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Contesting Older Boundaries of Historical Thinking: A Rereading of the Arab Nahda

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

In European Studies

by

Ahmad (Edward) Shaykh El-Najjarine

Thesis Committee:

Professor Ian Coller

Professor John Smith

Professor Mark LeVine

2021

Dedication

To those who believe in me...

"Someday soon, you're gonna have families of your own and if you're lucky, you'll remember the little moments like this, that we're good."

(Anthony Soprano

The Sopranos)

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Acknowledgments

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In the end, my intellectual journey owes its debt to a plethora of scholars, some whom I never met and some who were born in an altogether different century.

Abstract of the thesis

Contesting Older Boundaries of Historical Thinking: A Rereading of the Arab Nahda

by

Ahmad (Edward) Shaykh El-Najjarine

Masters of Art in European Studies

University of California, Irvine 2021

Professor Ian Coller, Chair

This thesis problematizes the capitulation tale of the Nahda by showing how Nahdawis in the earlier phase of the Arab Renaissance voiced autonomy, self assurance, and optimism. To strengthen its argument, the dissertation utilizes the example of Rifa'a Al Tahtawi who represented to some degree the wider attitude of Nahda's 1st generation elites set against the Nahda of the later generation who voiced ambivalence and angst. Other presuppositions the essay challenges pertain to the outdated historical methodologies that are often laden in orientalist, Islamist and postcolonial literature.

Introduction

Shortly before his assassination in his booby-trapped Alfa Romeo as he was heading to work in 2005, journalist Samir Kassir (1960-2005) wrote an essay in which he detailed the reasons that created the "Arab Malaise". This French-Palestinian-Lebanese author--whose cause of death is attributed to the Syrian regime--articulated the discontent that plagued the Arabs in the 21st century as their region was--and remains--swamped by inept and autocratic rulers. In his words:

> It's not pleasant being Arab these days. Feelings of persecution for some, self hatred for others; a deep disquiet pervades the Arab world. Yet the Arab world hasn't always suffered such a malaise.[1]

In respect to the eras when Arabs were not yet suffocated by humiliation, Kassir was undoubtedly referring to the two periods often remembered by contemporary Middle Easterners; the first---according to the Arab journalist---comprised the first five centuries after the ascendancy of Islam, and the second was the Arab Nahda--- the subject of this essay. In his final volume to his work *History of Arabic Letters*, the prolific writer, Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914)--- long before Kassir--- had too differentiated the 'recent nahda' from the earlier one attributed to the Abbasids[2]. The Nahda--- a distinct term popularized by Zaydan himself--- was to Kassir a time of great expectations if not greatness, and began in the 19th century:

> The cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century, the famous nahda, illuminated many Arab societies.[3]

For Samir Kassir and others like him, the Arab Nahda was a source of pride because it molded a unique secular modern *zeitgeist* in the region. In addition to that, the age of the Nahda was

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[1] Samir Kassir, "Foreword," in *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2013).
[2] Hannah Scott Deuchar, '"Nahda": Mapping a Keyword in Cultural Discourse', Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics 37 (2017): 50–84.
[3] Samir Kassir, "Foreword," in *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2013).

permeated by the creation of new cultural institutions. Kassir identified the founding of the world's third oldest film industry by Egypt, including the presence of artists, poets, literary figures, and musicians whose ideas typified the spirit of the age. Stated differently, the Arab renaissance to the assassinated author was pivotal because of its changes it brought to society be it the spread of education or the resurrection of women from relative obscurity. This was also the age where Arab intellectuals innovated, be it in their employment of print instead of manuscripts, their confrontation with new epistemes typically that of the West or their production of intellectual notions not wholly religious. Simultaneously, the spirit of the age according to Kassir led Arabs to play prominent political roles during the twentieth century, after colonialism:

> Nasser's Egypt, for instance, one of the pillars of Afro Asianism and the subsequent Non-Alignment movement; independent Algeria, the driving force of the entire African continent; or the Palestinian resistance which was called on to further the cause of democratic rights without succumbing to the ideology of victimhood now so prevalent.[4]

Yet this unique era to which Samir Kassir felt enthralled by was in his days heavily appropriated by Arab governments as a means to establish a unified camp of secularists against the 'barbaric' Islamists; in post Nasser Egypt, this process involved the co option by the government of a large segment of secular and leftist intellectuals[5]. Worse, the parlance of violence was targeted at Islamists-- a parlance that often transformed into actual killing legitimized by muftis and official sheikhs. This use and abuse of the Nahda was similarly embraced by Islamists in post Nasser Egypt who saw in the Islamic faith compatibility with reason and progress. In the words of Abaza:

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[4] Samir Kassir, "Foreword," in *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2013).
[5] Mona Abaza, 'The Trafficking with Tanwir (Enlightenment)', Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 30, no. 1 (2010), 34–6.

The same language, historical figures, and symbols are today dissected and torn apart by both camps. The struggle seems to be over the monopoly of a reinterpretation—claimed as the only authentic and legitimate reading.

The war between secular fundamentalists and religious fundamentalists was ultimately one over epistemological inclusion as well as the desire to hijack spheres in the political and public realm. Neither Arab regimes, nor their 'unenlightened' enemies, were progressives to journalist Samir Kassir, however, and no longer was 'contentment' a predicament of the people as was the case before when "Arabs could look to the future with optimism". Interestingly enough, the association of optimism with the Nahda was embraced decades earlier by a young Syrian poet---Khalil Al Khuri (1836-1907)---whose words on January the 1st, 1858, introduced the Arab renaissance:

Arise: see how the universe orders itself by design, witness the age, how it smiles with refinement![6]

Those words were articulated in Khuri's first issue of his newspaper *Hadiqat Al Akhbar.* In light of the great transformations that were occurring during Khuri's time--- transformations alluded to by Kassir in his book--it is hardly surprising why those remarks were made. Indeed, the Syrian poet's announcement in 1858 coincided with the growth of the port city of Beirut--- a city that had become the main port of what was then Greater Syria, and a locus point from which steamships sailed to Egypt and Europe. Khuri's proclamations also coincided with the rise in affluence amongst the local merchants of Beirut---Syrian Christians, Jews, and Muslims---who were selling fine silk to Europe in return for European products. The initiations of various reforms such as the Hatt-i Humayun edict of 1856 that promised equality in education, government appointments, and the administration of justice to all, and the wider reforms of the

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[6] Khalil Khuri, "Al- Asr Al-Jadīd," *Hadiqat Al Akhbar*, January 1, 1858.

Tanzimat also explained the optimism of Khalil Al Khuri including the flourishing of the arts and sciences. From newspapers--- such as Khuri's first privately funded gazette in the Arab world---to Arab theatres, schools run by non-Arab missionaries, scientific and literary societies, and the printing of Arabic literary classics and translations of European books, the Levantine thinker exhorted Arabs to participate in the Nahda and 'storm forth to acquire knowledge and science'.

Samir Kassir's romanticization of the Nahda was certainly well grounded, and validated by the enthusiasm of his predecessor Khalil Al Khuri. Notwithstanding these thinkers' positive allusions towards the Arab awakening, however, a number of scholars capitalized on the darker undertones of the Arab Nahda. Their literature takes on a postcolonial and postmodernist bent insisting that the Nahda be read as a form of capitulation to Western epistemology instead of a heroic tale of Arab triumph. Similar to orientalist discourse that has become *demodé* in academia, their literature implicitly takes for granted a binary perception of 'East' and 'West' as well as a diffusionist reading of the European Enlightenment. This essay will briefly analyze their literature, and challenge its main presuppositions. Moreover, the essay will destabilize the capitulation charge by examining Rifa'a Al Tahtawi's intellectual activities and attitude while also conveying the differences that typified the period of the earlier Nahda (1830's to the 1850's) from the later Nahda (1870s to the early 20th century). Finally, a discussion of the angst and fear that colored the later generation of Nahdawis will be discussed.

Islamists vis a vis the Arab Nahda

To better understand postcolonialism' attitude towards the Arab Nahda, it may be helpful to analogize their perception of the movement to the Great Fall. While the Christian tradition interprets the Fall as the transition of mankind from a state of innocence to wretchedness, many

Islamists view the Arab Liberal age in similar terms--- from a state of purity to a condition of cultural humiliation. This interpretation emphasises the Nahdawis' (un)conscious resignation to Western epistemology. Safinaz Kazem, a former leftist who converted to Islam, considered Qassim Amin's writings on women as a project aimed at Westernizing women as opposed to liberating them; specifically, she saw the whole Nahda project as the cooperative efforts of intellectuals aimed at drawing people away from their Islamic roots towards Western culture. The same position was advocated by the Islamist theoreticians, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and Muhammad Jalal Kishk (1929-1993), who saw that Nahdawis were making concessions to their 'adversaries', and falling victims to Western epistemology[7]. Interestingly, the position of many Arab elites in the 1990's onward did not contribute positively to the image of the Arab Nahda. As was previously discussed, many secularists in post Nasser Egypt went to great lengths to hijack the Arab renaissance. Many of Nahda's central preachers were commemorated by the Egyptian neoliberal government of Mubarak such as Rifa'a Al Tahtawi, Jamaludin Al Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1845-1905) and others. Ironically, the same government that was commemorating Nahdawi preachers stripped many women protestors from their clothes in 2005, and many within the government referred to the headscarf as a form of backwardness and regression[8]. Even within the legal sphere, the capitulation charge struck a chord. Tariq Al Bishri, an Egyptian judge-- and who was referenced by Talal al Assad in his final chapter of his book--spoke about Western infiltration in the Egyptian legal system differentiating in the process between the inherited and the imported[9]. The cultural struggle was characterized by the struggle between these two forces-- that which comes from outside and is alienating versus that which is inherited. The Egyptian judge saw that Egyptian elites gave more consideration to political and

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[7] Muhammad Jalāl Kishk, *al Ghazu al Fikri* [Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya lil Tiba'a wal Nashr, 1966].
[8] Jailan Halawi, "People Are Acting Strange," *Al Ahram Weekly,* 7-13 December 2006.
[9] Tāriq al-Bishrī, *Māhiyyat al muʿāsara* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 2007).

economic independence and not nearly as much towards cultural independence; Legitimate independence according to him must be rooted on an Islamic identity and devotion[10]. It is critical to affirm that this reading of the Nahda which centers on colonial domination is framed by Muslim puritans binarily. For many Islamists, they read the bulk of modern Arab history as the loss of what is called *asala* or cultural religious authenticity. Many Muslim fundamentalists, for example, regarded the later generation of Nahda elites such as Zaki Naguib Mahmoud--a positivist philosopher--and philosopher, Fu'ad Zakariyah, as traitors and secular Westernizers. Interestingly, in the terminologies of this 'unenlightened' camp, secularism equates to atheism. Commenting further on the Islamists' ill regard for Nahda elites, Mona Abaza attested:

> It is no coincidence that some of these emblematic figures of Egyptian modernity, especially [Salama] Musa and [Taha] Husayn, have been cursed by the Islamists as "false Westernizers," " fake enlightened," and "naive modernizers".[11]

One such Islamist--previously a Marxist--Muhammad Immara argued that Salama Musa was pushing a Nahda of 'civilizational collaboration' with the West; Musa personified Westernization according to the veteran Marxist turned Islamist; his westernization project to Immara was a mechanism directed at cleansing all expressions of resistance against the colonizers. Immara saw much of the Nahda to be symbolized by this collaboration and associated the phenomenon with atheism and secularism that was brawling with Islam[12].

Western Academia vis a vis the Arab Nahda

It was not only Kishk and Bishri who spoke about the outright surrender to Western epistemology. Timothy Mitchell's *Colonizing Egypt* argued how the coherent Western imperial

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[10] Roeil Meijer, "History, Authenticity, and Politics: Tariq Al Bishri's Interpretation of Modern Egyptian History," *Middle East Research Associates*, September 4, 1989.

[11] Mona Abaza, 'The Trafficking with Tanwir (Enlightenment)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (2010), 34–6.

[12] Muhammad Immara, *Salama Musa, a false Interpretation or Civilizational Collaboration* (Cairo: jamiyyat al marqaz al 'alami lil tawthiq wal diraset wal tarbiyya al islamiya, silsilat nahwa fikr islami, n.d.), 7-26.

system not only disciplined, but enframed the Egyptians with great success from 1798---the year of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt---to the beginning of the 20th century; Mitchell's book was essentially a rereading of Europe's confrontation with the Orient dealing particularly with the subject of techniques of control; it utilized the 19th century exhibition as a model to explain how 'strategies of change' that were enforced during this timespan strove to superintend a myriad of facets within society and politics. The exhibition itself was not merely, according to Mitchell, representing Egypt, but was simultaneously seeking to model Egypt[13]. Specifically--- and with the *Foucauldian* influence apparent-- the book highlighted how Egyptians--thinkers and non thinkers alike--had their bodies and minds controlled by the Europeans and their imitators. As one reviewer noted:

> [Mitchell] examines material structures and systems of representation that created a new disciplinary order in terms of armies, methods of schooling, forms of rural and urban organization, and such concepts as *tarbiyya* (discipline), *Siyasa* (politics) industriousness, and Western hygiene"[14].

The colonizing power according to Timothy Mitchell sought to regiment the vulnerable Egyptians along similar lines to that of England and France.

Other writers who implicitly championed the capitulation charge include Stephen Sheehi who argued in the 2nd chapter of *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* that Nahdawis were obsessed with 'failure' and enamored by the 'superiority' of the West[15]. Even while critiquing colonial discourses, many non Western thinkers according to Sheehi still fell prey to Western assumptions; the narratives pertaining to the *failure* of Arabs to achieve progress and

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[13] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 9.
[14] Mervat Hatem, "Colonizing Egypt," *Middle East Journal*, (1989): 127–28, pp. 127-128.
[15] Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004), 2nd chapter.

modernization were implemented in the literature of Arab writers themselves. In other words, both colonizers and Arab intellectuals located the source of the failures to the Arab heritage. Elizabeth Holt's description of the Nahda--in the introduction of her book--as a project ruined before even beginning is perhaps more distressing than Sheehi's account[16].

In the linguistic realm, Shaden Tageldin's *Disarming Words* considered how colonial power depended on cultural seduction. Situating cultural seduction above military and economic domination in terms of efficiency, Tageldin noted how many Egyptians--chief amongst them Nahdawis-- were entrapped by the French, and British into perceiving "linguistic equivalence, cultural equality, respect, and even sovereignty"[17]. This process involved, according to the author, Europeans 'translating themselves' in the Arabic language ending with the Nahdawi translating himself and his very own culture into Western epistemes. Via this mechanism, Egyptian intellectuals and translators found themselves seduced by the Europeans' expertise in the Arabic language and its literature. As Wail Hassan noted [18]:

> This notion of seduction works by giving the seduced the illusion of power, the easier to "disarm" their resistance and entice them to love rather than hate their colonial masters. whereas colonial discourse casts the European in the role of a male sexually possessing a feminized Orient, in seduction, the European male is dressed in drag luring the Egyptian.

Timothy Mitchell in *Colonizing Egypt* has similarly tackled the issue of linguistic invasion; In one of his chapters, he assessed the efforts by Nahdawis both to accommodate and repel this cultural takeover[19]. The capitulation charge was likewise embraced by historian Michael Gasper who saw Nahda's protagonists as lacking agency and foresight. In particular, he saw the

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[16] Elizabeth Holt, *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), introduction.
[17] Jenine Abboushi, "Disarming Words: Empires and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt," *Comparative Literature Studies*, (2014): 360–64, pp. 360-364.
[18] Wail Hassan, "The Seduction of Seduction," *Research in African Literatures* 44 (2013): pp. 188-193.
[19] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988),128.

Egyptian literate middle class and their efforts as paving the way for their adversaries to actualize their primary tasks. As Gasper affirmed:

> Their attempts to maneuver within the emergent economic and political structures facilitated the colonial project's goal of remaking the conditions that shaped Egyptians' lives.[20]

The articulation by these scholars towards the Arab renaissance aligned with Robert Young's assertions who argued in *White Mythologies* that the spread of Enlightenment cosmology was a form of intellectual imperialism bent on the destruction of alternative worldviews[21]. In other words, contrary to Immanuel Kant's belief[22], the Enlightenment[23] to Young was not a quasi natural development, but a phenomenon replete with violence. Indeed, critical theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Daniel Carey, and Lynn Festa all saw the belligerent and barbaric diffusion of the Enlightenment outside the West as being marked by highly asymmetrical relations of power[24]. To these scholars, much of the problem originated with the movement of modernity itself that began in the West during the Enlightenment. According to these critical theorists, this is a confident, totalizing, and ebullient movement typified by an all knowing attitude that is aimed at mastering and controlling the world; Its premises rest on the complete knowability of the world of which there is a single universal Rationality. As Allister Mcgrath, noted:

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[20] Michael Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 223.

[21] Robert Young, *White Mythologies Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[22] Immanuel Kant, *Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* (Berlin Monthly, 1784).

[23] Many scholars are more comfortable in speaking of 'enlightenments' as opposed to 'enlightenment' and argue that the date extend well beyond 1700s and beyond the Western world where non Western actors understand the term differently; More fundamentally, the designation 'age of reason' is subject to interrogation in light of the fact that mesmerism, occultism, and magic were married to elite culture, and science.

[24] See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999). See also the contributions in Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa, eds., *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory* (Oxford, 2009).

A leading theme of modernity was its emphasis on uniformity. The Other was relentlessly reduced to the Same. There was only one right way of seeing things; once this had been determined, it was to be enforced. To observe everything from the privileged vantage point of modernity is to…subjugate anything that is regarded as a menace.[25]

Mcgrath's points lay bare much of what is at stake with the Arab Nahda in the eyes of those who champion the tragic interpretation. In commenting on the belligerent nature of the West, the philosopher Michel Foucault, in his work *Discipline and Punish,* applied the notion of a 'controlling space' as a metaphor for the coercive control of Western modernity and its failure to respect the others[26]. Similarly, Jacques Derrida saw the Western world as being obsessed with the notion of a 'center', a term that signifies various things such as 'origin', 'ideal', 'truth', and 'fixed point'. This overuse of the 'center', in the eyes of Derrida, explained the systematic attempt by the West to subjugate other abodes[27].

Problematizing the Capitulation Narrative

Having surveyed the scholarly literature and theorists who articulated in some shape or form the capitulation narrative, it is perhaps necessary to complicate some of their views on the subject. Implicit in much of their literature is the notion that 'secularism', 'renaissance', and the 'enlightenment' are unique Western concepts transplanted coercively or implicitly in the Arab and Islamic world. As we have seen, secularism was even equated to atheism and colonization by some Islamists. Also taken for granted is the juxtaposition of Western philosophers (of the 18 and 19th centuries) with intellectual imperialism, a claim challenged by various scholars[28].

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[25] Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Ebury Digital, 2008), 221.

[26] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (NY: Vintage Books, 1979), 200-201.

[27] Richard Kearney and Paul Ricœur, in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage: Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 120-126.

[28] See Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J., 2006); Jürgen

The problem with the diffusionist model, however, lies in its strictly manichean assumption. This assumption treats the Orient and the West as two pure and antithetical appellations, or as two distinct and "geographically and temporally" remote wholes[29]. Yet what exactly constitutes the Orient and the West is itself a subject of debate. Even if one were to assume that notions of 'East' and 'West' are actual representations of spatial reality---as this essay does for expediency---it does not mean that one should confine oneself to 'comparativist', 'essentialist' and 'nationalist' methodologies alone. Recent historiography has in fact expressed unease with comparative history[30] and area studies. As scholar Houri Berberian noted in *Roving Revolutionaries*:

> Critics challenge a number of issues often associated with the comparative approach, ranging from its close attachment to nation state and national histories and its universalist or presentist tendencies to its reliance on secondary sources[31].

A more efficient model that articulates history is the 'globalist' methodology or *Histoire Croisée* to use the vocabulary adopted by Michael Werner and Benedict Zimmerman[32]. Doing history globally helps unsettles the capitulation interpretation of the Nahda, challenges eurocentric attitudes, and complicates older boundaries of historical thinking. Connected histories is not an issue of 'connectedness' that deals with common salient elements, but is a methodology dealing with the circulation of ideas, people, and goods; it is a paradigm that emphasizes 'large scale processes' that go beyond "national, political, geographical and cultural

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Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1998).

[29] Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2007).

[30] Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical Historical Review* 91 (Winter 2005): 78.

[31] Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 11.

[32] Benedicte Zimmerman and Michael Werner, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory* 45, no 1 (2006), 30-50.

boundary lines[33]". Doing history globally also situates one's attention to the role of climate. Alan Mikhail's article, for example, conveyed how the ash from the Laki volcanic fissure that began erupting in Iceland sparked socio-political changes within Ottoman Egypt[34]. Another scholar highlighted the role of the 'Little Ice Age' whose effects stagnated the Ottoman transition towards an agricultural society[35]. There are other examples that blurries the East-West dichotomy. In commenting on the phenomenon of the Enlightenment, Sebastian Conrad, problematized the claim that associates Europe with the Enlightenment. Instead, Conrad argued that the movement was a response to cross border interaction and global integration. As the historian put it:

> Beyond the conventional Europe-bound notions of the progress of "reason," engaging with Enlightenment has always been a way to think comparatively and globally...The Enlightenment's global impact was not energized solely by the ideas of the Parisian philosophes. Rather, it was the work of historical actors around the world.[36]

Alluding to the symbol of the rickshaw within Japanese society, Conrad reiterated that what was seen as new and progressive was in actuality the end result of local conditions and power structures instead of being the outcome of a plan in Edinburgh or Paris. Conrad's words undoubtedly undercut some of the discourse levelled by critical theorists and Islamists alike, in suggesting that the Enlightenment was not solely a European affair. As Sanjay Subrahman reiterated, the movement must be thought of as a global and conjunctual phenomenon situated in

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[33] Bentley, "New World History," *World History Connected* 5, no. I (2013): I.
[34] A. Mikhail, "Ottoman Iceland: A Climate History," *Environmental History* 20, no. 2 (2015): pp. 262-284,
[35] Alan Mikhail, "The Little Ice Age Crisis of the Ottoman Empire: A Conjuncture in Middle East Environmental History," in *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[36] Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): pp. 999-1027.

a series of historical processes that brought together remote realms into correspondence[37]. Indeed, when it comes to modern knowledge regimes, the diffusionist model is jeopardized as many scholars discussed the global gathering of facts and the co production of knowledge. Put differently, Enlightenment science and worldviews cannot be dissociated from transregional networks and cross border circulations; scientific knowledge as Kapil Raj hinted came to fruition through "co constructive processes of negotiation of skilled communities and individuals[38]". In fact, much of what is taken to be Western science was in effect produced outside the West. The aforementioned sights obscure some of the assertions made by postcolonial scholars and Islamists whose understanding of the Nahda readily take for granted the diffusionist model overlooking in the process globality and entanglement in historical thinking. As Ilham Khuri-Makdisi highlighted, connectedness itself was a huge component of the Nahda in light of the presence of a special radical trajectory that spanned four continents while tying Alexandria, Beirut, and Cairo; intellectual and political discussions were present amongst not only Egyptians and Ottoman Syrians, but also ethnic Italians and Greeks. Makdisi's book problematized the tragic tale of the Nahda with its binary assumptions, stressing how the Near East must instead be understood within the wider context of world history[39].

Further complications with the capitulation charge are best examined microscopically in Egypt. As the facts on the ground revealed, it was not the Napoleonic invasion that produced a secular atmosphere in Egypt or the emerging capitalistic structure, but local conditions instead. In his review of Peter Gran's *Islamic Roots of Capitalism,* Eric Davis wrote:

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[37] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400– 1750," Daedalus 127, no. 3 (1998): 75–104, here 99–100.
[38] Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Delhi, 2006), 223.
[39] Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2013), introduction.

During the first period, 1760-1790, Egypt's commercial revival was the result of the development of a cash economy based on the export of grains to the world market. This increase in trade strengthened the indigenous middle classes, especially urban merchants and the *'ulama'*.[40]

It was ultimately the studies of *Hadith* that dominated that period, and the beginning of a secular culture must be contextualized within this revival of *Hadith* sciences; the unprecedented changes that were witnessed were internalized by the native middle classes via this revival in Hadith sciences. As Davis indicated:

The middle classes spurned the chronicle in favor of more conceptually oriented historical analyses which raised questions of individual and social morality. The Historian Al-Jabarti [1753-1822] was raising questions which were being asked by the middle classes as a whole.[41]

Gran's ideas poked holes to the arguments espoused by some of the Islamists cited in this paper who read the bulk of modern Arab history as a series of concessions to the West at the expense of Islam, and indigenous Arab culture. One must bear in mind that *tasawwuf*--- inner Islam---was also on the rise during that period as a means to reenergize the corporate apparatus in the Egyptian order. With the rise of the Egyptian Khedive, Muhammad Ali, *fiqh* and *kalam* became *a la mode* in Egypt fullfiling different objectives for the collective consciousness.

Indeed, the reading of the Nahda that stresses cultural invasion directs one's attention to the provenance of ideas and cultural practices. In other words, this reading sees ideas and practices as either from the Islamic/Arab abode or from the distant abode---the West---or as medieval Muslim jurists would have phrased it--- *Dar al jahiliyah* set against the *Dar al Islam*. Gran's

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[40] Eric Davis, "Gran, Islamic Roots of Capitalism," MERIP, October 24, 2016,
[41] Eric Davis, "Gran, Islamic Roots of Capitalism," MERIP, October 24, 2016,

overarching aim in his book, however, complicated this view. It cautioned readers towards

viewing the orient or non western world as a passive Other set against a distinguished

paternalistic Western Self. Historical narratives that implicitly or explicitly propagate a view of

the Orient as *solely* a recipient player in the global village---to use media theorist Marshall

Mcluhan's term---is exactly what a critical paradigm ought to challenge; the non West as some

irresponsible child unable to influence others let alone generate its own history was exactly what

postcolonial scholars had qualms about. They are correct to point out that the capitulation

narrative permits one to unravel the subtleties and complexities of epistemological transfer under

conditions of colonialism. In the words of Chakrabarty, not only does this model display the

asymmetrical structure of exchange, but it also alerts us to another takeaway:

> To write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force,
>
> and the tragedies and the ironies that attend it.[42]

However, the capitulation charge ends up introducing irreconcilable regimes of epistemology;

the picture consequently turns bleak under such model as cross exchange of ideas becomes

retarded due to the incompatible civilizational orders. In the words of Conrad:

> Such cultural essentialisms...prevent us from recognizing the extent to which both
>
> allegedly...indigenous traditions and seemingly universal forms of Western knowledge
>
> are the result of complex processes of interaction.[43]

Conrad's words also latently warn readers of the idea of 'opposed genealogies'--- the

traditional-inherited versus the modern-imported. Bypassing this binary mindset, many Islamists

alongside champions of Arab nationalism and liberals have entwined those seemingly opposed

genealogies. One merely needs to consider how the reasoned voice that pushed for change in the

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[42] John Tosh, *Historians on History: Readings* (London: Routledge, 2018), 170.
[43] Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): pp. 999-1027.

19th century was none other than Al Azhar institution; it was leading religious preachers that legitimized the great innovations that accompanied the age of capital[44]. In fact, as scholar Reinhard Schulze revealed, a number of Islamic preachers---even during the 18th century---embraced the notion of the autonomy of thought, and held that reason and experience are gateways to truth[45]. Specifically, they have striven to imagine a pure Islam that is adaptable to current sociopolitical conditions and hence an authentic Islam that is enlightened. Consequently, others have provided a *tanwir* project that nonetheless conserved Islamo-Arab precepts[46].

Interestingly, the perception of the non West as an irresponsible (and duped) Other was implicitly attested by Shaden Tageldin herself. As Wasil Hassan noted in regards to the 'translation is seduction' thesis:

> It posits translation as a form of enraptured, uncritical, unidirectional, and hence collaborationist transfer of colonial knowledge that seeks to erase native identity. This hides from view the ways in which al-Nahda translators sometimes deliberately twisted their European sources out of shape in acts of violent translation, making them say what they did not want to say.[47]

The reviewer cited the example of the Arab thinker, Al Siba'i, whose 1911 translation of Thomas Carlyle's chapter on Muhammad suppresses the British historian's subordination of the Arabian prophet to Shakespeare, giving off the perception that Mahomet enjoys the exact lofty status for Thomas Carlyle as for Muslims. The reviewer reaffirms:

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[44] John W. Livingston, "Western Science and Educational Reform in the Thought of Shaykh Rifaʿa Al-Tahtawi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (1996): pp. 543-564.
[45] Reinhard Schulze, "Was ist die islamische Aufklärung?," Die Welt des Islams 36, no. 3 (1996): 276–325, here 309. See also Schulze, "Islam und andere Religionen in der Aufklärung," Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 7 (2008): 317–340.
[46] See Abaza, 'The Trafficking with Tanwir', 35.
[47] Wail Hassan, "The Seduction of Seduction," *Research in African Literatures* 44 (2013): pp. 188-193.

Al-Siba'i removes an obstacle standing in the way of Egyptian readers' seduction by the Victorian author. Al-Siba'i defends Islam by coercing the Englishman to admit the superiority of that religion, something that can only reassure skeptical Muslim readers that their religion is indeed the truest.

Here, the point by the reviewer is to emphasize that translation is never a unidirectional process but a double edged sword, and that Europe may itself be played by the colonized in this seduction game of cat and mouse.

A Nuanced Reading of the Nahda and of the 19th Century

One way to problematize the capitulation metanarrative is through a nuanced reading of the Nahda period, and of the wider 19th century. As noted in the introduction, the Nahda period--and by extension the 19th century--was not expressed as one uninterrupted line. The first phase (1830s to 1870s) that housed the 1st generation of Nahdawis such as Rifa'a al Tahtawi, Butrus Bustani, Khalil Khuri, and others had a different bent from the Nahda of the later era (1870's to early 20th century). Specifically, the mid nineteenth century was less turbulent--socially and politically-- than the end of the nineteen century and early twentieth century[48].

Keeping this nuanced apprehension in mind, the age that Rifa'a Al Tahtawi--alongside Khalil Al Khuri, and Butrus Bustani (1819-1883)--occupied was one that was typified by self assurance and optimism. Their socio-political atmosphere naturally meant that they could establish local autonomy while simultaneously being on close terms with Europe. Taking the central protagonist as an example, his land---Egypt---was not an extension of the European imperial structure. Similarly, Greater Syria--or what Europeans called the Levant--was also not incorporated into

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[48] As a matter of convenience, this dissertation takes no qualms with historical periodizations. Indeed---and despite the ambivalences, value judgements, and ironies that come with it--- the entire historical edifice would not be a digestible and pleasurable activity if periodization ceased to exist. Historical categorizations not only contain elements of truth but also have pedagogical utility central to academic institutions.

the European imperial structure from the 1830s to the 1870s. Around that period, a weakened but still vast and powerful Ottoman Empire and Muhammad Ali's regime (1769-1849) were in place. While these points inflate the capitulation reading of the Nahda, they do not decenter in any way the European-dominated world which capitalism was in its center; it was also during this period that Europe was flexing its powers in the region. Diplomatically speaking, Europe was exerting more impact yet *Belad El Sham* and *Misr* were also players on the global stage even while extracting from Europe some of its methods. Those Near Eastern regimes were reconfiguring themselves and expanding. The aforementioned points pose a challenge to latent orientalism that perceives the Orient as displaying passivity, feminine penetrability as well as supine malleability. Far from that, Tahtawi's timespan was one in which the Near East did not exist for the West let alone constructed by and in relation to the West. Up until 1875--the period associated with the earlier Nahda--Arab elites of Egyptians or Syrian background, conveyed autonomy, and could express confidence and coordination with their authentic culture[49]. Tahtawi's age was the age of the imperialism of free trade[50], or as historian Eric Hobsbawn defined it 'the age of capital'[51] where capitalism was dramatically expanding worldwide. This moment in history signified to Hobsbawn 'the drama of *progress* […] massive, enlightened, sure of itself, self-satisfied but above all inevitable.' Even when Europe in the age of capital exercised shows of military force[52] as part of its worldwide capitalistic expansion, the practitioners still conceived of themselves in autonomous ways and as pushing forth a world marked by affluence, peace, and free trade. This was the very same world described by Herman Melville in his novel *The Confidence Man*

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[49] Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 248.

[50] John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review 6*, 1953; Those two scholars cited the policing of the high seas by the British navy, gunboat diplomacy and the coercive opening of markets for capitalist commodities as features of the age of capital.

[51] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital* (Scribners, 1989).

[52] Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, 16–17, 70–7.

(1857)-- a novel that highlighted the new innovations of the time, and whose discourse centered on the limitless prospect of profits and on the need to have confidence in one's fellow brethrens. Similarly, the milieu of the Egyptian translator also witnessed innovations such as railways, steamships, and telegraph lines. As Albert Hourani affirmed:

> Tahtawi lived and worked in a happy interlude of history, when the religious tension between Islam and Christendom was being relaxed and had not yet been replaced by the new political tension of east and west. He was in France at the time of the occupation of Algiers and wrote about it in his book on Paris, but in his thought there is no sense of Europe's being a political danger.[53]

Hourani went on to reiterate that France and Europe during Tahtawi's time did not stand for political power or expansion but stood instead for science and material progress. The achievements of capitalism as Hourani and Hobsbawn suggested were overall more positive, and hence evil was seen as being outweighed by good; the expansion of capitalism had displaced any lingering doubts[54] in the eyes of non Western elites. This explained Tahtawi's enthusiasm and admiration for inventions such as the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal, and the transcontinental railways in the United States. So much was his admiration for the age of capital that Tahtawi even wrote a poem in praise for the steam engine[55]. He and others like him could during the mid nineteenth century conceive of a successful and independent future for themselves where the rules of capitalism and modern bureaucracy held sway. Immersing themselves into this global structured world of civilization, achieving great feats, and conserving themselves was no fanciful illusion. The Azharite scholar likened the novelties of his day to a new dawn that would

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[53] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81.
[54] Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, 16–17, 70–7.
[55] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81.

ultimately lead to an edenic state of the gathering of peoples and their coexistence in peace[56].

Interestingly, he saw his own realm as a participant in this well ordered world. The Egyptian

preacher alongside other Nahdawis and non Western elites during the age of capital also

advanced their own forms of civilization catered to their region[57]. All of this was with a caveat,

however, as Nahda elites like Tahtawi excluded local groups such as nomads, Sudanese blacks,

the urban poor and peasants from the realm of civilization relegating to those peoples the status

of the barbaric. Yet this gradation did not take on racialist connotations until the end part of the

19th century. On this point, some scholars have highlighted the illustrious career of Africanus

Horton whose rise to office and his envisioning of a utopic future between the Africans and the

British show how much racial demarcations were less fixed[58]. Other examples pertain to the

Middle East where American missionaries had far less chauvinistic views of the Near East in the

early Nahda era[59]. Moreover, African Americans following the civil war--and coinciding with the

early Nahda-- also witnessed a relaxation of laws having access to some rights as well as having

roles that were open to them[60].

The points pose a challenge to the capitulation narrative championed by postcolonial scholars,

revealing how Near Easterners were not the Others--to use Jacques Lacan's term--but were

makers and shapers in their own right. It would not be until the 1880's and 1890's that the

capitulation narrative would strike a chord. It was during that timespan where some Nahdawis

[56] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81.

[57] Other non Western elites-- besides Egyptians-- also advanced their form of civilization through retaining powers over others locally during the age of capital; *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, eds. Helge Jordheim and Margrit Pernau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107–25 and 126–45.

[58] James Fyfe, 'Africanus Horton as a Constitution-Maker', Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 26, no. 2 (2008): 173–84; Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State (Oxford: James Currey, 1994), 36–42.

[59] Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 177-178.

[60] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, 1863–1877 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), cites the 1870s depression as the start of the retreat from reconstruction'.

were exercising an 'us vs. them mentality'; some were ready to shed their local traditions in the name of *hadatha* (modernity) while others saw the 'East' and 'West' as two distinct antithetical appellations that cannot meet. *tafarnuj* (westernization) for a great many was a great danger. The 1880s as Hobsbawn defined it was the age of empire *par excellence* or the age of high imperialism. Hobsbawn identified several features of this new phase of global capitalist expansion-- financialization and the concentration of capital into monopolies, competition between national rival industrial economies, a newly warlike territorial expansion, an increasingly powerful state amongst other things[61]. The age of empire also drew rigid boundaries between contrasting realms. It was during that period where Tunisia and Egypt fell to their invaders, and where the Ottomans owed vast sums to European creditors. Additionally, this was an age where racial boundaries became more erect in comparison to the earlier phase; within the realm of culture and politics in the West, attitudes began to be cast in racialist terms as that between whites and non-whites[62]. The age of capital with its notion of 'unitary civilization' where different people participated appeared to be disturbed in the end part of the 19th century.

Tahtawi and Self Affirmation

To further problematize the tragic tale of the Nahda that associates the period with surrender, it may be necessary to turn once again to the figure of Rifa'a Al Tahtawi who was an Egyptian imam, traveller, and translator. The previously mentioned scholar, Timothy Mitchell, attested that Nahda elites who mastered geographical knowledge were ultimately within the confines of European epistemes and were hence prisoners of European interests. A closer examination of Nahda's central figure, however, challenges this particular discourse. Similar to what Al Siba'i

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[61] E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 2002), 355-358.
[62] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

did with Carlyle, Tahtawi also outplayed the European 'other'. Tahtawi was by no means an uncritical imitator; he did not conceive of cultural identity in any fixed sense nor did he see it in the risk of being terminated. Tahtawi also took no qualms with cultural borrowing with translation as this activity-- according to him and other mainstream scholars of his time--was in tune with the famous Muhammadan saying of seeking knowledge as far away as China[63]. In his writings, Tahtawi engaged in blending and creative adaptation of two or more different sources in his text with not only classical Arabic authors but European ones as well[64].

There are other examples with Tahtawi that challenge this narrow reading of the Nahda. Taking European geographical books as an example, the Egyptian preacher employed those to his own ends and to the interest of the Egyptian autocrat, Muhammad Ali and his larger than life ambitions. In fact, throughout the mid nineteenth century, other non Western polities had employed geographical models for their own ends[65], showcasing further the trouble with the defeatist Nahda tale. While the Egyptian imam admired European geographical works such as their up to date nature, how they were based on first hand accounts, and how organized and detailed they were[66], his activities revealed a Nahdawi who engaged critically with the European texts he was translating; the Azharite *savant* would often contest one European claim with another European source of authority. In one instance, he intervened by undermining utterances that were antithetical to Islamic precepts[67]. In another instance, Tahtawi's interventions were striking-- the Egyptian imam saw in the authors' words a clear picture of Eurocentrism and

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[63] Wail Hassan, "The Seduction of Seduction," *Research in African Literatures* 44 (2013): pp. 188-193.
[64] Manal Gamal El Din Hosny, 'Tradition et renouveau dans l'oeuvre de Tahtawi' (Alexandria University, doctoral thesis, 2001), 86, 115–6.
[65] Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[66] Rifa'a Al Tahtawi, *al Ta'ribat al Shafiya lil Muriad il Jughrafiya* (Bulaq: Dar al Matba' al Khudaywiyya, 1250/1834), 1:3.
[67] Youssef M. Choueiriy, *Modern Arab Historiography: Historical Discourse and the Nation State* (Routledge Curzon, 2003), 5.

vowed to rectify the problem. The Egyptian preacher would also alter statements by Europeans who did not display respect to the Islamic faith or towards the Ottoman empire of which he saw as commanding Egypt; he relegated to the Arabian religion political relevance, and a primary stage ahead of Christianity and Judaism[68]. All in all, however, Tahtawi's geographical translational activities could only be read as part of Muhammad Ali's expansionsist policies and not as an abstract theorizing:

> It seems clear that Tahtawi was responding to the Egyptian demand for geography, the need of Mehmed Ali's officials for knowledge of the countries they were going forth to subdue, to govern, to negotiate with.[69]

Those words challenge Mitchell's assertions revealing how a famous Nahdawi was appropriating European ideas to his own ends and that of his ruler. Tahtawi even altered statements in a European text that described the Ottoman state as despotic, quoting a different source to back his position[70]. Once again, the aforementioned points highlight how a Nahdawi---far from resigning to European assumptions---utilized European works in the service of Egyptian-ottoman imperial projects. The state building ambitions of Muhammad Ali conveyed an example of sophistication, confidence, and innovation. As Khaled Fahmy argued in his work *In Quest of Justice*:

> [The bureaucrats] seemed not to have been bothered by the provenance of the many innovative practices they were implementing. [Borrowing new 'sciences' from Europe] was never informed by a sense of anxiety that had its roots in identitarian crisis ... The question of identity was moot[71].

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[68] Al-Ta'ribat al-shafiya, 1: 128, 136.
[69]Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[70] Al-Taʿrıbat al-shafiya, 1: 143, 1: 126.
[71] Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 176.

Interestingly enough, when it came to the gradation of civilization to which Tahtawi's work is replete with, the Egyptian preacher placed into his hierarchy of civilizations the Egyptians and other Muslims in the third civilized grade being separated from Europe only by reciprocal differences. In the words of Rifa'a Al Tahtawi:

> [The countries of] this third grade differ in the sciences and arts, the goodness of their condition, their adoption of a particular law and their progress (taqaddum) in craftsmanship. For instance, the Frankish lands have attained the highest degree of proficiency in mathematics, natural sciences and metaphysics.[72]

Tahtawi went on to note, however, that the Frankish lands have not acquired the straight path, or treaded the path towards salvation. The Islamic countries, to the Egyptian intellectual, transcended the Europeans in respect to the legal sciences and their application, and in the rational sciences yet have neglected the philosophical sciences in their entirety. This reason warranted to Tahtawi the need for the Egyptians to seek Western countries in order to appropriate what they do not know. The first grade to Tahtawi referred to the savages such as the nomads of the country of Sudan whereas the second grade are the barbarians or the semi civilized people whom to Tahtawi included the Arabs of the desert[73].

Ambivalence and Angst in the Midst of Change

While the first generation of Nahdawis voiced optimism and confidence, they still experienced doubts and fears. To take the essay's central protagonist, Rifa'a Al Tahtawi, there is no denial that the Egyptian preacher did have ambivalence in regards to Western science. As John Livingston affirmed in respect to Tahtawi's attitude on science:

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[72] Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2011), 131-05.

[73] Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2011), 131-05.

> [He shunned] the alien philosophical ground from which they drew sustenance...When he pondered heliocentricity, Cartesian rationalism, and the mathematical relationships expressing a system of natural law that governed the physical structure of the universe, his enthusiasm for Western science chilled to skepticism.[74]

Elsewhere, Tahtawi was disturbed by the European scientists' denial of miracles, their denial of divine predestination, their futile perception of religion, and their elevation of philosophers above the prophets. One can further decipher Tahtawi's unease in light of his eventual switch into the arms of Ptolemy and his rejection of Copernicus and Newton. He asserted that only the religiously strong should inquire into science. As Livingston noted:

> As early as his Paris days he fell back on traditional arguments, asserting religious authority in limiting scientific knowledge to the religiously strong. This of course throws into question the freedom required for science and civilization.

While this state of ambivalence is only natural, Tahtawi's predicament was almost certainly not of the same magnitude as that of the later generation of Nahda elites. There are obvious reasons for this, some which have already been discussed. The first---discussed previously---pertains to the nature of the age. In the atmosphere of competing blocs and major territorial acquisitions of the 1880's and 90's, many Near Eastern elites did not feel at ease within their Islamic-Arabic roots. Many have even forsaken the practice of *tawfik*[75]-- connecting together or immersing what was noteworthy in the societies of Europe and displacing what was at odds with Arab customs and Islamic precepts.. Many would push for a complete overhaul of Egyptian society--- from an indigenous one to a fully Europeanized one. Psychologically, these thinkers were experiencing

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[74] John W. Livingston, "Western Science and Educational Reform in the Thought of Shaykh Rifaʿa Al-Tahtawi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (1996): pp. 543-564,

[75] Mona Abaza, 'The Trafficking with Tanwir (Enlightenment)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (2010), 34–6.

'cognitive dissonance'--coined by Leo Festinger--whereby two beliefs are dissonant with each other if they do not fit together. As a response to this dissonance, some adopt a militant or radical approach while others surrender to the dominant mode of thought[76]. Hassan Al Banna and Sayyid Qutb who lived during the end phase of the Nahda embraced the former response; their time was one of pronounced colonialism. This explained Al Banna's concerns:

> Egyptians across religious divides often experienced missionary seduction, attempts to divert one from her truth into Protestantism, as an attack (ta'n) on the collective body that, despite its limited success, caused moral injury on the communal level.[77]

The Egyptians--and Arabs and Muslims by extension--were according to Banna mere hirelings belonging to Westerners; worse, they were in a state of utter humiliation and restriction. The founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers expressed his unease with the political and social confusion that had stricken Egypt and how he and his friends had been moved to tears as students in Cairo. Banna was heavily distraught by the luxurious homes of the British in Egypt and the miserable hovels of the Egyptian masses. As Karen Armstrong highlighted:

> The parties engaged in fruitless and vociferous debate and were still manipulated by the British […] The British kept a firm hand on the economy and public utilities.[78]

The witnessing of the spread of Western ideas on a large scale in newspapers, journals, and magazines that were anti-Islamic in tone also alarmed the later generation of Nahdawis. Banna specifically was disturbed with Egyptians turning away from the mosque. Indeed, towards the

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[76] Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), chapter 4 and 5.

[77] Jeffrey Culang, "Liberal Translations: Secular Concepts, Law, and Religion in Colonial Egypt" (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2017), 26.

[78] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (first published 2000; New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 219.

end of the Nahda, regions such as Egypt became heavily steeped in secularism and Westernization[79]:

> They had access to European-style modern social clubs, urban private social spaces,horse racing, schools, casinos, resorts and other tourist destinations with alcohol, mixed-gender dance halls, and swimming pools, as well as Western music and dress codes and fashion.

The predicament that had befallen those later generations of Nahdawis was not---as previously stated---experienced by Rifa'a Al Tahtawi who lived, as Hourani remarked, in a happy interlude of history where Europe was not yet a political danger. The imperial Europe would come to fuition later prompting the Palestinian Islamist thinker, Yusuf Nabahani, to rally Muslims against modernity and reform. As Amal Ghazal stated[80]:

> He led a scathing attack on those who supported the practice of ijtihād and abandoned taqlīd. He believed that they did not care about Islam, despised Islamic traditions, and followed Western manners and system of thought.

Similar to Banna, Nabahani voiced anger against the missionary schools in a 1901 treatise titled "Guiding the lost by warning Muslims against missionary schools." The age of Nabhani, Banna and Qutb was an age where religion was being coerced away from the "public square" to use theologian Richard Neuhaus's term[81]. Religion in that time was increasingly seen as a personal affair associated with leisurely activities and life cycle events. With notions such as self expression, individualism, and secularism, many Nahda elites found themselves positioned as 'cognitive minorities'. As Charles Selengut noted[82]:

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[79] Mohammad Salama and Rachel Friedman, "Locating the Secular in Sayyid Qutb," The Arab Studies Journal 20, no. 1 (2012): 104-131, here 113.

[80] Bjorn Bentlage, *Religious Dynamics under the Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism* (Brill, n.d.), 111-124.

[81] Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

[82] Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 56.

Intellectual and government elites look down upon the cognitive minority religions, consider them primitive, even irrational, and ignore or deny their beliefs.

The human desire to have an established social network as a means to have a fixed sense of self and conserve one's vision of reality---as many sociologists stress----was harder to achieve for Nahda intellectuals of the later era. This is in contrast to the first generation of Nahda elites who were able to engage in *tawfik* or what sociologists refer to as 'cognitive bargaining'. This sense of anxiety spearheaded by the age of empire was likewise decoded by Muhammad Muwaylihi whose novel's central character---Ahmad Pasha---finds himself resurrected from the dead in 1890's Egypt; he is at a loss of the new Cairo and finds that the terminologies within the Egyptian administration have been completely Europeanized and lacking coherency. Worst--- and similar to Banna's and Qutb's sentiments--- this fictional character from the dead finds the complete erosion of Islamic norms as well as the widespread abuse of alcohol, money and women in nightclubs and the stock exchange[83]. Commenting on the nature of the age of empire, Peter Hill wrote:

> A volatile financialised economy, the glaring presence of Europeans and European-style culture and the ever-present shadow of the British occupation contribute to the febrile atmosphere of *fin de siècle* decadence and insecurity. One reaction to this...was a new attention to the provenance of ideas.[84]

Indeed, as the fictional character in the novel soon discovers, the chief cause of the 'disorder' he witnessed was due to the Western penetration in the East and blind imitation of the West. Lebanese Nahda elite, Farah Antun, also saw much that is bleak with the age he was in. In his

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[83] Muwaylihı, *al-Muʾallafat al-kamila: al-juz al-awwal, Hadıth Isa ibn Hisham*, ed. Roger Allen (Cairo: al-Majlis al-aʿla li-l-thaqafa, 2002), 184–98.
[84] Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 248.

1903 *Al Din wal 'Ilm wal 'Amal*[85]Antun spoke about class struggle and the tensions that are implicit in modern civilization. Moreover, he described these tensions as inevitably leading to a new era of apocalyptic destruction only after which could a new dawn--- a socialist utopia--- be erected.

Conclusion

Referring to the turmoil of the Arab peoples during the Twentieth century, Samir Kassir, posed the following questions[86]: "How did we become so stagnant? How has a living culture become discredited and its members united in a cult of misery and death?" In response to Kassir's questions, many are quick to shift the blame of the Arab decline on the Western world. Within academia, this attitude found its own niche as many scholars saw the bulk of modern Arab history--and particularly the Nahda--as a series of defeats and capitulations to the European dominated world. This essay has insisted on challenging this capitulation narrative of the Arab renaissance yet it did not consider other potential Nahda paradigms. Similarly, this dissertation runs the risk of not highlighting the hierarchical attitudes of prominent Nahdawis; examining the shortcomings of the Nahda and the value judgement that is laden with this term might perhaps be relevant for future research. Nonetheless, this paper set out to do exactly what it promised. It conveyed how the mid nineteenth century was an age of autonomy, self assurance, and optimism felt by westerners and non westerners alike. Moreover, it conveyed how non western elites advanced their own forms of civilization. This dissertation took qualms with the underlying assumptions behind this defeatist model whether it is the diffusionist model that takes the European origin of the Enlightenment for granted, the inadequate historical methodologies, or the dichotomy of 'East' and 'West' championed most often by Islamists. Utilizing Rifa'a

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[85] Farah Antun, *Al Din Wa 'Ilm 'wal 'Alam,* 1903.
[86] Samir Kassir, *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2013), XIII.

Tahtawi who represented the wider attitudes of early Nahda thinkers, the essay highlighted the traveller's confident attitude set against the angst and ambivalence that typified his successors. Despite all this, the essay never concludes that the age of empire was one of complete acquiescence to the colonizers. While many non Western elites in the age of high imperialism did not interpret their world as a tale of capitalism's successful expansion, many led struggles for liberty while others have striven to have projects of capitalist expansion and of state formation[87]. As the 19th century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, uttered "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."

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[87]See Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2013), introduction.

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