

COLONIALITY, MODERNITY AND EUROPEAN KNOWLEDGE IN AL-ṬAḤṬĀWĪ'S *TAḤLĪṢ AL-IBRĪZ FĪ TALḤĪṢ BĀRĪZ*

HAIFA SAUD ALFAISAL*

This paper examines the attitude towards European coloniality expressed in one of the earliest Nahdawist¹ works. It argues that this attitude is inextricably connected to the problematics of indigenizing European modernity and the consequent epistemological effects of this process. The discussion is centered on al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's text because of its foundational status, thus highlighting the strategies of assimilation that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī employs in his account of his visit to France (1826-1831). Mignolo's coloniality/modernity complex serves as the theoretical basis for tracking the various discursive strategies used by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī to negotiate the difficulties posed by the political mandate of his patron, Muḥammad 'Alī Bāšā (b. 1769, d. 1849), who endeavored to indigenize, strategically and selectively, European modernity.

Introduction

Taḥlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talḥīṣ Bārīz (The Extraction of Pure Gold in the Abridgment of Paris, 1834) by Rifā'ah Rāfī' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (b. 1801, d. 1873) is widely considered to be one of the foundational *Nahḍah* texts. Abdulrazzak Patel categorizes al-Ṭaḥṭāwī as a «(pre-*salafiyah*) Islamic reformist», a Muslim modernist who was «at pains [...] to reconcile differences between traditional religious dogma and secular scientific rationalism»². It is these “pains” that I wish to highlight and map, for there is a process, a sequence and a logic to the crisis involved in confronting modernity that has yet to be addressed using the insights gained from decolonization theory³. After all, the

* King Saud University, Riyadh.

¹ *Nahdawists* have been described as «native functionaries», «literati, functionaries, clerics, activists, reformers», «managers of modernity» and «organic intellectuals». Stephen Sheehi, *Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahḍah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital*, in “Journal of Arabic Literature”, 43, 2-3 (January 2012), pp. 272, 278, 280.

² Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement*, Edited by Rasheed El-Enany, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2013, p. 24.

³ *Nahḍah* scholarship is still, and rightly so, overwhelmingly concerned with excavating the archive, but a few scholars, such as Stephen Sheehi, Michael Allan, Kamran Rastegar and Tarek el-Ariss, have recently turned to theorizing the *Nahḍah* and using it as an analytical paradigm.

Nahḍah encounter was, in the first place, a colonial encounter. I believe there is much to be gained from examining al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's travelogue from the vantage point of the coloniality of modernity, using Walter Mignolo's elaborations on the coloniality/modernity complex⁴. As this article will show, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's recodification of knowledge is determined by the coloniality of modernity and is dependent on the subalternization of indigenous forms of knowledge. Examining al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's account in this manner is essential for future *Nahḍah* studies because his mediation of modernity instigated an overhaul of all basic forms of knowledge: moral, religious, legal, educational, social, political and pedagogical. Understanding this text in context and within the economic and political reconfigurations of power is crucial. The coloniality of modernity was a formative part of this process. To address the coloniality of modernity in this foundational text is to understand the way in which Arab Muslim mediators of modernity comprehended selected and proposed assimilations, dissimulations and differentiations of modernity. In short, there is a political economy to al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discursive strategies that needs to be addressed if one is to understand his mediation of modernity.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discourse needs to be considered within the context of the colonization of Egypt as meticulously registered and read by Timothy Mitchell in his indispensable 1988 *Colonising Egypt*. The structural and material conditions explored in detail by Mitchell frame and determine both al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's position vis-à-vis state power in general and his own complex and ambiguous epistemic locus of enunciation. Mitchell's study illustrates the various processes by which the creation of a disciplined and regimented army, governmental administration and general populace was implemented and, more importantly, illustrates the connection that this process of forging a modern socio-political structure has with colonial regimes of structural control, from the privatization of land to the incorporation of the Lancaster school model. Initially intended for the regimentation of the British working class, the model's disciplinary practices were replicated in local Egyptian educational institutions with the aim of improving Egypt's productivity for the benefit of the European world market⁵. The current undertaking, however, is more concerned with examining the initial moment of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discourse, in which he undertakes to engineer consent for Muḥammad 'Alī's reforms through an epistemological wrenching, which was the pre-condition for the immense and wholesale structural transforma-

⁴ W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2000.

⁵ «The order and discipline of modern schooling were to be the hallmark and the method of a new form of political power; a power required [...] by the system of private landownership and production for the European market that was becoming established in this period». See T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt: With a New Preface*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1991 (1st ed. 1988), p. 75.

tions that the colonization of Egypt entailed and in particular the establishment of its pedagogical institutions⁶. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's role in the transformation of the pedagogical system cannot be overestimated. His theorizations on knowledge and science in *Taḥlīṣ* would infuse the entire edifice of civilian education that was established after his return to Egypt. In addition to holding various pedagogical administrative positions, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī continued to espouse educational theories in works like his 1872 *al-Muršid al-amīn li 'l-banāt wa 'l-banīn* (A Guidebook for Boys and Girls)⁷.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's literary influence is perhaps not as clearly marked out as his pedagogical role. He was, no doubt, a key figure in the «encounter between different literary traditions», which did «not take place in a common shared space, in learned circles or schools, which unite scholars and poets of different backgrounds», but rather took place «in the form of translation» and in travel accounts «to the capitals of Europe, turned into literary writing»⁸. Tarik El-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* enriches al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's scholarship by approaching modernity as a somatic condition, to be read from the human sensorium. He connects this experiential dimension to the literary when he uses al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's poetic associations as a registrar for his unconscious in the experience of modernity. Although some reservations may be held with respect to the temporal challenge posed by El-Ariss's use of Adonis' reading of modernity (wherein El-Ariss exploits the semantic slippage between *ḥadāṭah* [modernity], *ḥādīṭ* [event], and *ḥadīṭ* [new]), this problem does not seem to detract from his insights into the psychology of desire and power in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's engagement with the modernizing demands of his patron, Muḥammad 'Alī *Bāšā*⁹. However, I believe that the experiential dimension of this encounter must be read with an

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-76 for a detailed exposition of the role of pedagogical institutions in violent structuring of the rural population for productivity. Khalid Fahmy, in *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*, takes Mitchell to task for paying more attention to educational reforms than to the military reforms of Muḥammad 'Alī, which is where, Fahmy argues, Mitchell's ideas of «“enframing” would be most apparent». See Khalid Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his army and the making of modern Egypt*, AUC Press, Cairo 1997, p. 119. It is my position that investigations of the mediation of modernity must be more rather than less inclusive. Stephen Sheehi's work clearly illustrates the importance of connecting structural and epistemic transformation and the role of key figures he calls the 'managers of modernity'. Stephen Sheehi, *Towards a Critical Theory of al-Naḥḍah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital*, cit., p. 280.

⁷ See Mitchell on al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's role in engineering the logic of the new order. T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt: With a New Preface*, cit., pp. 88-99 and 107-108.

⁸ Nadia Al-Bagdadi, *Registers of Arabic Literary History*, in “New Literary History”, 39, 3 (Summer 2008), pp. 437-461.

⁹ Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*, Fordham University Press, New York 2013.

attentiveness to the coloniality of modernity, which had a formative impact in shaping al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's deliberate and calculated mediation of modern Eurocentric epistemology, no matter how fraught with ambiguities this encounter was.

At first glance, Ellen McLarney's 2016 *Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab* promises to broach the topic of coloniality. She states, «new disciplinary institutions that accompanied colonial modernity did not necessarily supplant Islamic models, but rather worked within and through them»¹⁰. However, McLarney's line of investigation is focused on how «the classical conception of *adab* as righteous behaviour organizing proper social and political relationships»¹¹ was used as a method and approach to knowledge and, subsequently, to create a new political subjectivity in support of an emerging modern sense of nation and self-rule. She examines the role of *adab* in mediating and challenging some of the assumed properties of modernity as explored in four of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's works. However, it is my contention that the process by which McLarney's «[n]ew vocabularies (“civilization”, “progress”, “history”, “agency”, “liberty”, and so on) are acquired and linked to older ones»¹² is fundamentally fashioned by the coloniality of modernity. Thus what McLarney presents as «al-Taḥṭāwī's oeuvre» – his «translational negotiation of “indigenous” and “foreign” epistemes»¹³ – will be misread unless due attention is given to the coloniality of knowledge formation.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discursive move, the process by which al-Ṭaḥṭāwī sanctioned French ideas, namely, through «reference to the scriptural tradition, projected back into the early community (*salāf*), and framed within classical theological debates about ethical conduct (*adab*)»¹⁴ was determined by the coloniality of modernity.

Other recent scholarship in English on al-Ṭaḥṭāwī has described him as a «keen ethnographer of that new object called “Europe”»¹⁵ and as incorporating and assimilating «the Franks' sciences into an Islamic model»¹⁶. However, I would like to build on Lisa Pollard's 1999 study titled *The Habits and Customs of Modernity: Egyptians in Europe and the Geography of Nineteenth-Century Nationalism*, wherein she discusses al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's mediation

¹⁰ E. McLarney, *Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab*, in “International Journal of Middle East Studies”, 48, 1 (February 2016), p. 27, doi: 10.1017/S0020743815001452.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ A. Wick, *Sailing the Modern Episteme: Al-Taḥṭāwī on the Mediterranean*, in “Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East”, 34, 2 (Summer 2014), p. 416.

¹⁶ E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Takhlīṣ (1834)*, in “Middle Eastern Literatures”, 16, 3 (2013), p. 282.

of modernity. She traces how European positivism transformed ways of knowing wherein progress was incorporated into epistemic frameworks, which in turn influenced identity by shaping modern behavioral and habitual customs. What I am emphasizing here, however, is the formative role of the coloniality of modernity in such processes.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī claims to have written the travelogue at the instigation of his mentor, Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār (b. 1766, d. 1835), a reformist scholar and rector of al-Azhar (1831)¹⁷. This may be part of the reason for his emphatic advocacy for the legitimacy and the Islamic credentials of Muḥammad ‘Alī *Bāšā*¹⁸, viceroy of Egypt’s (1805-1849) political program. However, the fact that the travelogue was published «by order of Muhammad Ali in 1834», who «had free copies given to his state functionaries as well as students in the government schools»¹⁹, leaves little doubt as to the political import of this travelogue. The Pasha’s controversial²⁰ reforms were undertaken in response to French military superiority²¹. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, following the general consensus of the era, attributes the military superiority of the French to their modernity, for «their skills, organization, justice, technical know-how, versatility and inventiveness in matters of warfare»²² cannot be separated from the modernity that produces them. It is this modernity that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī tries to represent in his travelogue, and his strategy in doing so is determined by the coloniality of modernity.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī addresses the issue of reform in the introduction of his travelogue, casting the reform project as essential for the advancement of Muslim civilization and the sciences as key to this advancement. What is in fact a political program in response to the socio-political transformations of the transition to a cotton economy is idealized and imagined as a universalized and collective aspiration towards the advancement of Islamic civilization. The transformation to a cotton economy and the political ascendancy of Muḥammad ‘Alī necessitated creating a class of technocrats dedicated to bolstering ‘Alī’s

¹⁷ See Rifa’ a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)*, Translated and Introduced by D.L. Newman, Saqi, London 2011 (2nd ed.), p. 104.

¹⁸ D.L. Newman, *Introduction*, in Rifa’ a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., pp. 16-18.

¹⁹ L. Pollard, *The Habits and Customs of Modernity: Egyptians in Europe and the Geography of Nineteenth-Century Nationalism*, in “Arab Studies Journal”, 7/8, 2/1 (Fall 1999), p. 63.

²⁰ One outstanding dissenter was none other than ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ġabartī (b. 1753, d. 1826), chronicler of the eyewitness account of the French occupation of Egypt, «who fiercely opposed both the introduction of European (infidel) sciences and practices and the ruler’s absolutist governance». D.L. Newman, *Introduction*, cit., p. 39._

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²² Rifa’ a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 113.

power and running his government and military. This meant that he had to wrest education from the provenance of al-Azhar and prioritize the utilitarian sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-nāfi‘ah* or «useful sciences» as al-Ṭaḥṭāwī calls them) in order to set up European-style military and governmental teaching institutions to support these reforms²³. Although European-inspired reforms were not new to the Islamic world²⁴, Muḥammad ‘Alī’s geopolitical and temporal locale and the absolute power he enjoyed as a result of the vacuum following the French occupation of Egypt meant that, unlike the Ottoman sultans, he did not encounter formidable resistance from the religious and political elites. With the defeat of the Mamluks, Muḥammad ‘Alī’s efforts focused on undermining Azharite control over education. Who better to do so than an Azharite scholar like al-Ṭaḥṭāwī? al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s dependence on his patron for his own professional, financial, and social well-being made his engineering of consent for the reforms a matter of vital interest, not of choice²⁵. Moreover, there was a great deal more at stake for the recently disenfranchised al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, whose family was stripped of their *iltizām* (tax-farming) income by Muḥammad ‘Alī, who replaced «the inefficient tax-farming [*iltizām*] system with a system of government monopolies»²⁶. Because of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s reforms, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s family lost the tax-farming revenue they had re-

²³ One aspect of these reforms entailed sending students and young bureaucrats to Europe to be educated in languages and sciences, as well as in Western practices. Pollard describes the effects of this training abroad, stating: «Upon their return to Egypt, the members of the missions were employed by the state in various capacities. They took positions in translation, civil administration, finance, education (*diwan al-madaris*), and in various forms of industry. Because they constituted the bulwark of a new educational and bureaucratic elite, the members of the missions were not always well-received upon their arrival. The old elite of bureaucrats – Turks and the Egyptian *‘ulama* – resented them, as did the European administrators who worked in the state’s employ, as they feared replacement by the new arrivals. Despite such less than welcoming receptions and criticism, training abroad became the hallmark of modern education, and created a kind of new cultured aristocracy. Likewise, knowledge brought back to Egypt from abroad became instrumental in shaping the relationship between the state and its servants». L. Pollard, *The Habits and Customs of Modernity: Egyptians in Europe and the Geography of Nineteenth-Century Nationalism*, cit., p. 62.

²⁴ Muḥammad ‘Alī *Bāšā*’s educational reforms in Egypt echoed the earlier reforms of Selim III, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1789 to 1807.

²⁵ Johnston believes that his strategy reveals a discomfort – «be it personal, political, and so forth, with seeking knowledge from Christians, and the resultant need to defend this choice, whether to himself, to his readers, or both». E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s Takhlīṣ (1834)*, cit., p. 285.

²⁶ M.E. Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 2009, p. 17.

lied on, and his income as a teacher was meagre. It was only when his mentor Hasan al-‘Aṭṭār – the Pasha’s appointee as Chief of the Azhar (1830-1834) – intervened that a position was secured for al-Ṭaḥṭāwī as a preacher in Muḥammad ‘Alī’s New Army, thus laying the foundations for al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s long service to the Pasha.

By advocating for the useful sciences as a way in which to engineer consent for Muḥammad ‘Alī’s reform agenda, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī supports this recoding of knowledge with the usual roster of epistemological authorities – namely, numerable verses from the Qur’an and various Hadiths of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as countless citations from the collective Arabic literary heritage. Drawing on the knowledge of these authorities is necessary for the naturalization and legitimation of new forms of knowledge. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s reconstitution of knowledge is simultaneously the «violent epistemological wrenching»²⁷, which is an effect of profound socio-structural transformations, and an epistemological act of order. Although his argument is simple, there is a colonial surplus to his logic, and it is this surplus that, I argue, is an unavoidable corollary of modernity. In order to legitimate new forms of knowledge, he has to engineer a perspectival reorientation apropos the function of knowledge to one that is utilitarian. The utilitarian attitude then determines his reordering and classification of knowledge. However, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī encounters various problems in this process because there is a colonial violence at work in his epistemological wrenching and ordering.

Reorienting Knowledge: The Perspectival Shift as a Precondition for the Useful Sciences

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī clears the epistemological ground for his reconstitution of knowledge by announcing the necessity of shifting the indigenous worldview away from other-worldliness as the aim of knowledge. «The scholars», he says, «must encourage all people to devote themselves to the sciences, arts and useful skills»²⁸, and to abandon the idea that one has to «wholeheartedly [abandon] himself (*inhamaka*) to the hereafter»²⁹. He thoroughly disagrees with what Syrian polymath Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḥusayn al-‘Āmilī (b. 1547, d. 1622) said in a poem about the futility of worldly education:

You who are in school
 all you have acquired is murmurings [of the devil]
 Your thought if it is with any other but the Loved One
 will not have a share in the other life
 So wash away with wine from the table of the heart

²⁷ I am using Stephen Sheehi’s formulation here; see Stephen Sheehi, *Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahḍah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital*, cit., p. 269.

²⁸ Rifa’ a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 115.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117, fn. 1.

every science that does not bring salvation in the hereafter³⁰.

This transition to worldliness and disenchantment³¹ with the otherworldly is the precondition for al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's utilitarian classification of forms of knowledge. This disenchantment with the spiritual was expressed in one of the earliest eyewitness accounts of the French invasion of Egypt. In 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ġabartī's account, the military and organizational superiority of the French is juxtaposed with the weakness and disorganization of the Egyptian army³², as well as with the futile spiritual appeals of the populace. The prayers of the scholars ('*ulamā*'), Sufī masters and disciples, and even the hoisting of the supposed banner of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ġabartī says, did nothing to forestall the French invasion. He even goes so far as to say that fate was on the side of the French as he attributes the main cause of defeat to «a side wind» that blew sand clouds «into the faces of the Egyptian soldiers»³³. In other words, even fate favors the hardworking. To recognize the impracticability and futility of local indigenous religious practices is the wager of modernity. It is the condition of possibility for the adoption of the new reform-centred outlook. Although this does not entail a complete marginalization of the religious worldview, it does entail disenchantment with the spiritual and a consequential tendency towards a more modern and utilitarian understanding of the role and function of religion in the social order³⁴. In other words, there is a shift in the political import of knowledge.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

³¹ I am using the term in the sense that Charles Taylor uses it in his book, *A Secular Age* (2007). See Ch. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2007.

³² Ġabartī makes the following comparison: «[T]hey were irresolute, and were at odds with one another, being divided in opinion, envious of each other, frightened for their lives, their well-being, and their comforts; immersed in their ignorance and self-delusion; arrogant and haughty in their attire and presumptuousness; afraid of decreasing in number, and pompous in their finery, heedless of the results of their action; contemptuous of their enemy, unbalanced in their reasoning and judgment. They were unlike the other group, that is the French, who were a complete contrast in everything mentioned above». Abd al-Rahman Jabarti, *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French Occupation, 1798*, Translated by Sh. Moreh, Markus Wiener, Princeton 2004 (3rd ed.), p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Thus, for example, *ṣarī'ah* was reformulated in reformist discourse as a concept from which Islamic modernity's moral code could be constructed. In Salvatore's words, *ṣarī'ah* existed «as "Islamic normativity" or "Islamic normative reason" rather than "Islamic law"», meaning that «[I]aw was seen as a tool for regulating fields of social behaviour and for disciplining citizens», and this was «a view that religious reformers largely shared with state authorities». A. Salvatore, *The Reform Project in the Emerging Public Spheres*, in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, edited by M.Kh. Masud-A. Salvatore-M. van Bruinessen, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2009, p. 195.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's next step is to consolidate the utilitarian view towards the acquisition of knowledge – that is, to legitimate modern ways of knowing. This is because al-Ṭaḥṭāwī needs to go further than mere disenchantment if he is to engineer consent for reform and instigate a paradigm shift in ways of knowing. He needs to reconfigure worldly knowledge³⁵. Based on utility, he explains the division of human knowledge into:

the sciences and the arts. The former are achievements that have been empirically proven. Art, on the other hand, denotes skills, i.e., knowledge of the techniques for certain things in accordance with specified rules.

The sciences are subdivided into mathematical branches and non-mathematical branches. The latter are, in turn, split into natural and theological sciences. The mathematical sciences are made up of arithmetic, geometry and algebra. The natural sciences are composed of natural history, physics and chemistry. Natural history is taken to refer to botany, mineralogy, and zoology. These three branches are called 'the classes of production': i.e. the botanical class, the mineral class, and the animal class.

As for theology, it is also referred to as 'metaphysics'.

The arts are subdivided into intellectual arts and applied arts. The former are closest to the sciences and include, for instance, the science of eloquence and rhetoric, grammar, logic, poetry, drawing, sculpture, and music. All of these are intellectual arts because they require scientific rules. Conversely, the applied arts are the crafts.

Such is the division drawn up by Frankish scholars. However, in our country there is very often no difference between sciences and arts; a distinction is made based only on whether an art is an independent science or serves as a tool for another.

[...] The knowledge of all these subjects comes after the knowledge of the French language and matters related to it³⁶.

³⁵ Johnston offers the following explanation of what this process of knowledge meant in terms of the transformation of the traditional epistemological framework and the recategorization of the *al-'ulūm al-ḥikmiyyah*. «Differing from those few earlier classifications that prefer the name *al-'ulūm al-ḥikmiyya* to refer to the grouping of non-Islamic sciences (e.g., al-'Āmirī or Ibn Khaldūn's modification of these as *al-'ulūm al-ḥikmiyya al-falsafiyya* in the 14th century), al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's account situates the '*ulūm ḥikmiyya* within the '*ulūm 'aqliyya*, incorporating and assimilating the Franks' sciences into the structure present in the Islamic lands and restricting the '*ulūm ḥikmiyya* to a subset of the rational sciences». E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Takhlīṣ (1834)*, cit., p. 288.

³⁶ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., pp. 334-335. This schematic is simplified by Johnston into «transmitted science» and «rational science». E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Takhlīṣ (1834)*, cit., p. 282.

Sanitizing the Useful Sciences

One issue that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī needs to confront is the position of these sciences vis-à-vis religious knowledge. He has to explain and justify the reordering of knowledge and to prioritize the new useful and practical sciences related to the military, administrative, and legal system. This means that he has to situate the religious sciences (*al-'ulūm al-šar'īyah*). He manages to separate them from the new and useful sciences by claiming that the religious sciences are sufficiently developed. In so doing, he unwittingly subalternizes them as resources for fuelling the progress and advancement that the imperative of political power demands, which is the restructuring of forms of knowledge on the basis of utility.

To continue laying the foundations for the useful transference of knowledge, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī now turns his attention towards neutralizing French knowledge. His strategy involves the following:

1. De-Christianizing the useful sciences by stressing French religious apathy
2. Separating scientific method from philosophical speculation
3. Undermining the philosophical underpinnings of French modernity by attributing philosophical sophistry to rhetorical strategies and a faulty use of logic.

In terms of neutralizing French rational knowledge, French secularism served him well in one respect. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī frequently stresses that «the French in general are Christians only in name»³⁷. French knowledge had to be cleansed from any religious overtones because this was vital for the reform program to work³⁸. He reassures his readership of the complete separation of theology and secular knowledge, stating: «If in France people say, “That is a learned man”, they do not mean by this that he is knowledgeable about his religion, rather that he has knowledge of one of the other sciences»³⁹. Then to confirm the need for these secular sciences, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī continues, «you will recognize that many of these sciences are absent from our countries»⁴⁰. Hence, the need for the Pasha's reform program, which, he

³⁷ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., pp. 131, 252.

³⁸ For example, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī did not glorify secularism when it came to «the theocratic Islamic view»; in this case, he «could not accept the basic secular doctrines of the French Revolution, namely, the sovereignty of the people and the displacement of divine authority by that of human reason». L. Zolondek, *The French Revolution in Arabic Literature of the Nineteenth Century*, in “The Muslim World”, 57, 3 (July 1967), p. 207.

³⁹ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 259. «In other words, what distinguishes the scholarly world of Paris in this age is specialization, institutionalization, and professionalization». A. Wick, *Sailing the Modern Episteme: Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī on the Mediterranean*, cit., p. 415.

⁴⁰ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 259. It is highly significant that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī chose to revisit the issue of French religious apathy in a section of the

stresses, emulates the French «because of their human qualities and because of their sciences – not because they are Christians»⁴¹.

There was, however, a more threatening aspect to French secularism and religious apathy. Secularism's philosophical underpinnings undermined the Islamic cosmic worldview, and French religious apathy would suggest, to the average Muslim, a pervasive moral laxity. To mitigate this threat, salvage the indigenous religious worldview, and give the religious worldview a function within his schematic of modernity, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī reassures his readers that the French, nonetheless, «praise all of them [religions] as they enjoin people to do what is good and prohibit the reprehensible»⁴². He is thus able to forge links with the French moral order through a common moral behavioral code, the well-known Islamic “to do what is good and prohibit the reprehensible” dictum⁴³. However, the rationality cultural complex presented a much more challenging obstacle for the religious worldview.

The rationality cultural complex underpins Eurocentric constructions of knowledge. This complex operates by fabricating a subject-object relationship in the construction of knowledge wherein the reason-bearing white European male subject knows the, essentially and naturally, reason-deprived object who is also external to the subject. This cultural complex is projected as a universal, but always hierarchical, criterion of legitimacy in knowledge construction. The idea that rationality, reason, and the knowing subject are contextual and relational is not within the purview of this rationality cultural complex⁴⁴. It is

third essay, titled «On the Religion of the People of Paris», which directly precedes his elucidations on the organization of French knowledge.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴³ He also uses this precept to bring together Islamic law and French law: «Together with Monsieur Chevalier I also studied two volumes of the book entitled *The Spirit of the Laws*, which was written by an author who is famous among the French and who is called Montesquieu! The work can best be compared to a balance between the legal and political schools (*madhab*); it is based on commending the good and censuring the bad in accordance with reason». *Ibid.*, p. 296. Commending the right and forbidding the wrong becomes in modernity “commending the good and censuring the bad in accordance with reason”.

⁴⁴ This complex, first elaborated by Aníbal Quijano (1992) in *Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad*, describes the way in «which the European paradigm of rational knowledge was elaborated» through the coloniality of power «as a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world». A. Quijano, *Colonialidad y Modernidad-Racionalidad*, Edited by H. Bonilla, Tercer Mundo, Bogota 1992, p. 172. Quijano stresses the formative impact that the coloniality of power in the «constitution of the paradigm» and its association «with the emergence of urban and capitalist social relations, which in their turn could not be fully explained outside colonialism and coloniality particularly not as far as Latin America is concerned». *Ibid.* This same complex is opera-

this complex with which al-Ṭaḥṭāwī struggles in order to neutralize French secularism so that he may consequently naturalize French useful sciences.

As al-Ṭaḥṭāwī observes, the French reject anything that is included in the holy books «since it falls outside the natural laws»⁴⁵. To allay the hegemony of the rationality cultural complex⁴⁶, he simply dissociates the success of their application of the scientific method from the sophistries – or what he calls the «heresies»⁴⁷ of philosophical thought. To root out these heresies, his strategy is to redress the colonial hierarchization of knowledge. Having already dissociated the useful sciences from the religious sciences, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī now attempts to subordinate the philosophical surplus of modernity to the dogma of faith, in opposition to the very construct – rationality and practicality – that he has so far been advocating as the engine fuelling European supremacy. This response to the profound contradictions of his argument threatens the logical consistency of his case. The root cause of this philosophical and methodological conundrum is the belief that European modernity can be separated from its philosophical underpinnings. In this way, he is no different from many *Nahdawists* who strove to separate «Western science and technology [...] from [the] philosophy, culture and imperialism of the West» so as to benefit from «modernisation without» addressing «the philosophical underpinnings and the socio-political outlook that derives from their application in the West»⁴⁸. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's strategy deserves some attention because it demonstrates the *modus operandi* of colonial difference.

The Coloniality of the Modern Episteme

Colonial difference serves as the condition of possibility for the coloniality⁴⁹ of power because it is used to legitimize the «subalternization of knowl-

tive here in the Arab Nahdawist context as the exploration of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's mediation of modern epistemology reveals. It is also functional in Walter Mignolo's coloniality/modernity formulation. See W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, cit., p. 59.

⁴⁵ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 131.

⁴⁶ Here I am using Mignolo's configuration of Aníbal Quijano's understanding of rationality as a cultural complex, which «was being put in place and established as the universal paradigm of knowledge and of hierarchical relations between the “rational humanity” (Europe) and the rest of the world». A. Quijano, *Colonialidad y Modernidad-Racionalidad*, cit., pp. 437-447, quoted in W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, cit., p. 59.

⁴⁷ He recognizes that the French do not adhere to «all forms of religious worship whose wisdom» they «do not recognize»; they consider them to be «heresies and fanciful delusions». Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 252.

⁴⁸ Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement*, cit., p. 162.

edges and the subjugation of people»⁵⁰. Colonial difference is what holds modernity and coloniality together: «colonial differences, epistemic and ontological, are constructed in the rhetoric of modernity – inferior beings (colonial ontological difference), racially or sexually, are beings not well suited for knowledge and understanding (colonial epistemic difference)»⁵¹. This dynamic underlies al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's reading of French superiority. The French enjoy political and military superiority because they have excelled in ways of knowing that are different from the indigenous superstitious and non-utilitarian attitude towards knowledge. He expresses his frustration with the traditional method, which requires extensive linguistic knowledge and which consists of studying commentaries and commentaries on commentaries, as opposed to the colonial way of knowing, which is to pursue innovative ideas⁵². Here the subalternization of the indigenous episteme to the hegemony of the rationality complex is clearly illustrated. Thus, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī states that «anyone endowed with a pertinent critical mind» can see that Parisian 'scholars' knowledge of all these scientific disciplines, whose effects have been proven by means of experiments, has been firmly established»⁵³. However, he interjects, «while they have the most in-depth knowledge of most sciences and theoretical arts, some of their philosophical beliefs depart from the laws of reason adhered to by other nations»⁵⁴. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's dispute here is with the definition of reason; these other nations are not named, nor are their normative laws of reason delineated. The Islamic understanding of reason is, however, explained.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī suggests that the French use of reason against religious belief is nothing more than sophistry: They use logic (*qānūn al-'aql*) to «twist and defend them [these philosophical beliefs] in such a way that they appear to be true and credible to people»⁵⁵; and in their philosophical sciences, «there is a lot of misguided filling that runs counter to all the holy books and on

⁴⁹ Mignolo defines coloniality as follows: «The coexistence and the intersection of both modern colonialisms and colonial modernities. [...] from the perspective of people and local histories that have to confront modern colonialism, is what I understand here as 'coloniality', quite simply, the reverse and unavoidable side of 'modernity' – its darker side, like the part of the moon we do not see when we observe it from earth». W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, cit., p. 22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Mignolo also observes that «[f]rom the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs». *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵² Newman offers the following explanation in a footnote to al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's text: «This is a reference to the habit of classical Arab scholars of spending their time writing profuse text commentaries and super commentaries (*hāshiyā*) on commentaries (*sharḥ*)». Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 116, fn. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

which they base proofs that are hard for people to refute»⁵⁶. Elizabeth Johnston reads this act of reclamation as being al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's critique of «their neglect of the transmitted sciences» and their inattentiveness «to investigating all aspects and dimensions of their (Christian) shari'a»⁵⁷. Wick, on the other hand, regards al-Ṭaḥṭāwī «as saying that one should strive not to read reason *against* but rather *along with* transmitted tradition» [italics in original]⁵⁸. However, both claims fall short of the mark because what al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is actually suggesting is a subordination of logic to the dictates of faith. All philosophy books, he insists, should be subjected to the «third rule of refutation» by the author of *al-Sullam al-murawnaq fi 'ilm al-mantiq* (The Brilliant Staircase Towards Logic)⁵⁹, which regards logic as an auxiliary science to support and guide the followers of the prophetic tradition and the holy book, not to contradict them. This conditional acceptance of the modern episteme bears witness to the accuracy of Mignolo's analysis of the coloniality/modernity complex. The epistemic coloniality of modernity has cornered al-Ṭaḥṭāwī into a logically untenable position, namely, the conditional and sporadic employment of the cultural complex of rationality. That is not to say, however, that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's position is not internally conflicted – it is. However, the conflict is deferred so long as the utilitarian perspective is maintained, allowing for the enjoyment of the fruits of European modernity without delving into its agnostic philosophical underpinnings. Thus, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī does more than incorporate the Franks' sciences into an Islamic model, as Johnston's reading suggests⁶⁰. He attempts to reconcile two conflicting epistemes by proposing a conditional exercise of reason as a nodal point of convergence.

This analysis of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's use of reason exposes the shortcomings of investigations of the *Nahḍah* that fail to take into account the coloniality of modernity and the colonial character of the East-West encounter. This point is best illustrated

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 255. Newman states that in the original manuscript version, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī uses the rotation of the earth as an example of what «runs counter to all the holy books». This limitation on the use of logic is very much in keeping with what Salvatore notes is one of the key categories or, as I would put it, nodes of reform discourse, *ṣarī'ah*. Salvatore makes the following comment: «We come here to the third main element of the reform discourse, concerning the place of *ṣarī'ah*. Michael Gasper (2001) has observed that, while Islamic reformers agreed that the *ṣarī'ah* was the principal source of Islamic reason, the increasingly press-based public sphere was the key to establishing some crucial conditions for the use of that reason». A. Salvatore, *The Reform Project in the Emerging Public Spheres*, cit., p. 194.

⁵⁷ E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Takhliṣ (1834)*, cit., p. 288.

⁵⁸ A. Wick, *Sailing the Modern Episteme: Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī on the Mediterranean*, cit., p. 416.

⁵⁹ *al-Sullam al-murawnaq fi 'ilm al-mantiq*, <http://www.ahlalloghah.com/assollam.pdf>.

⁶⁰ «I show how he shapes the Franks' sciences into a model that can be incorporated into and absorbed by his own, although not without meaningful consequences». E.E. Johnston, *Classification and Critique of Sciences in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Takhliṣ (1834)*, cit., p. 283.

by comparing the above analysis of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's manipulation of reason with that of Wael Abu-Uksa. His claim that «'Aql signifies the epistemic realm, which exceeds the temporal horizons of Islamic legal theory» and that both the Muslims and the French acknowledged reason «as a comprehensive leading principle that formulates norms of governance and society»⁶¹ is not borne out by the above analysis of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's use of reason. This is because colonial relations of power in the construction of knowledge are not taken into account⁶².

If in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's mediation of forms of knowledge, the coloniality of modernity operates on a subtle level, his attitude towards French colonial power is explicitly obscurantist. It is my contention here that this could not be otherwise, given the coloniality of modernity whereby «there is no modernity without coloniality; coloniality is constitutive of modernity and not derivative. There is a single coloniality/modernity that is the consequence of the geopolitical differential distribution of epistemic, political, economic, and aesthetic (e.g., sensing, subjectivity) power»⁶³.

The Coloniality of Modern Power

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's handling of French colonial violence is even less convincing than his unsuccessful attempt at reconciling the two epistemes mentioned in the previous section. Having used the separation of the theoretical from the practical as his intellectual sieve to secure the value of the useful sciences, he applies the same strategy to the problem of colonialism. He separates French colonial practice from French ideology and the civilizational discourse of the Enlightenment as perceived in the notion of *liberté*.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was in Paris when the French invaded Algeria in 1830 and when, later that year, they deposed Charles X. What he has to say about the French invasion of Algeria is intriguingly sparse, and even apologetic, compared with his profuse explanation of the political situation that led up to the revolt, to which he dedicates the whole of «Essay Five». Although scholars have separately noted al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's «bizarre omission [...] [of] the French invasion of Algeria – a fellow Muslim state!»⁶⁴ and his «lengthy translation of legal documents spelling

⁶¹ Wael Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab World Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316676189>. In the French invasion of Egypt proclamation, «'aql was used as a signifier for political legitimacy» because the Mamluks were said to lack «reason, science, and virtues ('aql, 'ilm, faḍā'il), and therefore they were not eligible to rule Egypt alone». *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶² Abu-Uksa's claim that the scholarly emphasis on reason, 'aql, displaced the French political principle of freedom and equality is likewise faulty. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶³ W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, cit., p. 22.

⁶⁴ D.L. Newman, *Introduction*, cit., p. 92.

out French freedoms» and «discussion of civil society type institutions in Paris as well as the discussion of French intellectual life»⁶⁵, I argue that these two aspects of his discourse are intricately connected and that it is the coloniality of modernity that forges this connection. French modernity carries the promise of *liberté*, which al-Ṭaḥṭāwī reimagines as a simplistic and naive paradigm that he uses as his moral compass in mediating political modernity.

There is sufficient reason to exclude the possibility of political censorship⁶⁶ as a probable cause for this striking omission of the invasion as a topic of discussion. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī deliberates on the virtue of justice, the French king's tyranny, and the harmful effects of despotism, as well as on the value of liberty in his travelogue. All these issues are politically sensitive and could very well have displeased his patron, Muḥammad 'Alī *Bāšā*. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is careful to placate his patron with statements commending the Pasha's insightful reforms and his mission to rejuvenate Islamic civilization. Moreover, although he is careful in his discussion on the French revolt against their king, which he calls a heresy, he justifies its inclusion by stating that the French count it as one of their happy times and distances himself from this revolt by declaring the following: «In our country, these two expressions ['King of France' and 'King of the French'] would be synonymous, since the fact of being the king by choice of the people is not incompatible with the fact that this is given by God the Almighty – Praise be to Him – as a favour or beneficence. For instance, to us, there is no difference between 'King of the Persians' and 'King of the land of Persia'»⁶⁷. To do otherwise, as Newman suggests, would have laid al-Ṭaḥṭāwī open to the accusation «of challenging the very idea of the caliphate! Indeed, was not the Ottoman sultan “the shadow of God on Earth”?»⁶⁸.

It is my contention here that to have inserted his opinions on French colonization in this travelogue would have undermined his entire mediatory process and, consequently, seriously compromised the mission's aims and by extension, of course, Muḥammad 'Alī's reform project, not to mention al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's own prospects for the future. That is all somewhat obvious. Less obvious is what I would like to propose is al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's vested interest in mediating modernity, namely, his ideological investment in the French ideal of *liberté*, as a more probable cause for understating French imperialism. To put it simply, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī needs the promise of *liberté* that is embedded in the construct of modernity.

⁶⁵ P. Gran, *Tahtawi in Paris*, in “Al-Ahram Weekly Online”, 568 (2002), p. 6, www.ahram.org.eg/weekly.

⁶⁶ Gran claims that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is not forthright in his political discussion owing to his sensitivity to what «Mohamed Ali might have found offensive». *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 323.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī dissociates French colonial practice, namely, the invasion of Algeria, from French ideological and scientific modernity, liberty and reason by minimizing the importance of this act of colonial violence. Although al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is aware that «the war between the French and the Algerians was purely a question of politics and of quarrels related to trade, money», he is essentially misleading by personalizing the war when he continues, «and disputes springing from» French Prime Minister M. Polignac's «arrogance and pride», his «personal whim» and «fancy»⁶⁹. At no point in his account does al-Ṭaḥṭāwī consider the systemic and structural causes for the invasion. This «question of politics» was the economic drive behind acts of colonial aggression. Polignac used the Bakri and Bushnaq Algerian debt affair⁷⁰ as a premise for the invasion of Algeria. Far from being a personal affair, it was highly political. It was the French state that was granted an interest-free loan by the Algerian Dey, and it was the French state that also made a deal with Algerian traders to slash the amount owed, to the disadvantage of their creditors (including the Dey). Economies of power are not isolated personal phenomena. They are systemically generated and structural. Colonial knowledge is likewise intricately connected with colonial power. This fact is iconically represented by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's account of his coming across the mummified body of «Shaykh Sulayman al-Halabi, who martyred himself by assassinating the French general Kleber (Klaybar) and was then himself killed by the French when they occupied Egypt»⁷¹ in the *Salle d'Anatomie* in the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. Following the assassination of General Kleber on 14 June 1800, the assassin's body, including the skull, was preserved for the purpose of medical education. Throughout the years, the skull was available for study by «generations of French medical students as a means of demonstrating the cranial features of the criminal and fanatical mind!»⁷². In this instance, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is speechless, and he contents himself with saying «there is no power and no strength save in the Great Almighty God!»⁷³.

Instead of confronting the crisis of French colonial violence, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī internalizes love of liberty as his caliber. Thus, he attributes the French king's bad behavior with respect to the Algerian question to his being an en-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁷⁰ Algerian merchants supplied wheat to the French for which the French were given an interest-free loan by the Algerian Dey. When the debt rose, Algerian traders made a deal with the French to slash the amount owed; however, their creditors (including the Dey) were horrified when they learned of this deal. The Dey argued with the French consul and then slapped him. Ultimately, Polignac used this insult as an excuse to invade Algeria.

⁷¹ Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 264.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

emy of liberty⁷⁴, which, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī argues, is clearly revealed by his appointment of ministers known for their hatred of liberty. The hated Polignac was the most prominent of those appointees. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī uses rumors to spice up the minister's anti-liberty offence⁷⁵. The French people, however, loved liberty and are therefore cast as God's instrument of revenge against the State (the king and his minister) and the Church (the archbishop). al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's reasoning is consistent. Writing forty years later in 1871, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī translates and comments on an eyewitness account of the incidents that led up to the French invasion of Algeria⁷⁶. His commentary still upholds the same personalized religious perspective. The Turkish account provided by an Ottoman official (*qā'im maqām*) strongly suggests that the source of conflict was the Algerian Dey's obstinate and uncompromising character. When the Dey finally admits his error, his defeat, and consequently the loss of Algeria to the French, is portrayed as God's punishment for disobeying the Ottoman Sultan, who sent the Dey emissaries commanding him to resolve the conflict with the French Consul peacefully⁷⁷. This is the same reasoning that

⁷⁴ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī explains that the French people «believed his words» and «the entire population rejoiced at his government and the way in which he complied with the laws» but «in the end, he shamed the laws in which the rights of the French people were enshrined». *Ibid.*, p. 309. In footnote 1, Newman says: «The Arabic clearly shows the difficulty al-Tahtawi had in explaining the concept of non-religious laws, rights of the people». *Ibid.* Gran's reading is not borne out by the textual evidence, wherein al-Ṭaḥṭāwī very clearly denigrates the counter-liberty tactics of the French king and his prime minister. Thus, it cannot be said that al-Tahtawi was cautious in describing «the overthrow of the Bourbon Dynasty in 1830 (*taghayyur* or change) and its replacement by the Duke of Orleans in the July Monarchy leading to a much more constitutional system [...]». P. Gran, *Tahtawi in Paris*, cit., p. 6.

⁷⁵ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī spices up the minister's anti-liberty offence with rumors regarding Polignac's being illegitimate.

⁷⁶ This account is mentioned in D.L. Newman, *Introduction*, cit., p. 92 (fn. *Nubḍah 'an duḥūl al-Farānsīs li 'l-Ġazā'ir*). The original which I use is Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Ta'liq 'alā ta'rīb nubḍah tāriḥiyyah fī 'l-kalām 'alā aḥḍ al-Farānsīs li 'l-Ġazā'ir bi-qalam Muḥammad Ḥalīm Afandī al-mu'āwin bi-dīwān al-makātib al-ahliyyah* (Commentary on the Translation of Muḥammad Ḥalīm Afandī's Brief Historical Account of the French Acquisition of Algeria), Edited by Ġābir 'Aṣfūr, *Rawḍat al-madāris*, Dār al-Kutub wa 'l-Waṭā'iq al-Qawmiyyah, al-Qāhirah 1998, pp. 748-750. Original publication in *Rawḍat al-madāris al-miṣriyyah* (22/03/1871-09/03/1872).

⁷⁷ The Dey tells Muḥammad Ḥalīm Afandī, whom al-Ṭaḥṭāwī identifies as Aḥmad Afandī al-Ġazā'iri, Governor of the Aegean district, that «I have disobeyed and violated my master's orders. For he did not instruct me to do as I have done and that is why I have been defeated, and have fallen into the hands of my enemies. Thus God rewards all who disobey their masters and follow the inclinations of their passions and the Devil». Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Ta'liq 'alā ta'rīb nubḍah*

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī applies in his deliberations on the French invasion of Algeria⁷⁸. Defeat and colonial occupation is understood as part of God's divine retribution but never in connection to the French nation and its civilizational claims.

Reading al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's position in light of the formative impact of coloniality can be contrasted to Abu-Uksa's reading, which emphasizes the semantic development of political terminology. Abu-Uksa highlights al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's eyewitness account of the July 1830 revolution for its being the first portrayal, «in nineteenth-century Arabic», of «the conflict between two schools of political thought: the proponents of absolutism and the proponents of freedom»⁷⁹. I believe that Abu Uksa's reading misses significant semantic surplus in the development of political terminology by not taking into account the coloniality in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's treatment of liberty.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's personal investment in liberty is best understood from his definition of it. He attempts to bring it closer to the Islamic worldview by suggesting that, because all are said to be equal before the law in the Charter of 1814, liberty (*ḥurriyyah*) means justice (*'adl*). Abu-Uksa explains that this definition places the «concept of freedom» as synonymous with «the principle of the rule of law, and hence it is a state of executing *'adl* by complying with the legal and moral rules of religion»⁸⁰. This was an important alignment because this allowed Muslim scholars to define freedom «not against absolutism but in contrast to the lack of order. The idea of constitutionalism thus did not necessarily evolve in contrast with autocracy but rather with anarchy and absence of the execution of religions laws. This interpretation of freedom emerged within the epistemic conception of religion»⁸¹. McLarney has also explored the development of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's translation/interpretation of French *liberté*. She astutely notes how in his own translation of «All French are equal before the law» from Article 1 of the French National Charter, which is where

tārīḥiyyah fī 'l-kalām 'alā aḥḍ al-Farānsīs li 'l-Ġazā'ir bi-qalam Muḥammad Ḥalīm Afandī al-mu'āwin bi-dīwān al-makātib al-ahliyyah, cit., p. 747. All texts from this source are my translation.

⁷⁸ «The times favoured the French and they turned Algeria into one of their colonies and then into a French province [...] As for the French King, Charles X, he and his ministers, in whose day Algeria was taken, were themselves ousted from France, a short time after. They were expelled in spite of all their pomp and power, just as they were responsible for ousting the Algerian rulers [...]. This confirms the God's words: "when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly" (*al-An'ām*, 44). In spite of all this there are still Arabs in Algeria who are resisting. He who contemplates the mystery of God's words, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty" (*Āl 'Imrān*, 26) must submit to Divine wisdom. All matters pertain to God's will now and hereafter». *Ibid.*, p. 750.

⁷⁹ Wael Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab World Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth*, cit., p. 98.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

he interprets *hurriyyah* as justice and equity, «al-Ṭaḥṭāwī tactfully omits “*quels que soient d’ailleurs leurs titres et leurs rangs*” (whatever their title or their rank), perhaps in deference to the sovereign»⁸². But more importantly McLarney illustrates how al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s use of «the particular phrase, “to rule with *al-hurriyya*”» means that he makes the ruler subject to (Islamic) ethics of justice and fairness and thus the ruler becomes not «the embodiment of the law, the dispenser of the law [...] but is *subject* to the law»⁸³.

Clearly there is much to be investigated in terms of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s mediation of *liberté*. However, I do not believe this is possible without a precise and intricately contextualized approach to individual works with a clear understanding of the impact of colonialism informing the process of investigation. As the above reading of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s mediation of French modernity illustrates, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī privileges the modern episteme, to which he subordinates the indigenous religious episteme, as his unresolved handling of the problem of French reason and religious conviction illustrates. The point is very subtle and needs careful attention. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is not positioning the religious episteme as superior and determinative; he has forestalled any mobilization of the episteme when he says that Islamic science, the *ṣarī‘ah*, is sufficiently developed. However, he is treating the rationality cultural complex as the superior episteme, and when he dismisses the philosophical conundrum of having to reconcile faith with what he reads as the sophistries of French reason by simply stating that reason is to be limited by the dictates of faith, he is not elevating the religious episteme. He is in fact deferring the inevitable epistemic confrontation, holding his philosophical breath, as it were, long enough to ensure the acquisition of utilitarian knowledge to support Muḥammad ‘Alī’s necessary reforms.

al-Ṭaḥṭāwī makes great conceptual leaps to indigenize *liberté*. Having thus elided freedom with justice, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s personal investment in *liberté* becomes more apparent when he implicitly aligns himself with the French people. For amongst the radicals who advocate subjecting the king to the dictates of the law, he counts philosophers, intellectuals, scientists, wise men, and most of the populace. It is not difficult to imagine al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, disenfranchised in terms of class by *iltizām*, subliminally identifying himself with these lovers of liberty. However, it is when he draws naive parallels between the traditional Arab love of freedom and that of the French, that any doubt regarding his personal investment in the notion of *liberté* is assuaged. *Liberté*, now understood as anti-despotic social justice before the law, is thus indigenized by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī.

His attempts at reconciling the modern French concept and practice of liberty with Arab cultural heritage bear witness to this vested interest. In addition to drawing parallels between the liberty-loving gazetteers of French

⁸² E. McLarney, *Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab*, cit., p. 29.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

journalism and the ancient Arab poets, whose role was to record events⁸⁴, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī draws a more striking, albeit far-fetched, parallel when he declares that the «freedom, which the French are forever requesting», was «also part of the character of the Arabs in past times»⁸⁵. As evidence, he cites anecdotes from the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras to emphasize the innateness of this will to freedom so as to stress this preoccupation with liberty. From the pre-Islamic annals, he relates the encounter between «al-Nu'mān Ibn al-Mundhir, king of the Arabs, and Khosrow, king of the Persians»⁸⁶. Apparently, Khosrow challenged al-Nu'mān to prove that there is substance to the Arabs' poeticized boasting. al-Nu'mān responded admirably by emphasizing the Arab love of liberty: «As for the Arabs, O King, because of their great noble-mindedness, their loyalty, their religion, the wisdom of their tongues and the generosity of their souls, many of them say that they are all kings in their elevation and that no man submits himself to another, since both are of noble blood»⁸⁷. He also reminds him that the Arabs saved Yemen, whereas the Persian king's ancestors failed to do so. Not surprisingly, he paid for this remark with his life. The second example al-Ṭaḥṭāwī cites is from the Islamic era. Here he relates the oft-cited rebuke uttered by 'Umar, the second khalif, which was directed at 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, one of his generals: «“Since when do you turn people whose mothers caused them to be born free men (*aḥrār*) into slaves?” From this, it becomes clear that the love for freedom has also been part of the Arab character from ancient times»⁸⁸.

It is not the accuracy of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's reading of history but rather his evaluation and reading of liberty and his strategy in naturalizing liberty that are of interest. The ambiguity of his political allegiance⁸⁹ lends further credibility to the vested interest hypothesis that I am proposing here as a key element in understanding and mapping his strategic mediation of modernity. I do not want to suggest that there was anything sinister in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's handling of French coloniality. I do, however, want to stress that he could not have acted otherwise given the *modus operandi* of the coloniality/modernity complex. Unbeknownst to him, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is subjected to the crisis in French revolutionary discourse existing between the «powerful, global ideology in favour of republicanism, rights, and popular sovereignty», on the one hand, and the use of this global ideology to «justify expansionism» on the

⁸⁴ Newman notes that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī added this part on ancient Arab poets in the second edition; see Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 275, fn. 3. This fact speaks to the studied and deliberate attempt at naturalizing liberty.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁸⁹ See a summary of this in L. Pollard, *The Habits and Customs of Modernity: Egyptians in Europe and the Geography of Nineteenth-Century Nationalism*, cit., p. 73, fn. 45.

other⁹⁰. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī confronts the coloniality of modernity by using *liberté* as a conceptual paradigm to read French revolutionary politics and, consequently, to categorize the parties involved based on their proximity to this idea of *liberté*. In this way, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī unwittingly colludes with modernity's coloniality as he holds out for the promise of *liberté*. He concludes his didactic travelogue with this inane, obsequious declaration:

I should like to say that after having investigated the morals of the French and their political system it appears to me that they more closely resemble the Arabs than the Turks or other races⁹¹. Their affinity manifests itself most strongly in things like honour, freedom and pride. The word they use for 'honour', i.e. personal dignity, is the same as that for 'honour' in the sense of nobility and high rank. It is on this 'honour' of theirs that they swear in important matters, and if they enter into a covenant, they commit themselves to keeping their promise and they live up to it. There is no doubt that the honour that exists among the pure Arabs is the most important human feature, as shown in their poetry and borne out by their history⁹².

Conclusion

To attempt to reconcile French modernity's ethical claims concerning equality, reason, justice, and morality with the violence of French colonial practice would have brought the entire edifice of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discursive mediation of modernity crashing to the ground. It would have meant questioning the nature of progress, the legitimacy of the burgeoning capitalist mode of production, and the utilitarian ethos at the heart of modernity's enterprise. More important, it would have undermined the credibility of Muḥammad 'Alī's reform project and destroyed al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's investment in the promise of *liberté*.

The fact that, while al-Ṭaḥṭāwī did not manage to further the cause of political liberty when he returned, but nonetheless managed to lay the foundation for a complete epistemic overhaul of indigenous pedagogy and public sphere⁹³, can be taken as an indicator of the *modus operandi* of the modernity/coloniality process. Relationships of power are embedded in discursive formulations that re-enact and propagate the logic of the inherent coloniality

⁹⁰ S. Desan, Suzanne-L. Hunt-W.M. Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 2013, Kindle edition. These editors read the French Revolution in terms of its interaction with developments in the colonies and not as a phenomenon emerging from the center and trickling out to the peripheries. They refer to this period in time as the era of «conjunctural revolutions».

⁹¹ Muḥammad 'Alī belongs to the "other races" category, and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's alignment, as an Arab, with the French speaks to the vested interest in reading made in this article.

⁹² Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 365.

⁹³ McLarney points to this discrepancy. E. McLarney, *Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab*, cit., p. 30.

of modernity, so that it is not so much the identity of the agency of utterance, in this case al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, as it is the geopolitical and epistemic locale of the utterance. In other words, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī does not go further in his quest for *liberté*, not because of his own personal hypocrisy, but because of a situated geopolitics of knowledge through which he has already acceded so much legitimacy to the French modern enlightenment episteme and so deliberately ignored its coloniality that he must replicate this coloniality because of his modernity. This is precisely the type of understanding that can be gained from bringing the discussion taking place in the decolonial school of thought to bear on East-West encounters like al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's. There is much more than an «ideology of love» that is being negotiated in this Egyptian elite's response to colonial Europe. What is happening here is not that instruments of coercion have been converted «into those of seduction and thereby solicited – and often elicited – the complex “love” of the colonized and their (post)colonial heirs», as Tagedin propose⁹⁴. Tagedin's identification of processes in self-orientalizations is astute, but I believe they are much more fruitfully investigated from within the analytical paradigm offered by the decolonial school of thought. She proposes that «the “love” extended to the foreign – by the European to the Egyptian, then by the Egyptian to the European – might more deeply colonize than liberate [...]. Reading the literary record of post-1798 Egypt». This is the politics of translational seduction by which the colonized are lured in «to seek power *through* empire rather than against it, to translate their cultures into an empowered “equivalence” with those of their dominators and thereby repress the inequalities between those dominators and themselves»⁹⁵. The analysis of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī clearly illustrates there is no epistemic equivalence taking place. One episteme is privileged even if censored (viz., al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's on French sophistry). The ambiguity in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's response comes from the intricate process by which the coloniality of modernity operates. This is a process that involves an epistemic coloniality that is arranged in the very interstices of modernity and is not as Tagedin suggests an «“*intercultural*” translation in the sense of the transaction of epistemic “equivalence” in economies of cultural exchange»⁹⁶. This epistemic exchange is deeply inflected with coloniality.

The function of the coloniality/modernity complex is such that modernity must necessarily entail coloniality. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's discursive strategies – his attempts to sanitize and indigenize modern ways of knowing – meant an acquiescence to coloniality. This is most striking if one considers that Muḥammad 'Alī's modernizing reforms fuelled his own colonial endeavors in the Sudan, his intrusions into Syria (1831-1840), and his campaigns against the indige-

⁹⁴ Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2011, p. 7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

nous Wahhabi rulers of Arabia with the sacking of the capital, Diriya, in 1818, all of which speak to the validity of Mignolo's claim that «there is no modernity without coloniality»⁹⁷. Mignolo also argues that the coloniality of power underlines nation building in both local histories of nations that devised and enacted global designs as well as in those local histories of nations that had to accommodate themselves to global designs devised with them in mind but without their direct participation⁹⁸.

In fact, one may claim that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī recognized the dilemma of mediating French modernity when he writes the following verse:

أوجد مثل «باريس» ديار شمس العلم فيها لا تغيب وليل الكفر ليس له صباح أما هذا
وحقكم عجيب!⁹⁹

Is there another place like Paris
where the suns of knowledge never set
where the night of unbelief has no morning?
Forsooth, is this not the strangest of things!¹⁰⁰

If there were any love in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's mediation of European modernity, then it was for the promise of liberty. Otherwise, his travelogue needs to be seen as emerging from a political mandate imposed by his structural dependency on Muḥammad 'Alī's reforms. Trying to make sense of the internal consent exhibited by this act of mediation is, I believe, better served by adopting the conceptual tools of the decolonial school of thought and using this apparatus to examine the processes and reasoning that this complex and ambiguous internalized consent involved.

⁹⁷ W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, cit., p. 43.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Rifā'ah al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Taḥlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talḥīṣ Bārīz*, Ġumhūriyyat Miṣr al-'Arabiyyah, Kalimāt 'Arabiyyah li 'l-Tarḡamah wa 'l-Naṣr, al-Qāhirah 2011, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ Rifā'a Rafī' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*, cit., p. 256.