

Tanwīr

Arabic Enlightenment

Introduction

Tanwīr is derived from the word *nūr/anwār* (light/lights) and means illumination or spreading light. *Tanwīr* later became a synonym for Enlightenment. It is a multifaceted concept that embeds temporality of meanings, which transforms depending on changes in contexts and times. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the term was frequently used and had many religious and nonreligious philosophical connotations and interpretations. In the nineteenth century, the term inflated significantly, indicating socio-cultural and political movement that often referred to the French context. In the early twentieth century, this meaning of *tanwīr* was barely used and in the second half of the twentieth century, it evolved to signify an Arab intellectual movement and a philosophical position on religion, society and culture.

Origins of the concept of tanwīr

The word *nūr* was used in the ancient and medieval religions of southern and eastern Mediterranean to delineate the relationship between divinity and light in which God reveals himself to man. In Islam, The word *tanwīr* was not mentioned in the *Qur'ān* but the word *nūr* is used in several verses to indicate, among other things, revelation, prophesy and God (for example, Q: 2:257, 4:174, 5:15, 6:91, 24:35). *Nūr* was employed in these contexts to mark the transition from darkness to the light of religion. Many verses in the *Qur'ān* constituted fertile ground

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for the emergence of medieval doctrines derived from the concept of *nūr* and prior nineteenth century, *nūr* was strongly associated with the light of religious or nonreligious philosophical knowledge (de Boer, 1986; al-Tahanawi, 1996a, pp. 1731–1732; Kaffawi, 1998, pp. 617–620; Ibn Manzur, 2004, pp. 379–381).

In the early nineteenth century, the concept that comprises the notion of spreading light with the meaning of religious or philosophical knowledge was still frequently used. However, some Arabic-speaking contemporaries acknowledged the connection between the notion of spreading light with the eighteenth-century French concept of Enlightenment. In 1801, with the French evacuation of Egypt, some of the refugees who left to France and called themselves the “Egyptian Delegation” used the term “enlightenment” in its French interpretation. Group members who corresponded with the French and the British trying to convince them to support their plan for the “independence of Egypt”, used “enlightenment” in political context to connote movement that aims for cultural project:

“Nothing would be more glorious and magnanimous for them [for the European powers] than to dispel, by a simple stroke of politics, the darkness of ignorance and barbarism that covers these famous countries that were the birthplace of our *enlightenment*, of our sciences, of our arts, and in a word the ancient center of civilization from which it spread to us through the Greeks. If Egypt, which was so prosperous in the past, cannot excite the gratitude, may it at least excite the pity of European powers so that it could, when restored to itself, be pleasing to all the governments that covet it and thus cause trouble to none of them” (Haddad, 1970, p. 180).

Enlightenment embeds the French concept that considered Egypt as an integral part of Greek-Roman history. It presents a perception of the past and of the future, which results in a complete interweaving of Egypt and France in a shared culture, history and destiny. Ideas derived from the French concept of Enlightenment, such as the autonomy of reason and science based on observation as the sole reliable method for knowledge, already became controversial in the onset of French rule in Egypt (1798-1801). Muslim and Christian Arabic-speaking scholars, depicted the French who uses these methods’ in their political and social policies as *ṭabā’i’iyya* (naturalists) and *dahriyya* or *dunyawiyya* (worldly) that temporarily indicated materialist sects non-affiliated with any monotheist religion. With these terms the Arabic speakers emphasized that the source of French knowledge of society and politics is not religious revelation. It is important to stress that the term “enlightenment” employed in the correspondence between the “Egyptian Delegation” with the British and the French was not in Arabic. Although the early nineteenth century witnessed the Arabic encounter with ideas of the French Enlightenment, mainly through translations from the Greek, the construction of meaning of *tanwīr* as a local philosophical position only took place later (al-Zubaydi, 1972, p. 349; al-Turk, 1990, p. 28; al-Tahanawi, 1996b, p. 800; al-Sharqawi, 1996, p. 122; al-Jabarti, 1998, p. 191; al-Shihabi, 2008, pp. 143–151; Hill, 2015, pp. 1–25).

Comprehensive conceptual transitions took place in the first half of the nineteenth century which was heavily influenced by developments in the field of technology. Southern and eastern Mediterranean countries witnessed the inauguration of modern print. Furthermore, the process of acculturation took institutional shape with formally dispatched student missions to Europe and the founding of a professional school for translation in Egypt in 1835. The institutionalization of translation profoundly impacted the production of knowledge in general; by breaking the monopoly of the religious sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-shar‘iyya*) over knowledge, the semantic field of the concept of science (*‘ilm*) absorbed modern disciplines and expanded significantly (al-Tahtawi, 1834b, p. 125). The 1830s and 1840s saw the first modern printed publications of

translated works in natural and exact sciences, social sciences, including classical and modern philosophy, and in ancient and modern history and geography. The vast interest in modern sciences conjoined with the rediscovery of the relevance of ancient Greek and medieval Muslim philosophy, Ibn Khaldun's social thought and several central figures of the French Enlightenment, especially Voltaire who received ample attention (at least four of Voltaire's works were translated into Arabic in the first half of the nineteenth century). In this context, the concept of *tanwīr* became highly identified with the distribution of "rational sciences" (*'ulūm 'aqliyya*) and appeared in titles such as the translation of César Chesneau Dumarsais' (d. 1756) work, *Tanwīr al-Mashriq bi- 'Ilm al-Mantiq* (Enlightenment of the East in the Science of Logic). It is worth noting that Dumarsais was a prominent scholar in the French Enlightenment and a contributor to Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie* (Dumarsais, 1838). This vast interest in irreligious sciences was accompanied by elaborations on the subject of Enlightenment written by Arabic speaking scholars who visited Europe and documented their experience in Arabic. The socio-cultural aspect of the French Enlightenment and its relation to the Arabic term *nūr* (light) can be seen in Rifā'a al-Tahtawi's famous description of his trip to Paris, published in 1834. Al-Tahtawi used the phrase *al-anwār wal-ma 'ārif* (the lights and knowledge) to denote a cultural concept that contrasted with the clerics' values. He further elaborated the meaning of *anwār* by situating the "Clerics" in a social and political category; while the Clerics and their proponents supported the idea of absolutism, the other group, which was comprised of philosophers, scientists (*al-falāsifa wal- 'ulamā'*) and most of the French population, advocated constitutional monarchy or republican regime (al-Tahtawi, 1834a, p. 125, 1834b, pp. 119, 124, 157).

Nahda and Enlightenment

During the second half of the nineteenth century, known as the *nahḍa* period, "*tanwīr*" or "*anwār*" (illumination or lights) became integral terms in local Arab cultural movement that advocated *tamaddun* (literally means civilization, being or becoming civilized) which marked the emergence of Arab modernity. In its temporal meaning, *tamaddun* denoted a comprehensive doctrine that contrasted with *tawāḥḥuṣh* (barbarism). This doctrine portrayed, at times with different parameters the ideals of the future and consisted of moral, social, cultural and political thought that analyzed, criticized and problematized the principles and values necessary for the progress of the Ottoman Arabic-speaking societies (Zachs, 2005, pp. 67–77, 2012, pp. 153–182). This intellectual movement that evolved within the political context of the *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) included prominent scholars such as Butrus al-Bustani, Khalil al-Khuri, Fransis al-Marash, Faris al-Shidyaq, Khayir al-Din al-Tunisi and al-Tahtawi. The group perceived knowledge and reason as a key for progress and strived to reassess the state of reason in reorganizing society and state. The assumption most characteristic of this generation's thinking was that true revelation does not necessarily contradict secular reason. In this spirit, Khair al-Din wrote his famous introduction that advocates the *Tanzimat* as reforms that integrate reason and religious laws, and similarly, al-Tahtawi criticized and then embraced the idea of natural law with the argument that rationalist deductions that are not based on religious reasoning rarely deviate from the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Butrus al-Bustani, a Christian Maronite who converted and became a devoted Protestant had similar ideas regarding the relation between reason and religion. In the context of the civil war in Syria in 1860, and in al-Bustani's criticism of religious fanaticism which he perceived to be the social root and reason for the war, he went further than his Muslim counterparts and fully embraced the idea of natural rights, arguing that without clear separation between the civil (*madanī*) and the religious (*dīnī*) realms, and without individualization of religious belief, the next round of violence would be a matter of time. In its domestic aspects, the movement of *tamaddun* used the term *nūr* (*anwār*, *tanwīr*) to denote the subject of distribution of knowledge and sciences as a key for acquiring a civilized, progressive and powerful society. Thus, phrases like *anwār al-tamaddun wal-ādāb* (light of civilization and literature), *nūr al-tamaddun* (light of civilization), *anwār al-taqaddum* (light of progress), *anwār al-ma 'ārif wal-funūn* (lights of knowledge and arts), *tanwīr al-dhihn* (illumination of intellect) became common (al-Tahtawi, 1834b, pp. 6–7; al-Shidyaq, 1871, pp.

3–411; al-Ahrām, 29/11/1878, al-Baṣṣir, 11/8/1881, 1881; al-Bustani, 1882, pp. 213–215; ‘Abdallah Marash, 1897, pp. 329–332; al-Tunisi, 1985, pp. 178–179, 194–198; B. al-Bustani, 1990a, pp. 45–53, 117; al-Bustani, 1990b, pp. 10, 15, 22–23, 57; F. F. Marash, 2004, pp. 309–310; al-Tahtawi, 2010, pp. 309–310, 501–502). The association between *tamaddun* as a cultural project (*branāmij*) with *nūr* (al-Tunisi, 1985, p. 178) was emphasized during the early years of the *nahḍa* with the emergence of phrases like *jīl al-ma‘rifa wal-nūr* and *jīl al-anwār* (enlightened generation), *shu‘ūb mutanawirra* (enlightened nations) and *‘aṣr al-anwār*, *‘aṣr al-nūr*, *qarn al-anwār* (age or century of enlightenment) (al-Bashīr, 3/9/1870, al-Bashīr, 21/11/1873, al-Bashīr, 5/12/1873; ‘Abdu, 1881; B. al-Bustani, 1990a, pp. 45–53; S. al-Bustani, 1870, p. 226). These phrases elevated the use of the term from a signifier that describes the process of the distribution of rational sciences (‘*ulūm ‘aqliyya*) as a crucial condition for the transition toward progress, to the subject of generational identification that indicate “generation that poses enlightened ideas” or an appellation of an “age”, using the term as synonym for *‘aṣr al-tamaddun* (age of civilization and progress). In 1881, the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahrām* articulated the relation between *nūr*, reason, science and *tamaddun*: “freedom is the light (*nūr*) of reason, reason is the father of science, science is a fruit of *tamaddun*” (*al-Ahrām*, 9/2/1881).

A counter-attack on Enlightenment values, including the autonomy of reason, individualism and the state of modern science as an authority for knowledge in nature, society and state came soon after the rise of the discourse of *tamaddun*. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who spent eight years in Egypt in the 1870s, was most critical of these ideas. Around 1880 he wrote his treatise on the *Refutation of the Materialists* in Persian which was translated to Arabic in 1885 by his disciple Muhammad ‘Abdu. Al-Afghani defined his subject of criticism with terms common among early critics of the French secular rationalism: *dahriyya* (worldly), *ṭabi‘iyya*, *nitshariyya* (naturalism) *matiryalism*, *māddiyya* (materialism) or in other words all groups who reject revelation as authority for knowledge. His critical attack on Enlightenment ideas started with the ancient Greek philosophers. He contended that their “germs” and “evil” ideas spread throughout the great Empires in history, causing their weakness, decline and collapse. Among the modern philosophers and natural scientists that he attacked are Darwin, Rousseau and Voltaire, two of whose works had been translated earlier to Arabic by the request of Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi (Voltaire, 1841, p. 4, 1850, pp. 2–3), and a group in the Ottoman community who promoted “new age” ideas. All these, he argued, are enemies of religion. His position on the state of secular reason also dictated Muhammad ‘Abdu’s perceptions of state and society (al-Afghani, 1885; al-Afghani & ‘Abdu, 2002, pp. 103–106). Muhammad ‘Abdu, who assumed that the Muslims’ principles of progress are encapsulated within the Islamic scriptures, elevated the use of Islamic reasoning (*ijtihād*) as a key for the revival of the Islamic civilization. The profound need to restore Islamic rationalism was manifest in the first edition of *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* (1897) in which he uses the early rationalists’ theology of *al-Mu‘tazila*, to understand Islam, including the defense of their controversial doctrine of *Khalq al-Qur’ān* (the created Qur’ān), ascribing reason as a central methodology for religious knowledge. In subsequent editions he removed his comments that presented an obvious preference for *al-Mu‘tazila* rationalism apparently due to the Sunni ‘Ulama especially the Ash‘aris’ sensitivities, who regarded al-Mu‘tazila doctrine as *bid‘a* (innovation, which in this context means a belief that has no precedent in the time of the prophet). The limitation of his rational Islamic perceptions on society and state can be seen in his debate with Farah Antun in 1902 and 1903, especially on the subjects of individualism and tolerance. In his counter-argument, ‘Abdu rejected the liberal interpretation of tolerance that relies on individualization of religious belief and separation between the civil and the religious spheres. He contended that Islam differed from Christianity in that it contains no hierarchic institution as Church and Islam embeds internal norms of tolerance (Martin, Woodward, & Atmaja, 1997, pp. 129–135; Abu-‘Uksa, 2013; Antun, 2013).

Modernity, education, and rationalism

Although the words *anwār* and *tanwīr* were rarely used as historical period or as appellations for local intellectual movement, by the early twentieth century forms that derived from the term *nūr* were significant in the discourse of modernity. They were used to indicate the process of spreading knowledge by education and portrayed a program in which emancipation from a state of ignorance would lead to progress and civilization. Those who espoused universal parameters for progress and those who advocated Islamic particular parameters used this conception; they both continued to foster the forms of the ideas of rationalism, individualism and tolerance in their social and political thinking. Among the prominent intellectuals who promote these ideas in the social field was the Iraqi Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi, especially in his works that championed the women's rights. In an article he published in 1924, he argued: "[the Eastern women] and I [especially] mean the one who wear hijab should adopt from her sister, the Western women, the tradition of undressing hijab [*sufūr*]. She have to tear her hijab that locked her by ignorant and blocked the light [*nūr*] from her" (al-Zahawi, 1924, pp. 49–52). Other works which promoted progressive principles in the political field from within the Islamic religious discourse were *Islam and the Foundations of Governance*, by the Egyptian Azhari cleric, 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq. In this work published in 1925, he applied religious argument advocating secular perception to the state of "Islamic" governance. He argued that the Caliphate institution was not an integral part of Islamic doctrine and was political and not religious form of governance ('Abd al-Raziq, 1925). In 1926, in the field of literature and religion, Taha Husayn wrote *On Pre-Islamic Poetry*. There he undermined the idea of the authenticity of the early Arabic poetry arguing instead that it was a consequence of scholarly efforts from later periods (Husayn, 1926). In 1953, in the field of philosophy, the Egyptian Zaki Najib Mahmud wrote *The Myth of Metaphysics* in which he criticized the role metaphysics fills in social and political systematic thinking (Mahmud, 1953). All these works promoted rationalist deduction and relied on the assumption of crucial necessity for undermining traditionalism. The conservative scholars' strong reaction, followed by the authorities, was largely the reason for the re-evaluation and retreatment of these last three scholars from the arguments they held in their works.

The revolutionary (*thawrī*) leftist discourse that dominated the Arab intellectual thought during the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, identified *tanwīr* with pre-World War II liberal traditions. The leftist intellectuals constructed the meaning of *tanwīr* as a signifier of this particular period in Arab history that was dominated by intellectual movement that nurtured individualism, rationalism and tolerance as religious and social values. These positivist leftist intellectuals thought of *tanwīr* only as an early stage in the course of progress toward comprehensive national liberation and socialism; they perceived the Arab progressive liberal thought that preceded Nasserism, Ba'athism and socialism as reformist which was surpassed by the left's quest for revolution. In 1966, the Egyptian philosopher 'Uthman Amin elaborated on the relation between the revolutionary left and *tanwīr*: "the declaration of liberation that we are evidencing today is advancing in many fields. It is a natural outcome of the activist pioneers conscious rational endeavor whose subject was enlightenment (*tanwīr*) but its purpose was liberation (*tahrīr*)" (Amin, 1966, pp. 57–61). Revolutionary discourse adapted the social and religious content to *tanwīr* locating its intellectual heritage in its "progressive" (*taqaddumī*) struggle against the reactionary (*raj'īyya*) forces of "darkness". For Marxists, enlightenment meant a constant liberation of human positivist and secularist reason from the domination of superstition and irrational fatalism of traditionalism (*taqlīd*). This group thought of religious and social traditionalism as a major obstacle in Arab progress into modern society. Sadiq Jalal al-'Azam, one of the prominent Marxists of the 1960s, identified traditionalist and religious ideologies with "false consciousness", with "theoretical weapon" of the Arab "reactionaries" and Western imperialism in their war against the progressive Arab forces of liberation (al-'Azam, 1969, pp. 7–14).

Enlightenment's discourse, Reason, and Islam

The 1970s saw the decline of revolutionary thought and the beginning of Islamist revivalism (*al-ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*). In the next three decades, the term *tanwīr* transformed into a signifier for contemporary intellectual orientation and a subject of philosophical identification ("proponent of enlightenment", *mutanawwirūn*, *tanwiriyyūn*). Increasingly *tanwīr* was used to denote intellectual movement that contested the intensified politicization of Islam and the quest to implement shari'a laws. Most of the intellectuals who engaged in works identified with the *Tanwīr* were liberals, former socialists, marxists, and pan-Arab nationalists who viewed Islamic fundamentalism as "dark thought" (*fikr ḡalāmī*) opposed to free thinking. Jabir 'Asfur, a prominent Egyptian champion of *Tanwīr*, elaborated the principles and ideational background in which the intellectual movement of *Tanwīr* emerged:

"The modern state that we imagine to be shading us did not acquire the modern level that preserve and protect civil society. Forces motivated by hostility to civil society increasingly penetrate its institutions. Practices of reason [*ʿaql*] were replaced by traditions of transmission [*naql*] and the slogans of traditionalism eliminate, almost entirely, the dreams of creativity. Religious reasoning [*ijtihād*] was replaced by tradition [*taqlīd*], science was replaced by superstitions, tolerance chased by fanaticism, and the logic of dialog transformed to logic of dictation. The civil state that we dreamed of is undermined by the calls for theocracy, not because of the power of these demands, but due to the weakness of the foundations of the civil state itself" ('Asfur, 1994, pp. 9–10).

This statement summarizes to a great extent the social, political and religious subject of the movement of *Tanwīr*. The intellectual attempt to undermine the theoretical premises underpinning the discourse of political Islam was accompanied by great interest in medieval Islamic rationalist traditions, especially al-Mu'tazila and Ibn Rushd. The last was highly utilized to combat the common assumption that philosophical reason and Islam are incompatible. The preoccupation in medieval religious Islam heritage of Islam (frequently denoted by the word *turāth*) by using methodology derived from social sciences was utilized for advocating freedom of rational investigation, civil state, equality and socio-religious tolerance. These principles were all presented as values, illuminating their historical depth in Islamic religion and culture. Leftists and former socialists, among them the Egyptian 'Atif al-'Iraqi, the Syrian Tayyib Tizini and the Moroccan Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, expressed deep interest in "Averroism". Among this group, al-Jabiri identified in the thought of Ibn Rushd seeds for building the Arab or Muslim version of modernity which he termed "contemporaneity" (*mu'āṣara*). He was responsible for the republication of a series of books by Ibn Rushd, including works never before published in Arabic, as his *Commentary on Plato's Republic* which was translated from the sole surviving text which was in Hebrew (al-Jabiri, 1993, pp. 11–53; Kügelgen, 1996, pp. 97–132; Ibn Rushd, 1998). Muslim secular intellectuals including Muhammed Arkoun, Muhammad Talbi, Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi, Husayn Ahmad Amin, Sayyid al-Qimni, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and even Christians such as George Tarabishi, showed unprecedented interest beyond the preoccupation in *turāth* to fields of knowledge confined to traditional Islamic sciences, including the Qur'ān itself (Lee, 1997, pp. 143–174; Fluehr-Lobban, 1998, pp. 1–32; Esposito & Voll, 2001, pp. 68–90; Nettler, 2006, pp. 225–239; M. Kermani, 2006, pp. 1–28; N. Kermani, 2006, pp. 169–192; Tarabishi, 2008a). Among the prominent works that aimed to undermine orthodox medievalist dogmas, to deconstruct the relationship between political power and religion and to pose an alternative understanding to the Qur'ān's traditionalist concept were Muhammed Arkoun's collection *Lectures du Coran* written in the years 1970-1982 (published in Arabic in 2001) and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's *The Concept of the Text: Study in Qur'anic Sciences* which he wrote in the 1980s (Abu Zayd, 1990, 2000, p. 66; Arkoun, 1982, 2005). Both scholars emphasized the historical aspect in the structure of the Qur'anic

text and thus distinguished between the divine and textual linguistic phenomena as justification for scientific scrutiny of the Qur'anic verses. They employed a variety of methodologies and arguments including reopening the medieval discussion on al-Mu'tazila's stance on the subject of "*Khalq al-Qur'ān*" (Gunther, 2006, pp. 125–167; N. Kermani, 2006, pp. 169–192; Abu-'Uksa, 2011, p. 174).

Arkoun's preoccupation in the discourse of enlightenment exceeds the topic of Islam. He argues that not only in Islam did modern thought fail to replace the dogmatic perception of "true religion": it "failed to distribute modern enlightenment [*anwār*] and thus abandoning taboo mentality, accusations in apostasy and religious wars and replacing it by humanist and open mentality" (Arkoun, 2005, p. 6). He endeavoured to transform the theological idealism of the dogmatic conception of revelation in the three monotheist religions into a critical understanding which integrated in one "anthropological approach". Arkoun argued that the Mediterranean culture of Islam had already witnessed humanism in the ninth and tenth centuries and thus shared with the "West" the history of humanism. In *Toward a Historical Solidarity of the People of the Mediterranean*, Arkoun argued for Mediterranean humanism, advocating a "new" concept of politics that surpassed the imaginary clashes between the "West" and "Islam" or between the three monotheist religions. In applying anthropological methodology to understanding religion, he crystallized the concept "societies of the book" which integrate Islam within the anthropological study of Christianity and Judaism, emphasizing his attempt to initiate a comparative study of revelations and justify understanding the monotheist Mediterranean religions as part of one homogenous phenomenon (Abu-'Uksa, 2011, pp. 171–188; Arkoun, 2011, pp. 153–170).

The use of *tanwīr* in intellectual discourse that is identified with secularism triggered controversies with Islamist scholars and activists. Muhammad 'Imara, former leftist and prominent Islamist scholar who republished the works of nineteenth-century Muslim reformers including Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Muhammad 'Abdu and a publisher of *Rifa'a al-Tahtawi: Pioneer of Tanwīr in the Modern Era* ('Imara, 1984), advocated the Islamic concept of *tanwīr* (*tanwīr Islāmī*). Perceiving himself the disciple of the reform movement in Islam, he argued that all the early Islamic reformers rejected the secular idea of separation between Islam and politics. 'Imara attacked the movement of *Tanwīr*, depicted its proponents as "enlightened secularists" (*tanwiriyyūn 'almāniyyūn*) and contended that their ideas were foreign and constituted an integral part of the "Western" attack on the religion of Islam. He associated *tanwīr* with cultural invasion and "civilizational collaboration" (*'māla ḥaḍāriyya*) with the West arguing that Western Enlightenment evolved in the particular context of Western-Christian history and as a reaction to Church oppression. Relying on Muhammad 'Abdu's argument that Islam, unlike Christianity, did not have a Church, 'Imara criticizes Muslim scholars 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq and Taha Husayn for trying to "depose Islam from the lives of Muslims" (*'azl dīn al-Islām 'an dunyā al-Muslimīn*) by making it into a religion confined to the individual-God relationship ('Imara, 2002, pp. 5–35, 39, 96). Muhammad Zaquq, who held the position of Minister of Religious Endowments (*awqāf*) in Egypt, advocated 'Imara's concept, arguing that the Islamic particular perception of *tanwīr* "combines religion and reason, whereas the European Enlightenment upheld reason and ignored religion" (Najjar, 2004, pp. 200–201; Abaza, 2010, pp. 36–37).

In the 1990s, the use of *Tanwīr* as an appellation for a cultural project evidenced broad widespread interest that went beyond the intellectual preoccupation to the civic-social associations. Many activities including the establishment associations, organization of public lectures, public play, TV and radio programs, publications of books and pamphlets were initiated in the name of *Tanwīr*. In 1990, the International Book Fair in Cairo was named "One Hundred Years of *Tanwīr*" also indicating a hundred years for the inauguration of the *al-Hilāl* periodical. In 1992, Egyptian intellectuals founded "The Enlightenment Association" (*jam'iyyat al-Tanwīr*) which published a bulletin also called *Al-Tanwīr*. The intellectual activity of *Tanwīr* reached the Gulf States with the foundation of associations such as "*Tanwīr* Center for Culture" (*Markaz Tanwīr*

lil-Thaqāfa) in Kuwait (2001) and “The Forum Association” (*Jam‘iyyat al-Muntada*) in Bahrain (2005). A significant landmark in the institutionalization of inter-Arab cooperation on the subject of *Tanwīr* was the foundation of “The Arabic Institution for Modernization of Thought” following a meeting in 2002 between Libyan businessman Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mutalib al-Huni with Muhammed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and other scholars. This institution stressed the humanist and enlightened traditions in Arab culture and included, beside Arkoun and Abu Zayd, prominent scholars such as George Tarabishi, Hazim al-Biblawi, ‘Aziz al-‘Azma, Jalal Sadiq al-‘Azam, Kamal ‘Abd al-Latif, al-‘Afif al-Akhdar and many others. The institution failed however to continue in its activity and was replaced in 2007 by “The Arab Rationalists Association”.

The appellation *Tanwīr* was used in several contexts in the 1990s and the 2000s. Political regimes used *Tanwīr* to gain legitimacy, as well as a counter argument and “weapon” for confronting Islamist opposition, politically and culturally (see Abaza, 2002, pp. 32–46; Najjar, 2004, pp. 200–201; Alleaume, 1994, pp. 67–90). In 2003, several Arab scholars identified with this idea, made moral use of *Tanwīr* in their attempt to legitimize United States invasion to Iraq and the destruction of the Ba‘th regime (al-Nabulsi, 2005, pp. 9–28).

In the years prior to the 2010 upheavals in Tunisia that spread to other Arab countries, proponents of *Tanwīr* published pessimist assessments as to the future of their project in the Arab countries. In 2007, Hashim Salih, Syrian philosopher, disciple of Arkoun and his main translator into Arabic, published *The Historical Deadlock: Why Did the Tanwīr Project Fail in the Arab World?* arguing that the time had come to leave the “Middle Ages” that still dominated the cultural sphere in the Arab-Islamic countries (Salih, 2007, pp. 11–37; Di-Capua, 2012, pp. 177–179). In 2006, his Syrian counterpart, George Tarabishi wrote in *Heresies*, that his work was an attempt to resist an environment dominated by intellectual oppression of the religious discourse. As part of his advocacy on the premises of *Tanwīr*, he composed an essay defending secularism and separation between religion and politics. Tarabishi attacked the association Islamists made between “secularism” and cultural imperialism. He returned to Muhammad ‘Abdu’s thesis that Islam does not have a Church, arguing that secularism is an internal Islamic need, which without it there will be no social peace, tolerance and co-existence between the different Muslim sects (Sunni and Shi‘i Islam) and groups. Tarabishi criticized the conclusions reached in the contemporary discourse of *Tanwīr*, arguing that in the last decades, *Tanwīr* is returning to the topics discussed one or two centuries earlier, but with less progressive and less tolerant conclusions (Hazran, 2011, pp. 192–202; Tarabishi, 2006, pp. 65–70, 2008b, pp. 9–96). Tarabishi began and ended pessimistically on the state of *Tanwīr*, outlining his expectations for the twenty-first century: This is “the age of the reaction of the Arabs – and the Muslims in general – toward the new Middle Ages” (Tarabishi, 2006, p. 7).

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