‘Abduh fiercely criticized *taqlid*, the practice of imitating the earlier ‘*ulama*, and instead he shifted the focus on *ijtihād* and on the fundamental sources of the religion – the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. He enrolled there to study for four years and after his graduation he spent the next two years teaching there. During that period, he realized that he was not at all satisfied with its *modus operandi* as he thought that the curricula was outdated. Around that time, he started to be influenced by the Pan-Islamist Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī “who had received the unequivocal fame as the daring champion of religious and political freedom for the people of the East” (Hamid 2).

The traditional sciences that were a part of the curricula for a long period of time included theology, jurisprudence, *ḥadīth* and Sufism. To these, rational sciences were added, which were relegated somewhere in the background, and included philosophy, rhetoric, logic and astronomy – however, the purpose of the latter was restricted solely to finding out the precise times for the five prayers, or for the beginning of the lunar months (Yusuf 361), but so far as secular education was concerned, it was completely disregarded. Muhammad ‘Abduh wished to transform this center of learning into a place where Egyptians could embrace the Western learning style and sciences alongside the knowledge of Islam and its glorious past; a dream which came to life as he is credited for widening the tendencies of Al-Azhar to include a more open and liberal approach to studying Islam. In doing so, he managed to prove his fundamental belief that Islam and modernity are not an idealistic, unachievable desire for the Muslim people, but that it could be attainable, and more importantly, that it could be implemented without affecting the sacred integrity of religion – Islam could have a place in the new world.

‘Abduh, in the simplest terms, was a skilled architect of Islamic renewal. If al-Afghānī’s response to the British rule in Egypt and to European colonization in general

was Pan-Islamism, then Abduh preferred to find a balance between the two worlds and come up with a solution that would not impose the complete relegation of the other. As such, there was an immediate conflict to tackle, one between religion and science as he considered that the Muslim community was too rigid in regards to them. In his view, out of all the religions, Islam was the friendliest towards science and so Muslims could implement in the education of their society European sciences without a complete abandonment of religion. It is important to mention the fact that reason (*'aql*) occupies an important place in the Islamic tradition as it is the most crucial means of attaining knowledge and, generally, Muslim scholars considered the religion-science relationship in a positive light. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Muslim world fell behind the West when it came to the advancement in science and technology mainly because of many military defeats, which sparked intense discussions amongst the Muslim intellectuals about Islam and its true connection with science: “the idea that Islam is not an obstacle to advancement was one of the most significant subjects among the Islamist discussions in that period” (Çoruh 2). In his commentaries, ‘Abduh highlights and demonstrates that there are many Quranic verses that celebrate reason and shed a positive light on science and in this respect Islam is very open towards science in general. ‘Abduh relied on reason (Enlightenment reason) in his attempt to reconcile scientific discoveries with the Islamic revelation.

### **Modernity in the context of Postcolonialism – Gamal Abdel Nasser**

Under colonial rule, Egypt experienced the clash of two antagonistic narratives: the first projected a positive light over religion and society and depicted them as being civilized and open to modernization, while the second one confined the Muslims into a restrained vision of savagery (Kosba 107). May Kosba utilized the anthropological concept of “liminality” to deconstruct the paradoxical rise of Western Islamophobia in a Muslim majority country such as Egypt and in doing so she unveiled the ways in which colonialism has contributed to its complexity. In her study, she also approached the concept of “de-Islamization” positing the notion of Muslim dissociation from “negative stereotypes of Islam”, which more often than not also came with a conversion to Christianity (Kosba 108). Her main argument is that under the colonial rule, the Egyptians were forced to abandon their core values through a white-washing mechanism

instilled by the Europeans, which in turn diminished their identity to a mere liminal one. In the context of the colonial rule, Islamophobia thrived, as it was a product of Orientalist discourses and thought. The “us” versus “them” polarity shrunk the Muslims to an inferior scale, which in turn led to the establishment of “liminality” at the core of their identity, because “Orientalist practices can be internalized by the colonized” (Kosba 111). These binary discourses which always drew comparisons between what was understood as the superior West world and what was understood as its lesser Eastern competitor, with its restraining and outdated beliefs, have led both to the engenderment of the liminal identity and to the urgent necessity to shatter these prejudiced conceptions. Therefore, the need to cut ties with the West and to reshape Egypt as a country fully capable of supporting its people arose and soon enough this vision would be brought to life.

Although Egypt gained its independence in 1922, the speck of colonial influence lasted until 1956 when the last British soldier would leave the Egyptian land. If the doors for Western whitewashing of Egyptian history were flung open by Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, then Gamal Abdel Nasser would be the one to shut them closed. Nasser is seen as an inspiring figure, the definition of the right man who arrived at the right time; a brilliant orator who addressed his people using the familiar colloquial Egyptian instead of the distant modern standard Arabic with its classical overtones. His claim was that Egypt had suffered under the British rule for more than a century and that Western capitalism robbed them of their wealth and dignity: “the pathway toward power in the Middle East and toward a solution of the vexing Arab-Israeli problem was through an Egyptian-led Pan-Arab unity” (Tignor 260). Nasser was a member of the Free Officers Group, a secret organization established most probably in 1949, which seized power in 1952. Their purpose focused toward a diagnosis of Egypt’s “weaknesses” and their active search for solutions (Tignor 257). From this group, Nasser was destined to emerge as the leader. However, a significant shortcoming of these young military officers was their lack of mastery in economic matters, which became known on various occasions. One of the most promising projects that Nasser envisioned was a construction of a dam, one that would be completely controlled by Egypt, but this endeavor necessitated foreign assistance. Nasser asked the Americans for help and they openly expressed their concerns regarding the magnitude of the project and that it would represent a serious

financial strain for the country. The US being their primary source of support, Egypt relied on their help, but the American government took a different approach when it came to their relationship – they made sure that the country would continue to be dependent on their help for as long as possible. This matter took a drastic turn in 1955 when the Egyptian government purchased arms from Czechoslovakia, a Soviet bloc country; a move that stunned the Western powers, as the United States was amongst the few that actually sent aids into the country. Upon closer examination, this example highlights very suggestively the relationship that Egypt had with the Cold War superpowers. It is easy to see why the Egyptians turned to the Soviets, because the West availed them little of everything, including weaponry.

The American secretary of state at the time, John Foster Dulles, decided to teach the Egyptians a lesson in Cold War diplomacy and withdrew their financial support for the High Dam project; his reasoning being very subtle. In a statement he claimed that the actual reason for doing so was that they were worried the project was financially too overwhelming for the Egyptians; a valid concern, but beyond that, Dulles wanted to make of Egypt an example for the Middle East and let everyone know the consequences of a flirtation with the Soviet Union (Tignor 266). Even though this was a major impediment in the construction of the dam, during the Nasserist rule, the project would eventually concretize, and it would prove to be a pivotal point in Egypt's industrialization efforts.

Undoubtedly, this was Nasser's biggest economical achievement and Egypt received the finances necessary for its construction mostly from the USSR. On 26 July 1956, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal and they followed this triumph with some apparently very impressive Pan-Arab political gains, which happened in 1958 when Syria and Egypt joined forces to form the United Arab Republic. But, only three years later, it would dissolve as the Syrians claimed that the Egyptians treated them as second-class citizens (Tignor 272). In the Nasserist period, another achievement was set in motion and that one had its focus on gender discrimination and the emancipation of women. He was not the first to advocate for such changes, before him Muhammad 'Abduh demanded equality between the sexes and he wanted women to be able to have access to education just as much as men did. In 1956, "women were granted the right to vote and hold public office; subsequent measures abolished formal gender

discrimination in hiring, established social protections for working mothers, and guaranteed women's equal access to higher education" (Bier 3). These measures were an extension of Islamic Modernism under Nasserist rule, which further proved that Muslim countries and Islam as a religion could be compatible with modernity. The woman question remained a prevalent discussion in the post-1952 period and by granting them legal rights, the Nasserist regime was portrayed as an agent of women's emancipation and, subsequently, of modernity under the Muslim Egyptian rules and values rather than Western ideals.

### **Conclusion**

The course of modernity in Egypt experienced its difficulties, but it began to take shape in the postcolonial era. Colonialism in Egypt was marked by an intense sense of inferiority given by Islam's apparent inability of fitting into a modern context and was augmented by the Orientalist thought and discourses. Islam's place started to be questioned, as it seemed that Islamic modernism was an idealistic oxymoron, one that could not materialize. This culminated in the identity crisis and soon the specters of Islamophobia and de-Islamization started to grow roots in the Muslim Egyptian community. The intellectuals at the time acknowledged this serious threat and decided to address it at once. Muhammad 'Abduh was definitely a force of this reform movement and through his systematic work he proved that Islam could have a place in the new modern world – the decline that was previously felt started to dwindle little by little and the Egyptians regained their sense of self.

In the Nasserist period, Egypt erased the traces of colonialism in their country and began to make steps to regain their national self. If Muhammad 'Abduh was responsible for the renewal and reintegration of Egypt's Muslim identity, then Nasser was the one that reshaped Egypt's national identity on a global scale. His reforms culminated with the High Dam Project, a leap towards modernity on Egyptian's terms that helped forward society. The course of modernity in Islamic spaces is extremely complex and all the various types of discourses that have contributed to it would require an exhaustive analysis. Its branches spread across time and space, and the scholars and intellectuals who contributed to it come from various background and propose a wide range of ideologies and ways to fuse Islam with modernity. Muhammad 'Abduh is one of many,

but his contributions opened the door to a whole different spectrum of possibilities. The East and the West experienced and welcomed modernity under different auspices and the sparks of this movement definitely differ. So, where does Islam fit into the new world? The relentless quest for an answer to this question is what enabled Muslim thinkers to update Islam to a modern context, without invalidating its integrity and core values; however, the question remains relevant today.

**References:**

- Bier, Laura. *Revolutionary Womanhood Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Hakan Çoruh. "Relationship between Religion and Science in the Muslim Modernism", *Theology and Science*, vol. 18, issue 1, 2020, pp. 152-161.
- Hamid, Zubair. "Muslim response to the West: A comparative study of Muhammad 'Abduh and Said Nursi". *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 4, issue 2, 2019, p. 1-8.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Age of the World Picture", in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt, Garland Publishing, 1977, pp. 115-154.
- Khalid Masud, Muhammad. "Islamic Modernism". *Islam and Modernity. Key Issues and Debates*, edited by Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 237-260.
- Khan, Anas Ameer et al. "Muhammad Abduh's Contributions to Modernity." *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education of the International Islamic University Malaysia*, 1.1, 2012, pp. 63-75.
- Kosba, May. "Paradoxical Islamophobia and Postcolonial Cultural Nationalism in Post-Revolutionary Egypt". *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies*, edited by Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2019, pp. 107-124.
- Masud, Muhammad Khalid, et al., editors. *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Tignor, Robert L. *Egypt: A Short History*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Yusuf, Aasia. "Islam and Modernity: Remembering the Contribution of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905)." *ICR Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2012, pp. 355-369.