

Liberty and the Literary: Coloniality and Nahdawist Comparative Criticism of Rūḥī al-Khālidī's *History of the Science of Literature with the Franks, the Arabs, and Victor Hugo (1904)*

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Abstract In 1902 Rūḥī al-Khālidī produced what may be the first modern work of comparative criticism in Arabic. In his *History of the Science of Literature*, Khālidī (1864–1913), a Palestinian polyglot, used the discourse of literary criticism to develop a modern understanding of liberty, but at the cost of obfuscating the coloniality on which this notion of liberty was predicated. The following discussion examines colonial relations of power in the rise of modern Arabic literary criticism as registered in Khālidī's comparative treatise. Thus the ensuing analysis employs the conceptual apparatus of decolonial thought to explore Khālidī's contribution to the nineteenth-century Arab cultural renaissance and modernization, known as the Nahda.

Keywords Rūḥī al-Khālidī, Arabic comparative literary criticism, Nahda, *ḥurriyya* (liberty), coloniality

The Nahda has been defined as “the rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the 19th century” (Tomiche 2012). However, so neutral a formulation belies the harsh realities prevailing in imperial relations and affecting knowledge production.¹ Therefore I suggest a working definition of the Nahda as

¹ Sorbonne-educated Sa'īd 'Allūsh (1946–), a Moroccan critic, defines the Nahda as the outcome of internal and external violence (1988: 187). However, he does not read this violence with any specificity into his analysis.

This research project was supported by a grant from the Research Center for the Humanities, Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University.

Modern Language Quarterly 77:4 (December 2016)

DOI 10.1215/00267929-3649238 © 2016 by University of Washington

the nineteenth-century cultural modernization when the Arab-Islamic world registered, responded to, and mediated² Occidental European modernity and, consequently, exhibited an intensified interest in the literary and cultural productions of both Arab-Islamic and western European worlds. The inclusion of the colonality of modernity as an integral part of any definition of the Nahda, as the analysis of Rūḥī al-Khālīdī's work will reveal, is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of cultural exchange initiated by colonial contact. *The History of the Science of Literature with the Franks, the Arabs, and Victor Hugo* (*Tārīkh 'ilm al-'adab 'ind alifrānj w al-'arab w Fyktur Hūkū*), by Khālīdī (1864–1913), is considered the first work of comparative literary criticism in Arabic (see Ghazoul 2006: 113; Khateeb 1987: 82).³ Yet his influence on Arabic literary studies is open to debate. Khālīdī is better known as the first modern Palestinian historian, and his 1912 analysis of the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) revolution is an important political tract.⁴ One active Khālīdī scholar, Ḥusām al-Khateeb (1985: 44), has suggested that insufficient credit has been given to Khālīdī's role in the Nahda, partly because Khālīdī has gained more local Palestinian than Arab literary recognition (39), but he also acknowledges

² "Mediation" is alluded to here to indicate the processes of assimilation and transculturation enacted by agents, like Khālīdī, who are placed in a conflicted context brought on by the colonial encounter. It implies a complex flux between internal consent to a prevailing but external hegemony and, at the same time, a desire to interrupt that hegemony's monological trajectory.

³ Mayjān Ruwaylī and Sa'ad Baz'ī (2002: 356) assert that the modern acculturation of Arab literary criticism began in 1902 with the publication of Khālīdī's comparative treatise. Sulaymān al-Bustānī is a close second. He "published his Arabic translation of the *Iliad* in 1902, following it" (Khateeb 1987: 82) "at the end of 1903, with his two-hundred-page introduction to the work. It is evident, from their bibliographies, that both men are responsible for the establishment of comparative studies as a discipline" (83).

⁴ Khālīdī's bibliography, Khateeb (1987: 82) states, "gives the impression more of a historian than a literary scholar; indeed, he is considered by Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Asad to have been the pioneer of historical research in Palestine. Many of his treatises on Islamic history were originally given as lectures in Paris during the nineties; among these were 'Introduction to the Oriental Question from its rise until the end of the second quarter of the eighteenth century' (1897) and 'The rapid spread of the Muhammadan religion through the various parts of the Islamic world' (1896). His scholarly interests were, however, wide reaching; among his monographs was one on the history of Zionism and one on Linguistics."

that Khālīdī's pioneering work in comparative Arabic literary criticism is even less recognized. Khālīdī's comparative treatise is often considered alongside Sulaymān al-Bustānī's introduction to his translation of the *Iliad* and Quṣṭākī, al-Ḥimṣī's third volume of *Manhal al wurrād fī 'ilm al-'intiḳād* (1935; *The Seeker's Guide to the Science of Criticism*) (17). Khateeb believes that Khālīdī is unique, however, because unlike Bustānī and Ḥimṣī he had firsthand knowledge of European comparative literary studies and because he applied a specific methodology. Khālīdī also appears in Ra'īf Khūrī's 1957 anthology *'Aṣr al-ihyā' wa-l-nahḍa 1850–1950* (*The Age of Rebirth and Renaissance 1850–1950*), and his literary criticism is analyzed in 'Ishāq Mūsā al-Ḥusaynī's (1967) *Al-naqd al-adabī al-mu 'āṣir fī al-rub' al-'awwal min al-qarn al-'ishrīn* (*Contemporary Arabic Literary Criticism in the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century*).⁵ Ḥusaynī, a key figure in Jordanian literary criticism and thought, recognized Khālīdī as one of the first to use the term *literary criticism* (Khateeb 1985: 38). In fact, and this is part of my argument here, Khālīdī's (1984: 79) *critique littéraire* (*'intiḳād*) is a unique synthesis of elements from traditional Arabic literary discourse, *balāgha*, and from French notions of liberty, *ḥurrīyya*.⁶

Khālīdī was writing in an era of heated debates about literary and linguistic traditions, which were often cast as pre-Islamic or bedouin. Khālīdī's contribution was to recast debates about the renewal of the Arabic language and the forms of literary expression in ideological terms by incorporating, in a unique way, the element of liberty. The French ideal of *liberté* was already a widespread concern in political, social, and literary discourse, and Khūrī's 1943 *Al-fikr al-'arabī al-hadīth: 'Āthar al-thawrah al-faransiyyah fī ittawjīh al-siyasī w al-'ijtimā'ī* (*Contemporary Arabic Thought: The Impact of the French Revolution on Political and Social Tendencies*), for instance, recognizes the key importance of Khālīdī's literary criticism in its account of the influence of French revolutionary ideals on modern Arab thought. So, even though Khālīdī has never acquired the stature of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in literary circles, his account of *'intiḳād* in relation to coloniality deserves consideration if we are to gain a better understanding of the variety of modern Arabic literary criticism.

⁵ Khateeb (1985: 35–45) surveys more recent references to Khālīdī in Arabic literary criticism.

⁶ This is Khālīdī's exact translation for *al-'intiḳād al-kabīr*.

Khālidī's Political Treatise

Khālidī was not a literary scholar; he was an Ottoman functionary, a diplomat, a historian, and a liberal. There was a consistent tension, throughout Khālidī's life, between his official status as Ottoman functionary and his frequently noted love of *hurriyya*, "liberty."⁷ Because *liberty* was a watchword with the Ottoman censors, Khālidī had to read revolutionary works in secret, and his frequent visits to Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī in Istanbul in 1893–94 piqued the interest of Ottoman officials and resulted in a hasty flight to Paris (Juway'ud 2012: 162, 185–86). Even when in France, he was careful to evade the Ottoman censors when he wrote. Thus his work is found mainly in two primary Egyptian publications, *Al-Hilāl* (*Crescent*) and *Al-Manār* (*Lighthouse*), which were not under Ottoman censorship (168).⁸ Moreover, prior to the 1908 CUP revolution he published under a pseudonym, al-Maqḍisi.⁹ It is highly significant that he used the pseudonym in the initial publication of his treatise on comparative literature because—and this is my principal argument—both his political ideals, more freely expressed later in his staunch defense of the Young Turks, and the connection between these ideas and his formulation of *'intiḳād*, are made possible and enabled through his discourse on literary modernity. Moreover, forging this connection depends on the obfuscation of the coloniality of modernity. Khālidī, and arguably the less astute Ottoman political censors, was aware of the revolutionary potential latent in literary discourse, and his treatise should be analyzed with this point in mind.

Khālidī's liberal ideals were articulated in a series of articles for *Al-Manār* in 1908, in the wake of the CUP revolution, and later, in 1912,

⁷ One outstanding example is from his publisher friend Jurjī Zaydān, a pivotal figure of the Nahda, who referred to Khālidī as one of the foremost Ottomans and free men (Zaydān 1908).

⁸ Khālidī's 1903 article in *Ṭarāblus ashām* (*A Tripoli of Greater Syria*) prophesying a revolution in the Ottoman state caused the foreclosure of the publication (Juway'ud 2012: 171). Thomas Philipp (2010) gives some background on the role of these publications in the prewar sociopolitical ideological formations.

⁹ The treatise was initially published in the "form of a series of articles in AL-HILAL, beginning in Vol. IV, year 11, November 1902. In 1904 AL-HILAL published the collected articles in book form, but with the author designated merely as al-Maqḍisi; in 1912 a second edition appeared, this time with the name of the author and a photograph" (Khateeb 1987: 82).

were compiled in a book titled *'Asbāb al'inqilāb al'uthmāny w turkiyyā al-fatāt* (*The Reasons for the Ottoman Revolution and the CUP* [Khālidī 2011]; henceforth *'Asbāb*). Khālidī's political ideals and his literary tract belong to the same discursive formulation. This formulation mediates a modern understanding of liberty inspired by an amalgam of French revolutionary and socio-Islamic utopian ideals and culminating in his vision of CUP ideals.

Although, given the frequency with which they met, Afghānī must have influenced Khālidī, Khālidī's views on Islam and politics are far less radical and more in line with "a variety of Islamic modernist thinkers, such as Rashid Rida," the editor of *Al-Manār*, and, "more overtly, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi," whose "*Nature of Tyranny* . . . similarly brought Qur'anic and hadith examples to criticize the Ottoman ancien régime and advocate political reform, arguing for accountability and for the need of the ruler to serve the people" (Campos 2011: 47–48). As an Ottoman official but a firm supporter of the CUP revolution, Khālidī was discontented with the policies of the autocratic Sultan 'Abdul-Hamīd II, but he proceeded with caution and never revealed outright hostility to the person of the sultan. The Islamic ideals that Khālidī addresses in his *'Asbāb* include the necessary legitimacy of political power based on the *shari'a* (divine law) as a constitution and on the basic Islamic political concept of *shūra* (consultation), Islam's inherent objection to tyranny, and Islam's propensity for tolerance. Khālidī's immersion in French culture provided him with the necessary conceptual tools to formulate his conciliatory explanation for the CUP revolution.¹⁰ Thus he naturalized the ideals of the French Revolution by combining them with a fundamentalist and purist vision of Islam.

Khālidī's (2011: 29–30) political treatise begins by making a distinction between revolt (*thawra*) and revolution (*'inqilāb*), arguing that *thawra* was an illegitimate act of disobedience and that *'inqilāb* was a legitimate and necessary transformation in the political structure toward an already promised set of reforms. Khālidī's point was that the CUP was demanding reforms that had already been suggested by the Ottoman

¹⁰ For Khālidī's similar ideas on the nature of tyranny, see 'Abduh 1993: 381–88 on "fi al-shūrā wa-l-istibdād" (concerning consultation and tyranny), originally published in 1881.

sultan, thereby safeguarding the legitimacy of the revolution and the status of the sultan. Khālīdī's case for Islam is simple, simplistic, and racist: tyranny is not native to Islam but rather is of Asiatic origin (34–38). It is the root cause of *'inqilāb* (31), and it was through the tempering influence of Islam that the CUP revolution spilled no blood (160–62).¹¹

My point here is not to dispute Khālīdī's version of history. It is instead to illustrate the problematics of his espousal of liberty in its French ideal. For the modern notion of liberty is not native to Islam. That is why Khālīdī is always at pains to naturalize French revolutionary ideals by seeking out Arab and Islamic cognates. Thus Khālīdī notes Auguste Comte's influence on the CUP's values: love and service of country and community, austerity, clean government, and, most important, 'Ahmed Riza Bey's plea for Islam's tolerance (Khālīdī 2011: 123–24). Khālīdī quotes from Montesquieu (133) and Afghānī (142) on liberty. He bemoans the official ban on the use of the word *liberty* (132) but is also aware of the nonindigenous roots of liberty.¹² Under the heading "The Eruption of the Volcano of Liberty and the Events of the July 24 Revolution," Khālīdī announces the futility of all governmental attempts to censure "native" exposure to foreign schools: educated citizens "had access to foreign books and newspapers, and therefore were exposed to criticism of the Ottoman government" and were "pervaded with ideas about liberty, infused with European morality and with the spirit of nationalism. As a result, this new generation was subjected to various forms of tyranny and oppression, such as exile, imprisonment, surveillance and the destruction of their homes" (154–55).¹³ Khālīdī celebrates the fact that "Liberty or death" speeches were given in Salonika (Thessaloníki) from the various ethnic representatives and in several languages, but not Arabic (158). A liberty square was inaugurated to the tune of the "Marseillaise" (158). Campos (2011: 3–4) calls this conglomeration of ethnicities united under an ill-defined notion of liberty civic Ottomanism "a grassroots imperial citizenship project" that "drew

¹¹ For a full and contextualized discussion of Khālīdī's use of Islamic argument for liberty, see Campos 2011: 46–49.

¹² Campos (2011: 20–58) details how the notion of liberty was understood and employed in Khālīdī's immediate milieu.

¹³ All quotations from Arabic sources are my translations.

on both Western liberal and Islamic notions of liberty, justice, consultation, public good, and accountability.”¹⁴

Liberty held an ideological as well as a structural significance for Khālīdī. After all, having tried several times to get employment in the Ottoman government, his appointment as the Ottoman consul general in Boudreaux was facilitated by the favorable reputation that he acquired after he enrolled in the Institute for Political Science in Paris and then studied Oriental art at the Sorbonne (Ḥasan 2002: 348). Following the implementation of the long-awaited Tanzimat reforms, he became the official Ottoman parliamentary representative of Jerusalem in 1908. Thus liberty was a personal and political imperative, to incorporate the discourse of liberty into an Arab and Islamic context. It is also significant in understanding what made Khālīdī susceptible to internalizing and mediating French culture and less likely to focus on its violent colonial excesses.¹⁵

Khālīdī’s perspective on the events that led up to the revolution, his belief in liberty, and his declaration of support were made possible—and this is my central argument—by his modernizing discourse on literary comparison. In fact, Khālīdī (2011: 30) himself admits as much when he announces on the first page of *ʿAsbāb* that “today we are more than ever in need of defining our words and of determining the terms that are best suited for meaning, because political revolution creates a simultaneous revolution in language and literature.”

Khālīdī’s Comparative Treatise

Almost a decade earlier, while acting as consul general for the Ottoman Empire in Bordeaux in 1898—at which time he was awarded the Légion

¹⁴ “‘Liberty’ was not simply a question of political rights, but rather represented a broad, flexible package of competing political, philosophical, social, cultural, and even metaphysical worldviews. . . . *Ḥurriyya* was an outlook, an ideology, a personal commitment, an intimate emotional feeling” (Campos 2011: 35). Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ Ṭaḥṭāwī (2011: 113), an Egyptian teacher and scholar whose works were widely known and repeatedly reprinted in Beirut, advocated understanding *ḥurriyya* as “justice.” I discuss this issue in a separate essay in process, but since Khālīdī did not cite Ṭaḥṭāwī, I have not included him in the present essay.

¹⁵ Khālīdī must have been fully aware of both Afghānī’s and Muḥammad ʿAbduḥ’s critiques of colonialism.

d'Honneur for "his dynamic activity in both diplomatic and cultural fields" (Khateeb 1987: 81)—Khālīdī (1984: 148) expressed a strikingly similar idea in his book on comparative criticism: "A revolution in the morality and habits of a people demands a concurrent revolution in dialect and modes of expression." What is missing from the earlier idea is the mention of political revolution. He used the occasion of the 1902 French celebrations of Victor Hugo's life and works to introduce the writer to an Arab audience and to embark on a historical analysis and comparison of the science of literature between the 'Ifrañj (Franks) and the Arabs. It is my argument here that his political ideals, his literary comparison, and his *al-'intiḳād*, "literary criticism," are intricately connected.

Khālīdī establishes his thesis in the first paragraph, asserting that *ma'āni* (meanings), not *'alfāz* (words), are the essential factors in literary expression. Words are simply the forms that meaning takes, and *faṣāḥa* and *bayān* (both aspects of "eloquence") designate the ability to communicate meaning effectively. Out of a desire to forge links with European literary criticism, Khālīdī emphasizes the universality of *balagha* (the study of eloquence and rhetoric). Throughout his book he rails against contrived eloquence, which he indisputably correlates with a lack of freedom (Khālīdī 1984: 62–64). Khālīdī's historical comparative survey of the various eras of Arabic and European literary production concludes with Hugo's Romanticism as the essential background for a burgeoning Ottoman Romanticism. This is why, before he examines Hugo's work, Khālīdī stresses the similarities between the youths of his generation, who are faced with a dead literary heritage, and the French Romantics, who emerged during the French Revolution and who rejected the false refinements of neoclassicism. It is this comparison that prefaces his remark about the necessary and simultaneous "revolution in the morality and habits of a people" and "in dialect and modes of expression" (148).

Nothing in Khālīdī's literary treatise is really new; rather, he incorporates the political ideal of liberty into traditional and contemporary literary debates. For example, he echoes several points in Jurjī Zaydān's volume on the Nahda from his series *The History of Arabic Literature* (*Tārīkh 'ādāb allughā al-'arabiyya*, 1901–6). Khālīdī seems to have adopted, almost word for word, Zaydān's ideas about Arabic literary production.

Like Zaydān (1957: 208), he links the past with the present and notes, for example, that Arab scholars in the Abbasid era adopted elements of Greek scientific learning but neither absorbed nor translated Greek literature (see also Bustānī 2012: 56–59). Yet unlike Zaydān, he does offer an explanation for this, which is that the translators passed over the literary contributions of the Greeks because the Arabs were, in terms of religion and *adab* (literature), self-sufficient. He also notes that perhaps they even feared the reemergence of idolatry (Khālīdī 1984: 87). His logic suggests not only that cultural contact and transculturation are natural but also that traditional scholars believed in the communication of knowledge. They did so with Greek science but not with Greek literature because Greek poetry was closely related to Greek religion, which the Arabs did not need because they already had their own religious beliefs. Thus Khālīdī sets up science as a legitimate, traditional, and safe node of transculturation.¹⁶ He then uses this logic to argue for the adoption of European literary science. When literary criticism is viewed as a science, Arab self-sufficiency—in terms of *adab* and religious conviction—is not at risk. The categorization of *‘ilm al-‘adab* (science of literature) as a science means that literary adaptations from the West no longer bear the same ideological and theological stigma as in the tenth century, when the process of Arab translation of the Greek heritage was fully under way. Khateeb (1987: 83) offers the following explanation:

The appearance in the title of the word *‘ilm* would have caused some surprise in the Arab literary scene at the beginning of this century. The “scientification” of literature, no doubt as a result of the influence of contemporary French literary scholarship, was scarcely congruent with the classical Arab conception of literature as being the echo of the heart. The notion of literature as a “science” is continued in the further implication of the title that common laws may be applied to the literatures both of the Franks and of the Arabs.

This is not entirely correct, since Ibn Khaldūn refers to *‘ilm al-‘adab* in the section on Arabic philology in part 6 of chapter 46 in his introduction

¹⁶ I use *node* from the lexicon of critical discourse analysis. “A discourse is formed by the partial fixation of meaning around certain *nodal points*,” or privileged signs around which “the other signs are ordered” (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002: 26). They are floating signifiers, “signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning” (28).

to history, *Muqaddima (Prolegomena)*. In his usage, however, the phrase simply means “the knowledge of literature”; the modern enlightened, empirical, utilitarian understanding of what counts as scientific knowledge was not part of his conception. This is significant because, as Khateeb notes, science functions as a node of cultural continuity, a locus of “common laws.” During the Nahda, consequently, the naturalization of Occidental scientific advances was relatively straightforward because the claim could always be made that Occidental scientific progress was continuous with medieval Arab-Islamic science, whereas Arab literary self-sufficiency made the forging of similar continuities with Occidental literary criticism more challenging.¹⁷ The intentionality of Khālīdī’s employment of science as a transcultural node is attested to by the fact that in his French introduction to the treatise “the ‘science’ of literature is not referred to” (84). Here Khālīdī exploits the slippage between *ilm* in its traditional premodern meaning, indicating knowledge skill and proficiency in a particular field, and the new, uncharted meaning indicating science in the modern sense of the word.¹⁸ The liberty imperative made it impossible for Khālīdī to simply equate literary science, *ilm al-‘adab*, with *balagha*; instead, Khālīdī has to reimagine *balagha*. The Arabic literary heritage had to make itself available by using science as a transcultural node.

In terms of historical continuities, the principles and methodology of the early literary positivism of Gustave Lanson, a French professor of rhetoric, served Khālīdī’s purpose. Lanson “read a literary work through the author’s psychological biography, the historical situation of the nation, and the long-term evolution of the relevant genres” (Lanson, Rand, and Hatcher 1995: 223). This methodology is obvious throughout Khālīdī’s treatise.¹⁹ Yet the conceptual continuities needed to be imagined and constructed. Here, in this deliberate if strained construction,

¹⁷ The straightforwardness of the naturalization of Occidental scientific advances is evident from the prioritization of the utilitarian sciences in the establishment of European-style military and government teaching institutions during the rule of Selīm III and in the introduction of educational reforms in Egypt in the 1870s during the rule of Moḥammad ‘Ali Pasha.

¹⁸ This slippage is also to be found in Ṭaḥṭāwī’s (2011) use of the word *ilm* in *Takhlīṣ* (1834).

¹⁹ Khālīdī (1984: 68) stresses the need for critics to bear in mind the historical development and context of literary output.

Khālīdī is at his most original, as he manipulates the formalist paradigm as an imagined intellectual sieve that separates form from content. The sieve is the cognitive correlative of the general Nahdawist epistemological “assumption that Western science and technology is [*sic*] separable from [the] philosophy, culture and imperialism of the West” (Patel 2013: 162).

The Vessel Metaphor: Literary Science and the Formalist Paradigm

Although Khālīdī’s reference to the privileging of meaning over form is hardly original, in the context of the Nahda’s recodification of knowledge, developing new terms for new concepts and new meanings for old terms, his utilization of this concern to formulate *’intiḳād* is original. He uses French literary positivism to imagine a science of literature that is compatible with what he perceives as the indigenous Arab and Islamic imagining of literary criticism.²⁰ Khateeb (1987: 83) notes his quest for “the common law” that “may be applied to the literatures both of the Franks and of the Arabs,” but the real driver was the ambition to naturalize and reterritorialize modern notions of political liberty. What better medium than the authoritative paradigm of Arabic literary production, especially when taking into consideration its historical power to construct Arab and Islamic identity?

Khālīdī (1984: 95) explains that both *jāhili* (pre-Islamic) poets and Islamic literati likened “meaning to water and likened vocabulary and its structure to a vessel,” which could be made of “gold, silver, pearl, glass and tile,” and that the objective of these poets was to “irrigate their audiences with the same unchanging water in the most beautiful vessel [they] could create.” They exhibited their poetic skills and “linguistic, semantic knowledge of synonyms and command of vocabulary” by expressing the same meaning using a variety of different and skillful poetic forms (95). Khālīdī attributes the *jāhili* genius for poetic form to their ability to express meaning in the most suitable form, to their rich vocabulary and their commitment to cultivating their phraseology (74).

²⁰ Khālīdī’s treatise on the CUP revolution (*’Asbāb*)—namely, his comments on the non-Arab, non-Islamic origins of political tyranny—confirms that he conceptualized the native as Arab and Islamic.

Latter-day Arab poets then blindly imitate *jāhili* poetic expression. Little value, Khālidī declares, was accorded to the “thought and creativity” that Western orientalist prized (96).

Liberty and the Qur'an: Inverting of the Vessel/Formalist Paradigm

Khālidī's attempts to legitimate his conceptual literary continuities and the science of literature through a formalist paradigm constrain logic and fact. This is perhaps nowhere more striking than in his very creative use of the Qur'an in his conceptualization of the science of literature. He declares the Qur'an the “High Book of *'Intiqād*” (Khālidī 1984: 79). He argues that the Qur'an “excelled in all kinds of rhetoric” because it “contained stories, history, laws, wisdom, motivational and reprimanding injunctions” in addition to “administrative and political fundamentals” (76). Khālidī, again, begins with the traditional view of the Qur'an as an exemplar of *balagha*; its *i'jāz* (inimitability). He is unique, however, when he introduces liberty into that view of the Qur'an to create *'ilm al-'intiqād*. The Qur'an exemplifies the break with traditional and known forms of literary expression by making literary form subject to sacred meaning: “The Qur'an subordinated form to meaning” (76). Khālidī also adds the founders of Arabic literary criticism—*'a'immat al-'intiqād* (134) ('Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, 'Abdul Qāhir Jurjānī, and Ibn Khaldūn)—to his repertoire as authorities who “advocated subordinating words to meaning because modes of expression should serve meaning” (182). The Qur'an's value as a critical text, like the wisdom of classical Arab critics, consists in the liberation of meaning from the constraints of form.

Khālidī wants Arab poets (he generalizes here) to follow the example of the Qur'an and liberate themselves from the rigors of *jāhili* poetic forms. His reasoning suggests that this is because meaning is subject to historical transformation. Artists and writers initially and uncritically imitate their predecessors' achievements; however, they eventually “begin to realize the mismatch between meaning and form in their ancestors' works” because of the ancestors' “lack of civil developments and paucity of knowledge” (Khālidī 1984: 61). Here Khālidī, having secured the archetypal position in *balagha* for the Qur'an, provides a license for contemporary poets and writers to stop imitating and start innovating, basing this license on the following definition of *balagha*:

“the correspondence between meaning and form in every respect according to the demands of the situation” (61). This historicization introduces *’intiḳād* into *balagha* because, according to Khālidi, true eloquence is integrally linked to liberty (93):

‘Abdul Rahīm Effendi ’Ahmad, the Egyptian envoy to the 11th Orientalist Congress (1897) in Paris, confirmed the positive correlation between freedom and flourishing of the Arabic language and literature. The wider the scope of liberty, the better the quality of the literature, and the more constraining the grip of tyranny, the more constrained the level of thought, and the literati become no better than appeasers who express not what they feel and know and see but what is required.

In a rather extraordinary section of his argument, Khālidi illustrates his point by the curious example of the speech (translated from French to Arabic) of the French minister of education. This anecdote is intended to illustrate the futility of grandiloquence, which is discussed in detail in the three preceding pages (62–64). Khālidi denigrates all forms of grandiloquence: *takalluf* (affectation) and *taṣnū’* and *ta’ammul* (artificiality and pretense). Apparently, this speech was given as part of the jubilee for Pierre Eugène Marcellin Berthelot, a famous French scientist. Khālidi says that although the words are Arabic, the style is French, and native Arabic speakers may be put off by the formal impoverishment of his speech, it is nonetheless excellent because the meaning suits the occasion and is therefore appropriate (64). Yet the Arab audience may not recognize the excellence because of a lack of familiarity with the “minutiae of French history and the linguistic features of their language” (64). Some Arab poets prefer grandiloquence to meaning, but the Qur’an, the founders of Arabic literary criticism, and the French elites all lean the other way.

Literary Value and the Coloniality of Modernity

Khālidi is by no means the first to view the Qur’an as a critical text, but he is the first to read its critical contribution using the lens of French literary modernity, which he associates with liberating meaning from form. As medieval Arabs adopted Greek science, so Khālidi’s contemporaries will benefit from adopting a contemporary European

science of literature. Since the Qur'an, the Arabic founders of *'intiḳād*, and European literary modernity concur in the ideal of liberating meaning, any ideological and theological stigma that European ideas might have had in the eighth and ninth centuries is lifted.

With his historicization of *balagha*, Khālīdī introduces *'intiḳād/naqd* (criticism). His use of the formalist paradigm (i.e., his vessel metaphor) allows him to subvert imagined traditional literary value. Whereas previously, as William Smyth (2006: 417) notes, postclassical (roughly 1150–1850) Arabic literary critics were interested in the formal aspects of literature because of “the sacred quality that Arabic commanded by virtue of the Koran,” with Khālīdī, the Qur'an is recoded as a text of meaning-oriented literary criticism.²¹ True eloquence is the goal, with rhetorical superiority seen to arise from free expression.

But there is a cost. Khālīdī's argument becomes strained in considering literary value, insofar as he ignores the coloniality of modernity. That modernity cannot happen without coloniality is the central argument in Walter Mignolo's (2000) *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Khālīdī's literary and political modernity cannot happen without acquiescence to French coloniality. Mignolo's analysis of the constitutive relationship between coloniality and modernity and of the subalternization of indigenous forms of knowledge clearly pertains to Khālīdī.²² Mignolo's coloniality/modernity complex (i.e., the modern colonial world system) is key to understanding the epistemological shifts engendered by newly created sociopolitical configurations. For example, whereas organic unity was highly valued and sought after by some European criticism of the classical Arabic poem, or *qasīda*, in “the Arab literary tradition, a poet

²¹ Ṭaḥṭāwī (2011: 177–78) mentions this specific difference between Arab-Islamic ways of dealing with texts and European ways. Arabic books require an in-depth knowledge of and meditation on the language itself and not the ideas. French books do not require annotation or commentary.

²² Mignolo (2000: 22) explains: “There is no modernity without coloniality; coloniality is constitutive of modernity and not derivative of it. There is a single modernity/coloniality that is the consequence of the geopolitical differential distribution of epistemic, political, economic, and aesthetic (e.g., sensing, subjectivity) power. Thus, modernity/coloniality is held together by the colonial differences: 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).”

was often exalted or condemned on the strength of a single line or short sequence of lines. Attention was given to the balance of themes and the smoothness of transitions, but analyses of the structure of an entire poem were virtually unknown” (Cachia 2003: 9). Similarly, Khālīdī’s paradigm for excellence is governed by a colonial perspective on literary value. Unmerited grandiloquence is indeed a fault, but it is not limited to Arabic poetry, nor can it be universally applied to all Arabic poetry prior to the Andalusian poets, whom Khālīdī credits for correcting traditional unmerited grandiloquence.

Khālīdī’s internalization of Eurocentric literary value is clear when he claims that the descriptive poetry of the Andalusians is closer to his ‘Ifrañj benchmark than to the Arabic classics. Indeed, he even claims that had Andalusia not been lost, their poets would have upstaged Hugo and Émile Zola (Khālīdī 1984: 98). His token acknowledgment of the Arab influence on Europeans does not alter this hierarchy. Thus, although he seems to attribute the superiority of French literature of his present day to Andalusian influence, he in fact measures Andalusian poetry with the yardstick of French literature. His historical methodology conceals his projection of contemporary literary value onto the past, which he reads in the light of contemporary French Romantic literature. Khālīdī’s roster of authorities is impressive, but his omission of French and European colonialities is not.

Khālīdī’s distortions are best illustrated in a bizarre twist, when he compares what he mistakenly assumes is a verse from the Qur’an to a portion of a speech by Gabriel Hanotaux, a French statesman and historian who was notorious for his commitment to colonial expansion in Africa, particularly in Algeria. Both the supposed sentence from the Qur’an—“We share the same rights and obligations” (Khālīdī 1984: 79)²³—and the sentence from Hanotaux, “We owe them security, we owe them justice, and we owe them leniency” (80), address the rights and duties and the colonizers and the *dhimmī* (arguably translated “colonized”).²⁴ As formal rhetoric, the Arabic expression is superior to the

²³ The original reads, “Lahum ma lanā w ‘alayhum mā ‘alaynā,” literally “They have what we have, and they owe what we owe.” The phrase comes from a disputed hadith.

²⁴ The second sentence consists of Hanotaux’s explanation of French colonial policy in Algeria. Here Khālīdī may be referring to Hanotaux’s article “Face to Face

French, and so it is shocking that Khālīdī nevertheless praises Hanotaux's exemplary knowledge of literature, science, and politics and his love of French liberty and claims that French liberty "saved many nations from the darkness of oppression" (80). Khālīdī asks the reader to "compare between those two expressions [from the Qur'an] and these three [Hanotaux's] and let your free conscience, if you are truly free, be the judge, and then judge as you see fit" (80). What is he suggesting? Is it that the Qur'an and the writings of Hanotaux, because they are united in the quest for justice, are similar? Is he offering a challenge to detect the link between Hanotaux's sense of justice and that of the Qur'an? He does claim that the Qur'an, when read in the proper manner, advocates freedom and justice and opposes oppression. However, given the controversy that Hanotaux's Islamophobic comments ignited among key Islamic figures like Muḥammad 'Abduh—as well as in the 1883 debate between Afghānī and Ernest Renan²⁵—it is difficult to excuse Khālīdī for this blatant and naive acquiescence to the ideals of the French civilizing mission.

After all, Khālīdī was surely aware of the ruthless thoroughness of French colonial policies. He himself questions the French initiative of promoting colloquial Algerian over classical Arabic in colonial schools, stating that "for this they [the French] have their political reasons into which we shall not delve" (Khālīdī 1984: 69). He also notes that this colonial policy is not adopted in the mother country, France, where local

with Islam and the Muslim Question," which appeared in *Journal de Paris* in 1900 ('Abduh 2002: 14–57). This speech was "translated into Arabic and published in the Arabic newspaper *Al-Mu'ayyad*" (Adams 1933: 86). There is no question that Khālīdī was ignorant of the outrage that Hanotaux's comments caused; he mentions it in *'Asbāb* (Khālīdī 2011: 64). In fact, Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) responded to Hanotaux's remarks in *Al-'Islām w al-madaniyya* (*Islam Science and Civil Society*, 1901).

²⁵ Afghānī's response to Ernest Renan displays his own affinity with Renan when he hopes that "Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilization after the manner of Western society" (quoted in Keddīe 1983: 87); "Muslim religion has tried to stifle science and stop its progress," and with "access to the truth with the help of philosophic and scientific methods being forbidden them," they have become slaves to "dogma" (183). Afghānī juxtaposes "free investigation" to dogma, religion to philosophy, and though he advocates "free thought" he recognizes that the quest for reason is utopian because the masses "dislike reason" (187).

newspapers are banned from writing in the local dialect (70). In addition, he mentions the anti-Basque campaigns in the Pyrenees. Moreover, he suggests that the Algerian language policy defies reason and rationality because recent developments in communications, publishing, and transportation networks would make the development of a common language more “reasonable” than the promotion and enforcement of the use of local dialects. Yet he stops there. Had he been impelled to delve into the political import of French coloniality, he would have abandoned the French Romantic notion of liberty, which he believed to be of such relevance and usefulness that it had to be advocated at all costs; liberty and modernity are not possible without French coloniality. This is precisely how Mignolo’s complex functions.

Liberty, the Literary, and Ottoman Reform

Khālidī’s motives and his deliberate disregard of the colonial practices of power merit a more in-depth examination. Perhaps Khālidī was not highly critical of French colonialism because he was himself a citizen of an empire. Islamic imperialism is more likely to have created an objection to European superiority than to imperialism itself. Without the sense of religious affront, which French secularism may have assuaged, there would be no reason for Khālidī to object to imperialism in general and French imperialism in Algeria in particular. He had, after all, developed an epistemological affinity with European modernity. The only offense presented by French imperialism would have been to exacerbate the sense of inferiority experienced from the dethroning force of European political, cultural, and economic superiority. This was an interimperial conflict with similar civilizational claims—very unlike the colonial contact that occurred, for example, between the Europeans and the Native Americans, where such a disparity existed in worldviews that there was no question of the Native Americans comfortably slipping into an epistemological affinity with their European colonizers. As an Ottoman Arab, Khālidī understood what it meant to belong to an imperial power and a superior civilization—to have the will to dominate and enlighten the not-so-enlightened others. Thus it was easy for him to foster “a collective Arab consciousness and, hence, patriotic feelings of Arabism, ultimately as a first step to progress,” where “the idea of

progress was itself spurred on by an apologetic defence of an injured self-view in relation to the now powerful Western other on a cultural level” (Patel 2013: 138). However, this is all conjecture and food for further investigation. These are the possible explanations, but they do not detract from the central argument I am proposing here, which is that Khālīdī’s faith in modern French notions of liberty made it virtually impossible for him to formulate a substantive critique of coloniality.

There are also many viable explanations for Khālīdī’s use of literary discourse to approach what is, in effect, a highly charged political issue. Among many possibilities, these explanations include strong Ottoman censorship, the use of Arabic literature as a site of implicit political struggle, and, finally, the Nahdawist association of literary expression with individual liberty.²⁶ What is important to note is that Khālīdī’s act of mediation was colonially inflected.

Khālīdī was, by all means, a product of “the project of Ottoman nation building” throughout the nineteenth century and of the “new class of educated professionals and intellectuals, an emerging popular press, and a nascent civil society, all of which played an important role in articulating and disseminating various visions of the imperial collective” (Campos 2011: 65). To understand why Khālīdī produced this groundbreaking treatise of literary comparison in Arabic, his role as a mediator

²⁶ Khālīdī initially had his study published under the name Maqdisi (i.e., “from Jerusalem,” a common method of suffixing surnames that Arabs traditionally used to indicate their hometowns). He did so because Ottoman authorities were on the lookout for any threatening communication mentioning *tajdid* (renewal) or any discourse on renewal that could become the rallying call for opposition to Sultan ‘Abdul-Hamīd II. Following the reforms implemented during the Tanzimat era, Khālīdī had the entire work published under his full name in 1912. In his introduction to the Arabic version of Khālīdī’s study, Khateeb (1984: 14) states that the editor of the original edition mentioned that Khālīdī had used a pseudonym because he “feared the Ottoman censors and because he was one of the callers for liberty.” Sheehi (2012: 295) describes how Arabic literature acted as a locus of political struggle: “The form and content of Arabic—reforming, simplifying and standardizing it—was among the most discussed and debated topics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The debate over grammar and the great concern for language education precisely expressed the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the social changes underway. Enemies were formed, strange bedfellows made, and political rivalries expressed through different sides of the debate.” A case in point would be the notorious exchange between Naṣīf al-Yāzījī and ‘Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (see Patel 2013: 104–5), wherein Yāzījī took umbrage at Shidyāq’s critique of his father, ‘Ibrahim al-Yāzījī.

of political and literary modernity in the last years of the Ottoman Empire must be examined simultaneously. That Khālīdī, who was primarily a statesman, wrote about literary criticism and forged continuities between French and Arabic literary outputs clearly indicates the visceral connection between structural transformations and discursive strategies, as Stephen Sheehi argues. Nahdawists, contrary to the long-accepted understanding of them as initiators of the Arab renaissance, responded to structural transformations. Therefore they had to engineer the consent of the “larger population,” define “the normative codes for the establishment of an efficient state, civil society and economy” (Sheehi 2012: 278), and make “new national, ethnic, confessional subjectivities” identifiable so the “masses and the elites” would “recognize the contemporary social conditions that gave these identities relevance and coherence” (280). They were “interlocutors for the new bourgeoisie and ruling elites” (278).²⁷

Sheehi (2012: 269) stresses that “the introduction of capitalist means of production and surplus accumulation during the Ottoman Tanzimat” instigated a “violent epistemological wrenching.”²⁸ In fact, Selīm III’s failure to engineer this consent for the Tanzimat led one of his successors, Maḥmūd II, to stall for twenty years before implementing these reforms so as to give reformers enough time to develop the discourse that would engineer the consent for these reforms (Hourani 1983: 41). These “epistemological and material ruptures” produced the “visible effects”: “shifts in lexicon, debates in grammar and, indeed, the creation of new forms of poetry and prose” (Sheehi 2012: 291). Khālīdī’s mediation of literary modernity is part of this process that Sheehi identifies.

Khālīdī’s discourse emerges within the context of a modernity that entailed “the commercialization of agriculture, the incorporation of province and empire into the world economy, the rise of coastal trade,

²⁷ Early interlocutors such as Şinasi, Ziya Pasha, and Nāmik Kemāl “became prominent during the 1860’s” (Hourani 1983: 66). Although they were well acquainted “with the literature of Europe, conversant with its ideas and admirers of its strength and progress, they were still not wholehearted westernizers. They were conscious of belonging to an Ottoman community which included non-Turks and non-Muslims; they wanted the Ottoman Empire to enter the modern world; but they were aware also of an Islamic fatherland in which they were rooted” (66).

²⁸ Sheehi is referring to the repeated suspension of Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in 1839–76 and 1908–12.

and the commoditization of land [along with] the emergence of a large landowning class with strong patronage and other ties to rural hinterlands and the rise of minority merchant communities in the cities” (Campos 2011: 12). Regionally, these processes led to a crisis early in the twentieth century. The economic crisis “throughout 1905–8, sparked by a rising cost of living and declining salaries, dislocation of local workers and industries due to European economic penetration, and agricultural failures, added a new layer of opposition to the government in the form of workers’ strikes, grain riots, and tax revolts” (26). As a member of the landowning elite of Palestine, Khālīdī was directly influenced by the crisis. It is not too far-fetched to propose that these structural transformations generated the appeal of liberty to Khālīdī, and this, in turn, made his advocacy of political modernity part and parcel of his advocacy of *naqd* as literary modernity. Nonetheless, as a mediator for the newly emerging class of elites and the restructuring of power, Khālīdī speaks for CUP interests and his own class interests when he calls for liberty, even as he obfuscates the constitutive role of the coloniality of modernity.

Zaydān clearly illustrates both Sheehi’s points about the epistemological wrenching and the corpus recodification that occurred as an effect of structural changes in modes of production in the Nahda and the inextricable links between liberty and the literary. In his volume on the Nahda, Zaydān (1957) reorders knowledge by inventorying, classifying, and organizing it; he provides an exhaustive list of scholars, fields of knowledge production, loci of textual circulation, schools, missionary institutions, printing presses, charitable organizations, and so on. Nadia al-Bagdadi (2008: 446) notes that Zaydān’s “organizing principle follows now along proto-national divisions and new literary institutions . . . [in] react[ion] to the profound social and cultural transformations under conditions of European colonialism.” But it is important to qualify her assertion that Westernization “implies at once a one-way impact and a superiority of Western values to which others adhere, leaving little space for modes of inventive incorporation and exchange of ideas” (446). For although the process was determined by the coloniality of modernity, it was by no means passive; rather, it was accentuated by local factors. This is the case with Khālīdī’s promotion of the political imperative of liberty, as well as with Zaydān’s.

In Zaydān's *Nahda* volume, one section in particular stands out, not only because it is the only conceptual section in the entire volume but, more important, because it is dedicated to extolling the integral relationship between liberty and the literary. The "Liberty" section is oddly placed between the information he provides on the presses and information on various organizations (Zaydān 1957: 65–66). In this section, he attributes the spread of "the spirit of personal liberty" to the exposure to Europe and claims that it was the essential by-product of the effusion and materiality of the natural sciences (65). This sense of personal liberty, he explains, also accompanied the induction of the Arab literati into European civility and modernity. Literary liberty is manifested in the liberation from formal constraints, he says. To be modern is to pay attention to meaning and to place it above form (205). A concurrent shift in interest is also required, according to Zaydān. Poets should now address topics generated by *madaniyya* (civility) such as social norms and emotional analysis, should use realism as a mode of representation, should avoid hyperbole, and, most of all, should critique social conventions and norms and address the issue of improving the social condition of women (205–6). The similarities between Zaydān's position and Khālidi's are striking but not surprising, considering that the two men moved in the same circles. In addition, Khālidi's writings were frequently published in Zaydān's *Al-Hilāl*.

Conclusion

To legitimize the forging of continuities with Eurocentric modernity, Khālidi resorted to a tactic that is, to this day, a favorite among Arab intellectuals, wherein past Arab civilizational advances frequently form the foundation on which new discursive formulations are constructed. The nostalgia is doubly functional. It justifies imagined humanistic and benign utopias of equal exchange of knowledge. But, more malignantly, it facilitates the internalization of "orientalism" by reading Eurocentric "discoveries" of Arab forms of knowledge as an implicit acknowledgment of some sort of civilizational debt, whereas, in fact, the recasting of this "debt" within new epistemological frameworks buttresses European superiority and makes the Arab forms of knowledge self-readable and accessible through the authoritative *science* of the European master. Thus,

for example, Khālīdī learned to value Arab civilization in a new way after his discussion with Eduard Glaser, whose discovery of South Arabian (Yemeni) inscriptions not only bolstered Khālīdī's nostalgia for an imagined "Arab" homogeneity and greatness but also enhanced the orientalist's authoritative status as well.²⁹

On the surface, Khālīdī's discourse seems simplistic and general. However, when properly situated within its context, it shows that Khālīdī—as a mediator of modernity, as an interlocutor of the emerging CUP elites, and as an uncritical francophile—uses *balagha* in a rather particular and unusual way. He uses it to naturalize political liberty, and this usage is not without its genius. Political modernity and literary modernity are linked through his conceptualization of *balagha*. True eloquence is true *balagha*, and it can flower only when there is *liberty*. *Balagha*, as he conceptualizes it, consists of an appropriate relationship between form and meaning. Sociopolitical restructuring produces new meaning. True *balagha*, *'intiḳād/naqd* expresses these new meanings. More important, *balagha*, conceptualized in this way, is universal. This universality is the linchpin on which Khālīdī's mediation of modernity rests. It not only indigenizes modern European literary forms but also advances the cause of modern liberty. His necessary acquiescence to coloniality represents the dark side of this pursuit of *ḥurriyya*.

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²⁹ Khālīdī and Glaser met in Turkey, where Glaser showed Khālīdī what he had excavated in Yemen (Khālīdī 1984: 68).

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