Abstract

Any cursory account of the history of Arabic poetics will reveal that it is not reducible to stylistics and grandiloquence, as a significant number of reformist (nahdawist) literati, assume. The nahdawists were members of what is referred to as the nahḍa, or the Arab renaissance, which is a period extending from the late 18th to early 20th century in which the Arab and Islamic world fell under the influence of European colonial modernity. The misconceptions regarding balāgha are particularly notable in the writings of early modern Arab literary comparatists, whose exposure to Eurocentric literary modernity drove them to compare their own literary heritage with that of the European nations. This comparison generated the transition from balāgha to critique (naqd); from what they perceived was a defunct focus on formal rhetoric to a more modern, that is socially and politically engaged, focus on criticism, or naqd. This chapter will map the various ways in which the concept of naqd emerged to replace balāgha in the works of early modern comparatists.

Key words: balāgha, ʾIntiqād, naqd, comparative Arabic literature, nahḍa, coloniality, ʾadab.

From Balāgha to ʾIntiqād: Politicising the Science of Literature in Modern Arabic Literary Thought

Introduction

In the classical Arabic literary tradition, ʾadab understood as literature in the pre-modern sense, and balāgha was used to study Arab poetics.¹ As ʾadab became literature in the modern

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¹ ʾAdab is larger in scope than literature. It refers to ‘a diverse corpus of pre-modern writings that represent various bodies of knowledge, such as music, astronomy, geometry, medicine, poetry, philosophy, history, wisdom sayings, oratory, and divine texts’ (Rashwan 2021: 40).
sense,² in the late 19th and the early 20th century, *balāgha* (poetics) was replaced with ‘*intiqād* (criticism) as literary epistemology.³ However, this transformation in the ontology and function of the literary as a field was contingent upon the internalisation of *inhiṭāt* (decline). This epistemic shift⁴ transformed *balāgha* from its classical status as an epistemic literary field to a marker of decline or *inhiṭāt*. This process was neither immediate nor was it restricted to the institutionalisation of literary studies; it was gradual, negotiated, contextual and politicised. It was also conducted through lay and academic reconceptualisations of the literary and ways of knowing it. This combination of both lay and academic aspects of literary thought is represented here by Naguib Ḥaddād (1867–99), Ḥasan Tawfīq al-ʿAdl (1862–1904), those involved in the 1900 debate on Arabic versus European literature in *al-Muqṭaṭaf*,⁵ Qistākī al-Ḥumsī (1858–1941), Rūḥī al-Khālidī (1864–1913), Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872–1938), and Aḥmad Ḍayf (1880–1940). These figures belong to an understudied period of emerging modern Arab literary thought. Most discussions of modern Arabic literary criticism begin with Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī’s (d.1890) *Al-Wāṣila al-ʿadabiyya ilā al-ʿulūm al-ʿarabīyya* (The Literary Way to the Arabic Sciences, 1872–5). Nonetheless, this work is a *balāgha* and composition compendium in which Marṣafī takes ‘stock’ and frames ‘a field of study and the modernization of the discipline’ (Allan 2012: 181–2). Granted his organisation of knowledge prepares the literary terrain for theoretical and evaluative judgements, but the actual

² I mean by modern, the ‘European historical concept of *literature* as creative or imaginative “fine writing” or “belles letters”’ which restricted “the category of literature to so-called “creative” or “imaginative” work” (see Rashawn 2021: 36-37).

³ *Balāgha*, although often translated as rhetoric is more akin to poetic craft or *al ṣināʿa al shīʿriyya*. The use of ‘*intiqād* instead of the older and premodern term *naqd* is intentional and means modern criticism.

⁴This epistemic shift, engendered by colonial modernity, is explored in Aria Nakissa’s ‘An Epistemic Shift in Islamic Law: Educational Reform at Al-Azhar and Dār al-ʿUlūm’ (Nakissa 2014).

⁵Leading *nahdawist* journal from 1876–1952, meaning select, harvest and literary extract, founded by Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf and Fāris Nimr, based in Beirut in 1876 and then Egypt in 1884. This multipurpose journal’s topics cover agriculture, literature, science and astronomy.
engineering of modern literary value nevertheless took place in the works of thinkers mentioned above.

The fact that these thinkers were of lay and academic backgrounds must be considered because the academisation of modern Arab poetics was integrally linked to structural and conceptual transformations in the lived experiences of these thinkers. In other words, it was not simply a process of the imposition of a European model within an institutional setting. Thus, for instance, lay thinkers like Ḥaddād, al-Ḥumsī and the participants in the al-Muqṭatatf debates begin to domesticate the idea of ḥintiqād (criticism) before it develops into īlm al-ʾadab (science of literature) in the academic contribution of al-Khālidī and then as ḥintiqād in the academic setting of Dār al-ʿUlmāʾ (est. 1872) and the private Egyptian University (est. 1908) with Nallino and Ḍāyf. This process will be explored thoroughly below. If the ensuing discussion suggests a conscious exchange of ideas on the part of the thinkers discussed, then nothing substantial in terms of cross-referencing and citations supports this. What can be claimed, however, is that they shared a geoculture—that of the Arab nahḍa (renaissance), which is a period extending from the late 18th to the early 20th century in which the Arab and Islamic world fell under the influence of European colonial modernity.

This intersection with European colonial modernity means that early modern (18th century) Arab literary thought is at root an exercise in comparativism. From the earliest popular debates in al-Muqṭatatf to the inauguration of the modern academic study of Arabic literature in 1910 at the Egyptian University, all deliberations on literary value and the literary as such refer primarily to the authority of the European literary episteme. This episteme can be defined as a way of knowing centred on the rationality cultural complex, ‘the European paradigm of rational knowledge’ (Quijano 2007: 172; see also Quijano 2000, 534–5 for the origins of the coloniality–modernity complex), which is sustained by the coloniality of power and the epistemic structuring of differences between a knowing autonomous subject and an ontologically different object. In the nahḍawists’ deliberations on literary value, the differentials of power are recognised (particularly in
the awareness of European political domination) but rarely if ever associated with the civilisational and moral claims that the early thinkers discussed, which are attributed to the enlightened and reasonable Europe they imagined, and which contradicted European colonial practices. More importantly, however, this exercise in comparativism makes *inḥiṭāṭ* literary modernity’s condition of possibility, as *nahdahwist* literati negotiated the transculturation of European literary value by gradually internalising the European notion of Arab literary decline and eventually internalising it as they posited that the entire medieval and post-classical literary heritage is cast as stagnant, unsuitable and unimaginative. *Inḥiṭāṭ* is not limited to literary knowledge. It also became an all-encompassing signifier of a civilisational malaise that was used to justify and facilitate the imposing and deep structural and political demands of the transition to modernity in the Arab world, spearheaded by Mohammad Ali Pasha’s reforms of the early 19th century, which made Egypt, because of the relatively free press, a centre of literary reform as well. The profound structural transformations in the modes of production (the regional transition to a cotton economy) impacted the historical moment and political demands to which *nahdawists* were subjected. Nonetheless, the bitter foretaste of modernity was the internalisation of decline. In effect, *inḥiṭāṭ* is to the *nahḍa* what coloniality is to modernity: its dark underside.

**Transforming the literary terrain: *ʿintiqād* and *lafẓ/maʿnā***

The thesis of decline did not entail an immediate and thoroughgoing disregard for the Arab critical heritage. Continuities with that heritage were utilised to legitimise modern literary axiology and at the same time discredit, as *inḥiṭāṭ*, practices and perspectives that did not align with the aims of literary modernity. The specifics of the epistemic shift in literary epistemology and axiology involved applying a practice of critique—*ʿintiqād*—and manipulating the *lafẓ*(vocal form)/*maʿnā*(meaning) concern of *balāgha* in response to the need to express new social realities and concerns.
The European practice of ‘intiqād or criticism⁶ was a key element in this act of transformation. The term naqd, from which ‘intiqād was derived, is not a modern word, and the earliest recorded use of the term occurs in the 9th century. According to Lisān al-ʿArab, naqd was initially used to indicate money, and in the verb form, it referred to testing coins for the signs of corrosion and decay. Naqd was also used to refer to the act of denigrating and slandering others. According to al-ʿArabī Darwīsh (Darwīsh 1991: 12), the first to link naqd as money to naqd in relation to poetry was Khalaf al-Aḥmar (733–96) who nonetheless did not use it as criticism; he simply compared good poetry to money. The first to explicitly connect naqd to critical observation was Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 845–6) (Darwīsh 1991: 13), and the first usage of the term in relation to poetic judgement occurs a century later with Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar’s (873-948) naqd al-shiʿr. However, the term fell out of use as Arabic criticism preferred the term al-ʿilm bil-shiʿr (knowledge of poetry) (Darwīsh 1991: 13). ‘Intiqād acquired its cache in the modern era, when modern comparatists like al-Khālidī began to conceptualise poetry as a science of literature: ʿilm al-ʿadab. Darwīsh argued that the overwhelming influence of al-dalālāh al-lughawiya or language on poetry or the predominance of balāgha as a way of knowing literature stunted the growth of ‘intiqād as a holistic literary epistemology (Darwīsh 1991: 11–15).⁷ However, the process of transforming balāgha into ‘intiqād was complex.

The modern notion of ‘intiqād infiltrates many early calls for the reform of thought and practice: from its 1870 appearance as a sought-after mode of thinking in the opening statement of the Minister of Education, ʿAlī Mubārak (1824–93), to Rawḍat al-madāris (ʿAlī et al. 1997: 34)—the mouthpiece of educational reform in Egypt—to its more conceptually developed form as a new way of thinking that is just, objective and essential for the elevation of the arts and sciences as manifested in Yaʾqūb Ṣarrūf’s (1888–1927) al-Muqṭaṭaf article, ‘Al-ʾintiqād’ (Ṣarrūf 1887: 163).

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⁶As Jeffrey Sacks notes, naqd and ‘intiqād imply criticism and critique (Sacks 2007: 33).

⁷Darwīsh uses the term al naqd al ʿadabi to refer to modern Arabic literary criticism, which in this chapter is ‘intiqād, and writes, in English, ‘Criticism’, which he distinguishes from al naqd al naqd al ʿarabi al qadīm.
'Intiqād mostly indicated a transformation of consciousness and practice. Šarrūf notes that evidence for the existence of this critical consciousness exists in classical Arabic literary criticism in the abundant commentaries, *Shurūh*, they made on original texts, or *mutūn* (Ṣarrūf 1887: 164). He then notes that the Europeans developed this consciousness after they emerged from their ‘ignorance’ to employ ‘reason [al-‘aql] in the study of arts and sciences’ to the extent that they ‘elevated it’ to an art in itself and established literary journals for the practice of *intiqād*, in France, Britain, Scotland, Italy, Germany and the United States (Ṣarrūf 1887: 164–5). Ṣarrūf argues that

That is to say that far from denigrating or detracting from the value of literary works and their authors, ‘*intiqād*, according to the Europeans, indicates a level of care towards and esteem for the critiqued author. Meticulousness in the application of *intiqād* is evidence of attentiveness towards the critiqued work’, and that

‘those who are well-established in knowledge and broad in understanding consider the severity and diligence of the critique directed at them and their works is mark of distinction. They prefer highlighting the shortcomings to simply receiving prise for their works, in contrast to our case, the easterners, these days. And if they should detect, from the criticiser, leniency of or forgiveness [overlooking errors] they would take offence and consider this an underestimation of their worth and a belittling of the value of their work or their knowledge and mental acuity. For this method of criticism is the method the

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8 All translations from the original are mine unless otherwise indicated.
Europeans use to critique women’s writing; they tolerate their errors and overlook them’ (Ṣarrūf 1887: 166).

To explain the necessity of transitioning to this modern understanding of critical practice from that of classical Arabic criticism traditional understanding of naqd, it may be useful to revisit Darwīsh’s two meaning of naqd; naqd as an act that distinguishes good from bad quality, ‘tamyīz jayyidihā min raʿīdīʾhā;’ and naqd as the act of denigrating and slandering others (Darwīsh 1991: 11). Ṣarrūf’s argument may, therefore, be considered a response to the latter understanding of naqd. Thus, in early modern Arabic literary discourse, ‘intiqād indicates having the liberty to dissociate from the authority of traditional scholars, assume an objective stance towards literary texts by relying on reason and rationality, which in most cases meant adopting a historical perspective towards literary and critical opinions, and use what is referred to as the critical method in the study of literature.

The lafẓ/maʿnā topic, which was an overarching concern of classical Arabic criticism, is a feature of the classical literary heritage that was utilised to legitimise modern literary axiology. Lafẓ/maʿnā is conventionally translated as the word/meaning pair by Arabists. However, the word lafẓ is more accurately translated as vocal form. This pair, in essence, operated as a conceptual paradigm through which the theorisation of literature happened. For instance, literary scholars schooled in Western modes of reading literature apply close reading as a means of understanding literature. They detect, analyse and interpret theme, imagery, symbolism and all the contemporary developments and departures from this paradigm. Classical Arabic criticism uses the lafẓ/maʿnā concern in a similar manner so that it is not simply a measure of rhetorical skill but a field of knowledge through which understanding poetry happens. This Arabic pairing was a theory of meaning ‘consisting solely of vocal form and mental content’, which ‘provided the terminology and epistemological architecture for a whole series of ideas about how the mental content could, and should, be turned into linguistic content’ (Adamson & Key 2015: 75). Moreover, ‘it was in play across all available genres, from poetry to exegetical hermeneutics and legal theory’ (Adamson & Key 2015: 74). The thinkers explored below expressed the need for a new function for literature,
and a function that would enable the expression of what some thinkers suggested was new meaning. Although vague and hardly a coined term, this new meaning required finding new terms (words and modes of expression) to describe the present as opposed to what they perceived as the old, hackneyed modes of poetic expressions that did little to communicate contemporary experience. In fact, as the following will show, this need for new modes of expression transformed literature into a potent instrument of socio-psychological engineering.

**Comparative strategies: naturalising epistemic transformations**

Before the thinkers discussed here could introduce changes in ways of understanding the literary, they needed to naturalise them, i.e., ontologically and epistemologically ground the concept of change itself. Ontologically, most thinkers used a native authoritative ontological paradigm (appealing to concepts like creationism and the law of nature) to justify change and the universality of poetic expressions to normalise foreign influence. Epistemologically, they needed to justify adopting the European paradigm of literary knowledge to assimilate European literary value. Some thinkers established cultural continuities, some used the impending nahḍa to justify this shift, whilst others simply admitted the superiority of European knowledge.

The earliest known work of literary comparison is Naguib Ḥaddād’s three-part article in al-Bayān titled ‘Al-Muqābala bayn al-shi‘r al-ʿarabī wal-shi‘r al-ʿifrānjī’⁹ (A Comparison between the Poetry of the Arabs and the Poetry of the Franks). Ḥaddād was a prominent essayist and well versed in French literature (for more on Ḥaddād, see van Gelder 1996, Ḥannūn 1996, and Sadgrove 2012). His naturalisation of change allowed him to assimilate Victor Hugo’s use of August Comte’s stages of social evolution, which Ḥaddād translated as the primitive, the ancient and the modern

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⁹ *Muqābala*, *muwāzana* and *muʿāraḍa* are used to indicate a comparison or *muqārana*. See al-Jiyyār (1992: 246).

¹*Ifrānj* is used to refer to the West, as Ḥaddād states (Haddād 1897(1): 300).
However, this assimilation stresses the separate trajectories of the social evolution of the Arabs and Franks, with the Franks being influenced by Greek and Latin culture and the Arabs insulated but true to their nomadic origins (Ḥaddād 1897(2): 335–6). No cultural continuities are stressed; therefore, there is little in terms of transculturating concepts and ideas. Ḥaddād’s essay is interesting because of this acceptance of the separation of trajectories, which will not be sustained as the European paradigm of literary knowledge rises to prominence and as the values associated with it become assimilated by the thinkers discussed here.

Ḥasan Tawfīq al-ʿAdl’s (1898) Tārīkh ʾadāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyya (History of Arabic Literature)11 is a revision of the Arabic literary heritage from a comparative perspective. Although not a comparatist per se, al-ʿAdl applied a comparatist consciousness to the study of Arabic literature. Walīd Maḥmoud Khālis noted that al-ʿAdl presented ‘a new vision for Arabic literary studies, one that was influenced by Western literary studies and Orientalists’ studies of Arabic literature, all the while preserving the Arab Islamic character of the material he engaged’ (introduction to al-ʿAdl 2002: 8). His pedagogical journey from the Azhar primary schools to Dār al-ʿUlūm was typical of the era (Aroian 1978; Yousef 2012), but he was unique because he was perhaps the only Arab literary scholar to have taught orientalists and foreign service employees. Al-ʿAdl’s traveled ‘to schools in multiple European countries’, thus reflecting ‘the Egyptian educational administrators’ interest ‘in educational practices across a wide range of European countries’ (Kalmbach 2014: 100). From Berlin, where he taught Arabic at the Berlin School of Oriental Languages, to Cambridge, where he taught Arabic to British university students who were destined for the Egyptian government, al-ʿAdl travelled around Europe before returning to teach at Dār al-ʿUlūm in 1898. The Arabic disciplines taught at Dār al-ʿUlūm were


11 An incomplete manuscript was published in 1902. See the editor’s introduction to al-ʿAdl (2002: 24). Al-ʿAdl died in 1904 before he could complete the book. He had intended to cover the Abbasid to the Andalusian eras.
nahw (syntax), ṣarf (morphology), ‘arūḍ (metrics, prosody), qawāfī (rhyme), bayān, badī’, and maʾānī (sub-disciplines of balāgha), inshā’ (composition), ʿadab (literature, belles-lettres), and khatt (calligraphy)—as well as introductory coursework in civil school subjects—chiefly mathematics, geography, history, and drawing, as well as chemical, physical, and natural sciences. In the 1920s, coursework in Eastern and Semitic languages was added (Kalmbach 2012: 110).

Al-ʿAdl’s History of Arabic Literature is based on the notes he used when teaching his German students (introduction to al-ʿAdl 2002: 19), and he employed change to naturalise the historical perspective and historicise the Arabic literary heritage. A man’s intellectual and psychological faculties, which are in a state of constant flux and transformation, are subject to the momentum of history, he argued. A man’s need to communicate to reach a mutual understanding (tafāhum) (al-ʿAdl 2002: 28) is met by a divinely bestowed language, and the Qurʾān is its embodiment and is thus ‘the source of poetry and ʿadab’ (al-ʿAdl 2002: 117). Hence, literature becomes an arena for communication. Although al-ʿAdl did not attempt to trace cultural continuities, he tried to bring the aspects of the Arabic literary heritage and thought closer to the European understanding of literature when he likened the Okaz literary festival and similar souks to scientific seminars and language conferences; ʿوَتَىْ أَهْدَ أَلْمَأْلَكَ قَأْئَسَلَأْ يُهُدَأْ إِلَّاُ ‘these festivals can be considered scientific forums and linguistic conferences’ (al-ʿAdl 2002: 42).

The 1900 al-Muqṭaṭaf debate on the topic of ‘The Eloquence of the Arabs and the Eloquence of the Franks’ involved the following: Aḥmad Kāmil, a poet and minor political figure who served as the Wafd party’s central committee agent in El Maḥalla, Egypt (1923); Khalīl Thābit, a Lebanese journalist and foreign policy analyst and editor of the pro-British newspaper al-Muqṭṭam and Niqula Fayyāḍ, a Lebanese poet, medical doctor and prolific translator, ‘who was widely read in French literature’ (Starkey 2006: 55). They addressed the linguistic continuities and discontinuities between Arab and Western eloquence in relation to translation. The debate was
initiated by Aḥmad Kāmil’s provocative but flawed argument that although the Franks ‘are superior in science and technology’, they have yet to achieve ‘the level of Arab and Persian balāgha’ (Kāmil 1900: 38). Kāmil’s argument is flawed because he judged translated works, as his respondents point out (Fayyāḍ 1900: 294–5). It was Fayyāḍ’s translation of Rudyard Kipling’s ‘An Error in the Fourth Dimension’ in The Day’s Work (1898) that Kāmil thought so inferior and common. Thābit, the first respondent, objects that different linguistic roots entail different modes of expression and different tastes (Thābit 1900: 213). In the final rebuttal, Fayyāḍ utilised the concept of change to argue for the temporal, geographical and cultural specificity of literary expression. He asserted that balāgha is contextual and thus subject to temporal, geographical and cultural differences: ‘ولان البلاغة ليست في المعاني وحدها بل هناك طرق في التعبير واساليب في انتقاء الألفاظ ومناحي في التصور تختلف باختلاف الزمن والمكان والشعوب’; ‘Balāgha is not to be found only in meaning. There are modes of expression and methods of selecting vocabulary and ways of representing that differ according to time, place and people’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 291).

In Tārīkh ʿilm al-ʿadab ʿind al-ʿifrānj wal-ʿarab wa Fiktūr Hūgo (The History of the Science of Literature with the Franks, the Arabs and Victor Hugo, 1904), a pioneering work of comparative literary criticism, Rūḥi al-Khālidī (1864–1913) used cultural continuities to transform balāgha into ʿintiqād and to incorporate the French ideal of liberté into Arab literary thought. Al-Khālidī’s multifaceted personality and functions made him the ideal candidate for such a radical shift in how the role of literature and criticism was politically conceptualised (Alfaisal 2016, 2019). Like al-ʿAdl, al-Khālidī taught in Europe (for biographical information, see Kasmieh 1992; Khalidi 1992, 2010; and Khaṭīb 1987); unlike the former, al-Khālidī studied Islamic sciences and philosophy in Paris. Cultural continuities formed a cornerstone in his discourse. He employed these continuities to naturalise and justify the adoption of a scientific perspective in literary studies, and he also traced the literary legacies of the Arabs and the French, noting the historical influence of Arab poetry on European poetry up to Victor Hugo. His historical tracing allowed him to naturalise the rapport de fait approach of the French school of literary positivism, which was highly influential in early
modern Arabic criticism and comparativism. It was primarily through the teaching of Gustave Lanson, founder of the discipline of literary history in France, that Arab critics were indoctrinated in new methods of literary study, namely, to ‘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 1995: 223; see Ḥannūn 1996 for a thorough study on the influence of Lanson on Arab critics). These criss-crossing currents of cultural continuity legitimate what al-Khālidī perceives as the need to adopt the principles of the French school of criticism.

This enthusiasm for the French school of literary studies also underscores Qistākī al-Ḥumsī’s monumental Manhal al-wurrād fī ‘ilm al-’intiqād (The Seeker’s Guide to the Science of Criticism) (al-Ḥumsī 1907; volumes I and II were published in 1907 and volume III in 1935). Al-Ḥumsī’s exposure to the literary output of Europeans came as a result of his education in missionary schools and the leisure that his success in trade afforded him (al-Ziriklī 2002: 2002: 197). In 1905, he abandoned trade and dedicated himself to the study of Arabic literature, whose literary heritage he compared with that of the French. He referred to French critics and their publications as ‘كتب هذا الفن في اللغة الفرنساوية’ (books dealing with this techne [’intiqād] in the French language) (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 4–5). Al-Ḥumsī’s contribution is unique in its practical orientation. As a businessman, he exhibited a keen awareness of the materiality of literary production and scholarly pursuits underlying low Arab productivity: the costliness of acquiring books and their scarcity because of the nascent state of the Arab printing presses and consequently the reliance on ‘ulamā’ as sources of knowledge and, perhaps most importantly, the lack of freedom (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 31–3). Furthermore, he identified a gap in the European and Arab markets for a universal history of ‘intiqād (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 2), and he misguidedly saw himself as the first amongst Arabs and Franks to classify poetry according to excellence (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 178). Nonetheless, he attempted to identify and fix ’intiqād’s rules and practices. His perspective was informed by an awareness of the nahdawist moment in which the Arab world seemed poised to undergo a renaissance modelled on the European experience.
It would not be too far-fetched to mark this stage in the development of comparatist Arab literary thought as the endpoint of the strategy of forging cultural continuities to mediate and facilitate the assimilation of the European models of literary knowledge. Henceforth, the European literary episteme assumes prominence as a model to be emulated. Granted, references to ‘European models’ and ‘a literary episteme’ suggest a self-enclosed clearly defined singularity and insularity, which is not the case. Still, Europe as an imaginary is useful in terms of indicating a general tendency with the scholars involved in this conceptual rapport with the Europeans or ifranj. The reference to an overarching literary episteme is intended to invoke the Foucauldian *epistémé* as a determining structure in which reason and rationality function as instruments of epistemic coercion. The coloniality of this episteme is expressed in Aníbal Quijano’s modernity–coloniality–rationality–cultural complex. What this means is that there is a set of assumptions with their attending logic and objectivity that is determined by interests that are not benign and far from objective and to which native scholars must ‘buy in’ to have their knowledge counted as valid. It is this ‘epistemological affinity’ (Massad 2007: 5) that is being forged, most likely unconsciously, by these early thinkers of Arab literary modernity.

The Italian Orientalist Carlo Alfonso Nallino’s perspective is already situated in this European literary episteme, namely, the historical turn of literary studies. Nallino’s impact on the development of literary studies in the Arab world remains understudied.\(^\text{12}\) He was hired by King Fuad University as an astronomy professor in 1909, and he was one of several other orientalists, including Ignazio Guidi, David Santillana and Gerardo Meloni, who were employed by the university. Value was placed on belonging to a European episteme than to a particular specialisation. Thus, Orientalists became the perfect mediums for teaching European ways of knowing. This is why a year after he was employed to teach astronomy, Nallino gave a series of lectures (1910–12) on the history of Arabic literature at the behest of officials at the Egyptian University.

\(^{12}\) Samy Soliman explored the influence of French critics Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–69), Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) and Ferdinand Brunetière (1849–1906) on Nallino (Soliman 2009).
University. The Department of Arabic Literature was established in 1910. Orientalists were tasked with teaching the history of Arabic literature and Azharite professors with teaching actual literary texts. This policy remained in place up to the first World War (Soliman 2009: 101; see also Reid 1987). Applying a historical consciousness to the study of literature as Nallino did became a pivotal moment in modern Arabic literary criticism. His lectures were eventually collected and published in Tārīkh al-ʿādāb al-ʿarabīyya min al-jāhiliyya ḥattā ʿašr banī ʿumayya: Nuṣūṣ al-muḥāḍarāt allatī alqāhā bil-jāmiʿa al-miṣriya fī sanat 1910–1911 Karlu Nalinu. These lectures were attended by Azharites, Dār al-ʿUlūm students and teachers who were encouraged to do so by the Egyptian government as part of its educational reform project, which was to provide government schools with teachers well versed in modern methods of study.

Nallino positioned himself as the harbinger of an impending Arab renaissance modelled on European experiences. The aforementioned strategy of noting cultural continuities is, in Nallino’s thinking, transformed into a reminder of cross-cultural trade. He validated his presence by reminding his students of past economic interactions between the Arabs and the Italians, by which he meant Venetian trade. He explained that he was employed to teach Arabic students their own literature because of the need to apply the historical method to an otherwise anecdotal tradition (Nallino 1970: 57). In this epistemic transaction, Nallino offered his students a new way of knowing their heritage and a means of resuscitating it. He also encouraged them to preserve the vitality of and interest in their literary heritage in the emulation of Europeans, who were united by a common literary heritage in times of war and fragmentation (Nallino 1970: 19).

Aḥmad Ḍayf was also aware of being on the cusp of a nahḍa, only this time a localised Egyptian nahḍa (Ḍayf 1921: 1, 4). The internalisation of the European literary episteme was complete with him. He disclosed that this nahḍa aims to catch up with the European Enlightenment (Ḍayf 1921: 3). Although Ḍayf was overshadowed by the more flamboyant and politically connected Ṭāhā Ḥussayn, his impact deserves attention. His contribution to curricular development in Egypt—and, by extension, significant parts of the Arab world—is striking (see Ḥannūn 1996:
106 for Dayf’s impact). Dayf was active in engineering higher education through his academic output and by holding a position in specialised committees: the 1917 commission on planning a state university (the Egyptian University) ‘to draft proposals for faculties of Letters (i.e. Arts), Law, Science, and Commerce’ (Reid 2002: 76) and the 1923 commission as well. He also collaborated on high school textbooks such as Al-Muntakhab min ʾadab al-ʾarab (A Selection of the Literature of the Arabs published in four volumes). Moreover, he taught for most of his life, which means that his views necessarily shaped literary axiology. Evidently, he was instrumental in solidifying the institutionalisation of modern secular Arabic literary criticism. Dayf’s Muqaddima li dirāsat balāghat al-ʿarab (Introduction to the Study of Arab Balāgha, 1921) consists of the series of lectures he gave as the Chair of Arabic literature at the Egyptian University (1918–21) when he returned from the Sorbonne as the first Arab to earn a PhD in Arabic literature. His Muqaddima is actually a work of comparison between Arab and French literature and criticism, from which a conceptualisation of analytical criticism and a call for a national Egyptian literature emerge. Nonetheless, Arabic literary knowledge appears as defunct, so much so that even when it comes to imitating the ancients, a particular point of Arab expertise his exposition suggested, they are outshone by the French. He affirmed that the Arabs limited themselves to formal imitation and that the French forged conceptual links that would reveal how ‘نأ ﺐﺠﯾ ﺔﻏﻼﺒﻟا نأ ﻞﺜﻤﺗ سﻮﻔﻧ و ﻢﻣ ﺑ ﺑ ﺑ تارﺎﺒﻌﻟاو ظﺎﻔﻟﻷا ﻲﻓ ﻢﮭﻧورﺎﺠﯾ ﻢﮭﻧﻷ ﻻ ،صﺎﺨﺷ’ literature ‘represents the life of nations and the character of its people instead of being based on formal imitation; one that is based on copying words and expression only’ (Dayf 1921: 104).

Comparative strategies, such as noting cultural differences and continuities, served to naturalise the process of change and thus prepared the terrain of Arab literary knowledge for the

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13 The term secular is never used by Dayf. I bring it in here to describe what Aria Nakissa describes as an epistemic shift (Nakissa 2014, esp. 218). The reforms involved setting curricula and standardizing examinations and certification. My use of the term secular, throughout, will denote this shift.

14 He repeats the same idea on p. 162. The slippage between balāgha and ʾadab in Dayf’s discourse is addressed below.
transition to European ways of knowing and conceptualising literature. Tracing the strategies each thinker applied reveals a subtle transformation from equivalence to subordination in their estimation of differences between Arab and European literary knowledge. In all cases, the European episteme is present as a referent. The value of this episteme assumes gradual superiority as Arab literary thought develops.

The European epistemic paradigm and transformations in literary value

With the European episteme as the prime referent, thinkers adopted various ways of incorporating it into the Arab critical vocabulary. Most thinkers manipulated the lafẓ/maʿnā concern of classical Arabic literary criticism to assimilate European literary knowledge. Some thinkers presented a reductive reading of this concern, whilst others used it as a mark of decline.

In Ḥaddād’s Muqābala, the lafẓ/maʿnā pair is separated: he drew a formalist comparison between the Arab and Frankish perspectives on words and then considered differences in terms of understanding meaning. His deliberation on the differences in the Western and Arab perspectives on meaning, however, is where the mediation of European literary value occurs. For instance, he compared ‘the ḥamāsa of the Arab dīwān’ (anthology of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry) and ‘contemporary Frankish poetry in terms of simplicity of meaning, appropriateness of similes, and understandings of verisimilitude’, thereby making European poetry, at the epitome of their civilisational development, equal in excellence to that of the Arabs who were in the early Bedouin phases (Ḥaddād 1897(3): 363). He declared the French to be akin to jāhilî poets in their denigration of exaggeration and grandiloquence in contrast to ‘Islamic poets’ penchant for exaggerated metaphors and imagery that exceed the limits of the imaginable and knowable’ (Ḥaddād 1897(3): 363). He states that Arabs:

شاهينا الإفرنج في شعر جاهليتانا من حيث البساطة و التزام الحقائق وبايناهم كثيرا في شعرنا الأخير من عهد المتنبي إلى اليوم من حيث الإغراب في المعاني والمغالاة في الوصف بما يخرج الكلام عن حد الحقيقة أحيانا أو يليس الحقيقة الصغيرة منه الثوب الطويل الضافي من المجاز والإبهام
our jahili poetry resembled European poetry in terms of its simplicity and adherence to the truth, and we differ a great deal in our latter-day poetry, from the era of al Mutanabbi to this day, in terms of strangeness in meaning, exaggerated descriptions, such that speech exceeds the limits of what is true and can, at times, dress minute realities with the much too long garments of excessive and obscure metaphors (Ḩaddād 1897(3): 364–5).

However, he justified this discrepancy by stating that the Arabs exaggerate when they describe the machinations of their souls but are, like Europeans, more sober and true to life, when representing events and certain truths (Ḩaddād 1897(3): 364). Further, European dedication to reason and truth can limit poetry, whereas—as the famous Arab dictum goes—‘the most untruthful poetry is the sweetest, and the finest poetry is the more truthful’ (Ḩaddād 1897(3): 363). Moreover, whereas the Franks are better at describing states of being, the Arabs are better at describing objects (Ḩaddād 1897(3): 365). By states of being, Ṭaddād probably meant thoughts, which he employed when he defined poetry as ‘thoughts [al-fikr] communicated from the empirical world of the senses to the imaginary world (‘ālam al-khayāl’), expressed in the form of ‘speech that faithfully portrays [al-kalām alladhi yuṣawir] the minutest of heartfelt sentiments’. Poetry is ‘truth that is cloaked in metaphor’ and provides the ‘grand meaning that these thoughts reveal’ (Ḩaddād 1897(1): 299).

Ḩaddād’s definition of poetry is unconventional because the traditional definition is that poetry is rhyme and metre (see Ħussaynī 1967: 16–17 on this point). This point is important because it indicates that the process of transculturating literary value is already underway. This is perhaps why Ṭaddād’s comparison is markedly ambiguous in terms of fixing judgement related to the values that he incorporated from the European literary episteme, namely, thought, creativity and verisimilitude. The ambiguity in question arises from an unwillingness to generate hierarchies. The validity of Ṭaddād’s comparison is not the focal point here; his act of muqābala is. This is because his muqābala sketches the preliminary contours of a European literary episteme on the canvas of modern Arabic literary thought, which would come to dominate Arabic criticism over the next twenty years at least.
Having naturalised the historical perspective, al-'Adl applied it to the lafẓ/maʾnā pair (al-'Adl 2002: 29–32). His theory regarding vocal forms and meaning is based on al-Jāḥiz (d. 868)—Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn—who believed that the crux of poetic expressions was to be found in form, that is, in its turns of phrases, with the prime example being the Qurʾān. Although seemingly at odds with al-Jāḥiz, al-'Adl may have been reading al-Jāḥiz’s understanding of meaning in a similar way to Iraqi scholar and diplomat Nāṣer al-Ḥānī (1917–68). The latter suggested that for al-Jāḥiz, ‘meaning’ indicated the thoughts that writers wanted to convey or the experiences they intended to record and then asserted, ‘I mean they did not intend to use the English word meaning but rather thoughts or ideas’ (al-Ḥānī 1953: 106), which, as mentioned earlier, Adamson and Key called ‘mental content’.

Al-'Adl’s historicisation of lafẓ/maʾnā began when he readily admitted the Quranic perspective wherein meanings exist a priori to words, as in the verse he cited: ‘وَعَلَمَ آدَمَ الْإِسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضْنَاهُمْ عَلَى الْأَنجلِينَ فَقَالَ أَنْجِلُونِي بِسَمَّاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنَّنَا نَتَّفَعَلُّمُ صَادِقِينَ’ (And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful’) (Qurʾān 2:31, Pickthall translation). However, in al-'Adl’s formulation, meaning is generated in the human realm and in the thoughts and feelings of individuals who need to engage with each other. Meaning is also subject to transformations caused by shifting contexts and environments, and words are its instruments. He brought meaning down to earth, out of the realm of the Divine and placed it in the hands of man’s history thus subjecting meaning to time and space. He followed a similar process with regard to his definition of ʾadab, which, although close to the understanding of it as pædeia, is historicised when he ascribed to it the same function that he ascribes to history: ʾadab, he claimed, explores the intellectual condition and bayān of a people (al-'Adl 2002: 32), and history

15 It is ‘what produces a well-mannered, cultivated and virtuous person’ (al-'Adl 2002: 32). It should be noted that for lack of a closer alternative the Greek term, pædeia, is used here for the sake of convenience, in spite of its ultimate unsuitability as it excludes considering religious writings as the highest genre of ʾadab, which ʾadab does.

16 Bayān means the ability to turn a phrase or figure of speech.
is a register of the intellectual life of a people, their bayān or linguistic proficiency and their literary heritage. Thus, meaning is generated by the impact of historical momentum, and history is, in effect, a record of meaning. History becomes an epistemic instrument, a way of knowing literature, when al-ʿAdl claimed that the history of literature ‘is subordinate to the political and religious history of a people because political and religious conditions are general; they either generate thoughts and move people to acquire knowledge or they become an impediment to intellectual life, which in turn affects a community negatively and weakens it both politically and religiously’ (al-ʿAdl 2002: 32–3). The burden of political power is placed on the shoulders of literary history. Through utilising history as an episteme, al-ʿAdl added to the literary values of thought and creativity, the value of literature as a historical record of these conditions. As a historical record, literature must be periodised, which is precisely what al-ʿAdl did when he adopted Carl Brockelmann’s 1898 periodisation of Arabic literature in Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, a work considered to be the first to introduce this historical method. This historicisation of literary knowledge entailed implementing a historical consciousness in the evaluation of literature. As such, the institution of eras and author biographies with the attendant characteristics of time and place became informative and therefore valuable.

The notion that the historical context determines and even fixes certain characteristics on literary works is very much engendered by a Eurocentric epistemology of literature. Periodisation dominates literary studies in particular. It also creates boundaries and exclusions and functions as the frame within which research questions are asked and in which research is conducted: ‘our entire system of literary education, from the first-year undergraduate survey to the forms of judgment governing publication, promotion, and tenure, reifies the period as its central historical concept’ (Hayot 2011: 741). This takes shape as the ‘institutionalisation of context’ wherein context is ‘thematize[d], formalize[d]’, and put ‘into a wide variety of practices’ (Hayot 2011: 741). Periodisation is an ‘ideological’ concept whose ‘value’ is rarely if ever ‘debated’ (Hayot 2011: 742). For instance, periodisation makes possible statements like the following: ‘In this poem not
only the theme is uncharacteristic of classical Arabic poetry, but some of the compositional principles as well’ (Somekh 1992: 59–60). Presumably, the editors who made this statement recognised the problems associated with periodisation when they offered the disclaimer that ‘evidently the dates suggested here for the three periods of the development of modern Arabic literature do not constitute sharp lines of demarcation because there is a considerable overlap between the periods. However, they added, ‘it is to be hoped that these dates are useful pointers’ (Beeston & Ashtiany 1992: 23), that is, demarcations that determine what research questions are asked and how they are answered.

In al-Muqtaṭaf debates, the lafz/maʾnā concern is used to understand translations: Thābit said that the harmony between lafz and maʾnā is severely disrupted by translation (Thābit 1900: 214), and Fayyāḍ defined translation as essentially ‘stripping meaning of the mould in which the poet placed it and dressing it in new and strange attire’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 291). However, it was Fayyāḍ’s intervention that bore witness to the emerging authority of the European epistemic paradigm, which happened when he took issue with Kāmil’s dismissal of European critical authority in the latter’s appraisal of Victor Hugo (Fayyāḍ 1900: 291). More significant is Fayyāḍ’s use of values associated with the European paradigm (innovation, verisimilitude and creativity) to criticise Arab poets for restricting themselves to particular genres, modes of expression and poetic conventions that have become tired and tiring, particularly sajʿ (rhymed prose). He declares that ‘Arab writers should ‘adopt a new way of writing, one that is compatible with the contemporary era. For the Franks avoid imitation and strive for the new’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 293). Fayyāḍ’s justification for abandoning the old ways is telling: ‘excessive use of similes and rhymed prose wastes both the reader’s and the writer’s time. For we live in an era when time has become extremely valuable for the writer and the reader’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 293). Thus, he factored in the cost
of time as a determinant of literary value. In addition to brevity and conciseness as ideals, verisimilitude is also given more definition: Europeans esteem truth above all, ‘the truths of science and the wonders of ʿumrān [civilisation]’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 249).

Through the authority of the European paradigm, the literary values of brevity and conciseness, thought, creativity, innovation and verisimilitude began to infiltrate the discussion on literary criticism. The association between science and verisimilitude that Fayyāḍ developed would take on a startlingly innovative formulation with al-Khālidī’s conceptualisation of a science of literature or ‘intiqād, liberty and literary value. Al-Khālidī’s synthesis is noteworthy because it presents the literary as a locus of political value.17 His formulation of the notion of ‘intiqād is conceptualised as the revolutionary liberation of meaning from the strictures of literary form. To prize what the Europeans prized, that is, thought and creativity—a literary value they found lacking in jāhili poetry—words must be subordinated to meaning; he says:

فيه تصنع في الألفاظ وتعمال في الشكل الخارجي لا يكون فيه حركة ذهنية ولا تخيل أفاذاء الأفونج يقولون... الكلام الذي ‘Frankish literati say that speech that is filled with artifice … has neither intellectual vitality nor creative thinking’ (al-Khālidī 1984: 96).

Grandiloquence, mubālagha, is read as symptomatic of the subordination of meaning to form and is associated with political tyranny.18 Grandiloquence takes many forms: takalluf (affectation) and taṣnu`, taʿammul (artificiality and pretence) and tafrīṭ (waste). In a bizarre twist, al-Khālidī sanctions the subordination of form to meaning by claiming that the Qurʾān did just that: it makes literary form subject to sacred meaning; ‘وقع النطق في القرآن تابعا للمعنى’, ‘lafz in the Qurʾān follows meaning’ (al-Khālidī 1984: 76).

17 Al-Khālidī’s motivations and methodology have been explained in detail elsewhere (Alfaisal 2016, 2019).

18 For more on how and why al-Khālidī linked true eloquence to liberty, see Alfaisal 2016: 535, on al-Khālidī’s naturalisation of liberté.
Thus, the Qurʾān ‘contained stories, history, laws, wisdom, motivational and reprimanding injunctions’ in addition to ‘administrative and political fundamentals unmatched by any literati or poets,’ and more importantly, ‘the Quran advocated liberty, diminished the ills of slavery and inveighed against injustice’ (al-Khālidī 1984: 76). As such, it is a liberated text that offers a worldview and is, hence, relevant to lived experience. Even more unusual is his claim that, in so doing, the Qurʾān becomes ‘the high book of literary criticism’, *al-safīr al-kabīr fil ʾintiqād al-ʿadabī*:

‘thus is the value of this high book of “literary criticism,” which is of the most elevated of the literary sciences, comprehended’ (al-Khālidī 1984: 79). Having extolled the literary and thematic virtues of the Quran, al-Khālidī went on to credit it with ‘advocating liberty’ (*nādal ʿan al-ḥurriya*) (al-Khālidī 1984: 76), thereby securing the connection between linguistic and conceptual liberation. His introduction of the concept of liberty into the understanding of questions of form and meaning to formulate ʾintiqād is original.

When al-Khālidī associated the values of thought and creativity with the liberation of meaning, he created an important locus for literature as a socio-political force. In his *Tārīkh*, al-Khālidī reimagined the literary field as revolutionary: ‘a revolution in the morality and habits of a people demands a concurrent revolution in tone and modes of expression’ (al-Khālidī 1984: 148). Ten years later, this idea became overtly political when, in his political treatise, ‘ʿAsbāb al-ʾinqilāb al-ʿuthmāny wa turkiyyā al-fatāt (*The Reasons for the Ottoman Revolution and the CUP*; henceforth ʿAsbāb), al-Khālidī explicitly connected ʿadab with political revolution:
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 ['adab'] (al-Khālidī 1908: 13-14). Thus, 'adab becomes limited to the literary and is understood in its modern sense with an innate socio-political value.

It is important to pause here to consider Khālidī’s point on the semantics of revolution ('inqilāb), which, according to his understanding of the term, would in English mean coup and not revolution; had he not specifically used the French term Révolution:

The term 'inqilāb according to historians, is an important change in the government of a nation and the subversion of its laws. This meaning is in contrast with revolt and the refusal to obey and acknowledge the legitimate government. The difference between coup and revolution is vast, revolution entails a great deal of damage to the nation (umma) and its interests, and derails its path to success, as opposed to a coup, which, no matter how painful and disrupting, leads the progress of a nation, and eventually its success. Most Arab writers do not make this distinction; they refer to a
coup as a revolt. For example, they say the French revolution instead of the French coup, and they pay no heed to what was reported of King Louis the sixteenth when he was informed about the storming of the Bastille and the freeing of prisoners. He said: ‘this is a Révolte,’ to which his informer replied: ‘Excuse me Majesty, this is a Révolution’ (al-Khālidī 1908: 13). His point is that Révolution is legitimate, whereas Révolte is not. Thawra is illegitimate, whereas ʾinqilāb is legitimate. Legitimacy is crucial because, as with political transformation, literary transformation, requires the disruption of traditional pseudo-sacred authority, and therefore needs considerable power. That power comes from a new and critical understanding of literary axiology.

Qistākī al-Ḥumsī’s informing episteme is ʾintiqād, which he defined as ‘the search for truth’ (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 126) and which, according to him, is the central concern of all the thinkers of this past century (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 1). ʾIntiqād is concerned with more than just exploring words and meaning, he says (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 90). The critical process involves examining words to assess their rhetorical soundness and then examining meaning to assess the validity of the author’s expression, and then a re-examination is in order for an accurate critique to ascertain the accuracy of the representation.

Know that criticism differs according the science or objects being criticised. This is because when you criticise a work of literature you must first examine its expression to know its place in scale of rhetorical and linguistic proficiency. Then you examine its meanings to detect the status of the author’s reasoning and taste. Then you consider the benefit of the work in question. Once all this is achieved you must revisit this process in order to accurately ascertain the good from the bad and the true from the false (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 128).
Al-Ḥumsī’s *sullam al-ʼintiqād*, the ladder of criticism, further fixes the critical method. The *sullam* has three degrees, namely, ‘explication (*al-sharḥ)*, categorisation or classification (*tabwīb*) and judgement’ (*ḥukm*) (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 134). Explication reveals the relationship between the work and its historical and literary context; classification and categorisation note the historical and geographical context that ‘determines the status of the work critiqued or the writer who is being critiqued amongst his peers using sound fair judgement and sound and clear proofs’ (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 170) and judgement determines the relationship between the writer and his work (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 152). Al-Ḥumsī’s contribution is unique because he gives practical shape to epistemic premises by way of a critical methodology. He believed that the primary value of criticism is for the pursuit of the secret to his character and his thought. Thus criticism became more than an appendage to historical study; it became an instrument of analysis and investigation and is an exploration and discovery of the secrets of souls and psyches’ (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 90). Gone is the concern with the meaning-word pair, and the focus is now on the critic’s ability to assess the content of thought, psychological states and human consciousness (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 120). Moreover, criticism’s condition of possibility is liberty. He further elucidated that Europeans have been granted the freedom to write and critique, and they have been afforded the means of acquiring knowledge without having to waste a good portion of their lives in doing so (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 37). Al-Ḥumsī provided several examples of scholars who, throughout Islamic history, have paid for their opinions with their lives, stating that such a legacy must weigh heavily on contemporary scholars and literati. His own critical methodology, which is rooted in the premises of the French school of criticism (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 69), upholds the values of verisimilitude; rhetorical accuracy, which means choosing the correct expression; historical, geographical, and literary contextualisation; periodisation; objectivity and the independence of thought instead of hyperbole, grandiloquence, ornamentation and imitation (al-
Nallino represented the embodiment of the European epistemic authority within an institutional setting. Not only did history as episteme justify his own authority, but more importantly, he used it to reorganise the Arabic literary terrain. His *Tārīkh* is a historical survey drawn from a selective critique of the work of orientalists and some native Arab scholars, which he claimed to have read from a critical perspective. The bulk of his work is, due to the paucity of published material, primarily focused on excavating, historicising and interpreting the Arabic literary archive. His use of history as an epistemic organising principle naturalises literary evolutionism. Progress is to be gained through the application of a European model of rational thinking. Progress, *taqaddum*, also means having the ‘utmost freedom’ (Nallino 1970: 19) and the ‘independence of thought’ (17) to examine ‘the validity of prior opinions’ (20) and to base critical judgement on proof (19). Hence, progress means applying history as an episteme. This naturally leads to periodisation, which he asserted is necessary to help track and gauge ‘the progress of literature or its consequential decline’ (Nallino 1970: 64). The key premises of his methodology are as follows: working on the basis that literature is the product of race, environment and era; applying the new historical method; incorporating literary evolutionism and highlighting the psychology of the authors, which is one particular way of contextualising literary study as an integral factor in interpretation. Nallino also provided a prescriptive method for assimilating and internalising this new way of knowing by advising his students to take notes in imitation of European students (Nallino 1970: 18). The political potential of literature was also broached by Nallino when he implied—although he did not directly draw on it—the vocal form/meaning pair and asserted that words ‘transform in meaning from one thing to another in tandem with transformations in people’s social–political conditions and according to either the progress or the decline of such people’s skillfulness and knowledge’ (Nallino 1970: 21).
The paradigmatic shift in literary studies inaugurated by Nallino takes full form in the pedagogy of Ḍayf. With Ḍayf, Nallino’s critical perspective—particularly the liberty he urged with respect to critiquing the past—assumes the form of an ambitious project to unseat the ‘ʿulamāʾ from their place as epistemic authorities and to inaugurate a secular literary criticism in the interest of promoting Egyptian national literature.¹⁹ His \textit{al-naqd al-tahliili}, or analytical criticism, which he also referred to as \textit{al-tarīqa al-naqdiyya} or the critical way is the way literature should be studied: It involves researching the real transformation that the Arabic language and rhetoric underwent, research that is focused on scientific and sociological causes and then judging correctly insofar as we are intellectually capable and insofar as our research methods are sound, without recourse to the opinions of the ancients who should be treated only as references that are relevant for the historical consideration of language and not as authorities’ (Ḍayf 1921: 8).

Here, epistemic authority is plucked from the hands of the past authorities, who are now themselves subjected to the new episteme rather than generating it. Ḍayf says that ‘The spirit of \textit{balāgha} or the literary spirit was suffocated” by the \textit{fuqahāʾ} (religious scholars) who because ‘they used it to support or explain religious or Arabic language sciences’ (Ḍayf 1921: 81). Although he also counted the ‘debauched poets, who used poetry as an instrument of frivolity, a pleasure by which to garner favour and funds’ (Ḍayf 1921: 83), as likewise, suffocating the spirit of \textit{balāgha} or literature, he reserved the bulk of his malcontent for the religious scholars (125). That

¹⁹ The politics of Ḍayf’s criticism are explored in Alfaisal (2019).
the subservience to religious scholarship was his bone of contention is clear when Dayf faulted what he admitted was the more analytical criticism of al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī’s (Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī [d. 403/1013]) exploration of Quranic *iْjāz* for limiting himself to the Qur’ān (Dayf 1921: 171).

Analytical criticism is intended to help recast ‘adab as a dangerous instrument of social engineering. ‘Words become more effective than swords’ (Dayf 1921: 10) because ‘adab, as an ‘image of society’, helps diagnose social ills and ‘cures better than doctors’ (16). Analytical criticism must apply the principle of liberty to achieve this potential. Thoughts must be unshackled from ‘habits associated with tradition [*‘ādāt*]’ and dissociated from the doctrinal status we afford ‘our sense of self-righteousness, our knowledge and morality’ (Dayf 1921: 4). Dayf encouraged his students to do as Europeans did: to read literature scientifically and critically, which is ‘dangerous work’ (Dayf 1921: 9). This entails resorting to ‘primary sources and not limiting oneself to commentaries’ (Dayf 1921: 3). The danger is understood only when one understands the integral connection he forges between criticism and liberty:

‘What scientists today call freedom of thought is nothing but a kind of research that is based on reason and deduction, and this is the secret behind the progress of the sciences and arts in [European] civilisation today. There can be no doubt that our arts need this freedom based as it is on accurate information and sound deductions’ (Dayf 1921: 4). In supplanting the epistemic authority of the religious worldview, Dayf enabled individuals who, armed with European tools of knowledge—namely, the objective, historical and reasoned analysis of literature, *al-naqd al-tahli*lī—would rethink, reimagine and reproduce the entire corpus of the Arabic literary heritage ‘to transform thought and creativity’ (Dayf 1921: 8) and thus guarantee progress and social impact:
Thus, we can observe the responsibility placed on intellectual leaders and critics who have control of minds. This burden is heavier on writers and poets especially if they are skilled in making people understand, in capturing hearts and in taking possession of minds’ and they ‘can be extremely dangerous to society when in error… but have more power to transform souls and psyches than governments’ when not in error, of course (Ḍayf 1921: 85). However, Ḍayf’s internalisation of the European episteme is no mere act of imitation. It consists of an integral assimilation of its premises and practices. For instance, at one point in his Muqaddima, he engaged with ongoing debates in the French school of criticism regarding the scientification of literary studies: ‘scientific does not mean that literature should be restricted to certain rules beyond which it cannot venture, as in the natural and mathematical sciences’ because ‘literature is subject to taste’ (Ḍayf 1921: 8; for more on these debates, see Stezenski-Williams 1997: 44–7).

Inaugurating this new way of knowing literature transforms it into an instrument of socio-political value with the power to read and mould the social fabric into a national Egyptian identity. With the moral compass situated in the individual, ‘adab, as a displayer of ‘the whole of life filled with wisdom and teaching’ (Ḍayf 1921: 35), nears ideology and consequently becomes, as Noorani argued, essential for the formation of nationality (Noorani 2010: 24; for more on this process, see Alfaïsal 2019: 25). Analytical criticism aims to create ‘Arabic Egyptian literature’, which will be ‘Egyptian in terms of its subjects and information and Arab in terms of the language, style, and balāgha’ (Ḍayf 1921: 6). Here, balāgha is no longer a way of knowing the literary but a subcategory indicating one aspect of knowing language.
In fact, balāgha recedes into the background as a mode of knowing in all of the literary thought discussed here. These early thinkers of literary modernity associate it with formalist virtuosity and linguistic skills rather than with literary analysis and critique in the modern sense of the term, which is to reduce what is in effect a rich epistemic field to matters of form. That said, there was a level of uncertainty in the transition from balāgha to 'intiqād that is registered in Ḍayf’s lectures. He utilised the term balāgha and not 'adab as a synonym for literature: ‘نريد بالبلاغة ما يطلق عليه الناس الآن اسم أدب، وهو أثر العقول والأفكار الذي يظهر في الشعر والنشر’ (We mean by balāgha what is referred to today as 'adab, which is the trace of thoughts and minds in poetry and prose’ (Dayf 1921: 12). Eventually, however, he dropped this nomenclature and returned to the use of 'adab as literature in the modern sense, and balāgha comes to signal decline or inḥiṭāṭ.

**Inḥiṭāṭ: the cost of modernity**

Much of the theorising above is set against the backdrop of a growing internalisation of the decline thesis: inḥiṭāṭ (Grunebaum & Brunschvig 1957). The internalisation of decline grew, in tandem with the development of the European episteme, gradually from a parallel but different way of knowing into a superior way of knowing. The thesis of decline is nothing new to Arabic poetics. Debates, along the lines of those concerning the Ancients and the Moderns in European poetics, are also to be found in the Arab context on the issue of the old al-qadīm wal-jadīd or al-muḥdath which was a recurrent issue in Arab poetics from the 8th century (’Abbās 1986). Nonetheless, the Orientalist perception of decline is another matter, and it was this perspective that informed the early thinkers mentioned here. The European academic debate about the validity of inḥiṭāṭ began in 1957 with the publication of Robert Brunschvig et al.’s Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’islam, and it has been recently revisited in Inḥiṭāṭ - The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab. However, the current undertaking complicates the

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20 See the more recent revisiting of the debate in von Hees (2017). See also Fieni (2012); Massad (2007); and Matar, (2005).
politics of deploying *inhīṭāṭ* in the assimilation of European literary modernity. Whether this would shift the terms of debate or offer a substantial transformation in understanding *inhīṭāṭ* remains to be seen. What is observed with the thinkers discussed here is that in literary discourse, *inhīṭāṭ* takes shape as a perceived lack of scientific and objective critical thought and as blind imitation of predecessors, imitative formalism, insularity, ahistoricism and a lack of creativity.

There is no evidence to suggest the internalisation of decline in Ḥaddād’s and al-ʿAdl’s comparisons. However, al-ʿAdl conceptualised the medieval era as a period of fragmentation, decline, literary stagnation and decadence—of *inhīṭāṭ* (al-ʿAdl 2002: 33). Furthermore, his historicisation of literary knowledge enabled him to express his scepticism regarding the traditional literary axiology by which, for instance, the hanging poems became worthy examples of poetic superiority. He also called into question the Islamic categorisation of jāhilī poets into first-, second- and third-tier poets (al-ʿAdl 2002: 63)—a false categorisation, he claimed, because it is based on personal preferences.

Ḥaddād put Arab and European poetry in conversation as axiologically separate. Arab insularity is posited as a marker of self-sufficiency and purity rather than as an indicator of stagnation. Nevertheless, in naming, identifying and placing these values as categories for discussion, he effectively set the terms regarding what gets transculturated, such as the European esteem for precision (Ḥaddād 1897(1): 302). Arab critics will posit this esteem as a mark of excellence, whilst Ḥaddād, contrarily, considered it an indication of the linguistic poverty of European languages as opposed to the verbal affluence of the Arabic language (Ḥaddād 1897(1): 302). The same can be said about his focus on the value of thought when Ḥaddād encouraged Arab critics to detect ‘intellectual meanings’ (Ḥaddād 1897(1): 301) (‘*al-maʿānī al-ʿaqliyya*’) and some French poetic norms in the act of comparison.

With Fayyāḍ, however, the discourse of *inhīṭāṭ* began to assume prominence when he critiqued the stagnation of Arab poetry and agreed with the European verdict that 

فاشْعِرْ عِنْدَنا كَما ‘*Alas!* ‘I do not wish to find a poet who is not a slave.

*Arab*
poetry is a guitar with one string that is played by different artists, with the only difference being that of force’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 294). He attributed this monotony to a fear of the corrupting influence of European representation as if Arab thought were deficient in terms of inventiveness and creativity’ (Fayyāḍ 1900: 294).

There is no such fear in al-Khālidī’s thought as his internalisation of decline is unquestionable.21 His esteem for the European orientalists’ valuation of thought and creativity led him to position ḍintiqād as a form of socio-political commitment that would enable a kind of political and social expression in literary discourse that he considers lacking in Arabic. This is made possible by his incorporation of the French ideal of liberté into criticism. The dark underside of this act of incorporation was a belief in inḥiṭṭāt and a willingness to ignore French colonial practices in the name of the very liberté he espoused. His entire edifice hinged on an imagined post-classical medieval literary decline and a reductive perspective on what is in fact a varied critical heritage whose concerns were not limited to theorising lafż/maʿnā pair. Reducing the critical discourse to the issue of ornamentation ignores this heritage, which has taken as its fields of inquiry contextual considerations, historical perspective, style, plagiarism, prose versus poetry and the role of the reader.

Although similarly invested in liberty, Al-Ḥumsī universalised decline as a condition associated with a lack of liberty and therefore with a lack of critical thought. He also conceptualised liberty as freedom from having to imitate predecessors and as the liberation of thought and taste in writing’ (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 70). Imitation is a symptom of inḥiṭṭāt, which he read not as an Arab phenomenon but as part and parcel of the medieval system, in which there is an uncritical adherence to tradition, فقدان الأدب الصحيح و حرية ‘a loss of true literature and of liberty in the

21 See Alfaisal (2016: 535–9) for the politics of this internalisation and its connection to the naturalisation of liberté.
acquisition of knowledge and also as a result of manifest political tyranny (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 60).22 In this system, writers do not exhibit any traces of themselves, their feelings, their personal circumstances or their consciences (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 61). Gone is the concern with *lafẓ*/*maʾnā* pair; the focus is now on the critic’s ability to assess content of thought, psychological states (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 90). This explains the uniformity of expression, from which Europe was saved by the Renaissance (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 62, 65). The liberating critical method shifts the locus of authority to the critic’s own moral register (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 120) to judge fairly and abstain from bias—that is, to be objective. ‘Criticism is accurate if one is versed in the topic of human ethics and is able to investigate human conscience’ wrote al-Ḥumsī (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 120). Al-Ḥumsī referenced Ibrāhīm al-Yāzijī’s five rules of critique, which were written in response to a reader’s query about the meaning of ʾintiqād. They include ʿأول شروط المنتقد أن يكون خبيرا بصيرما في حسناته وعبوه، ʿ*first, having expertise in the topic*; ʿالشرط الثاني أن يكون بعد علمه بحقيقة ما ينقده منصفا، ʿ*fair judgement*; ʿوالشرط الثالث أن ʾبِتِجَافِي المنتقد عن الغرر في المدح والإنكار، ʿ*avoiding excess in either praise or denigration*; ʿوالرابع أن لا يختط ʾبِنَفْسِ المنتقد عِنْدِهِ المَدَحُ وَالإِنْكَارِ، ʿ*focusing critique on the work and not the writer*; and ʿالخامس أن لا ينظر إلى ما بينه وبين من ينتقد كلامه من السواد الشخصية من مودة أو موجهة, ʿ*excluding personalisation* (al-Ḥumsī 1907: 41; see al-Yāzijī 1899: 244–5).

By the time literary modernity entered the academic sphere with the lectures of Nallino and Ḍayf, the internalisation of decline was a *fait accompli*. However, it is less pronounced in Nallino’s formulation than in Ḍayf’s. Nallino fixed the notion of decline historically and cognitively, and he dated ʿ*asr al-*inḥīṭāt* between 1258 and the reign of Mohammad Ali Pasha (1805–49), during which poetry became artificial and imitative (Nallino 1970: 59). He also urged students to overcome

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decline by following the example of Europe in preserving its literary heritage.23 Naturally, Nallino did not point out that this revival is conditioned upon the acceptance of European epistemic authority. To counter decline, one must freely critique the past—in this case, from the vantage point of history, and this is the essence of progress. Applying history as an episteme entails recognising the principal of progress and progress, in turn, is used as a measure of decline. Once critics freely critique the past, they are able to progress. Nallino urged that political decline will also be remedied through the efforts of scholars who ‘dedicate their research skills to studying their history and to reviving their literature, language, and their key cultural achievements’ (Nallino 1970: 19). There is something hypocritical, to say the least, in Nallino’s call for Arab cultural preservation and his warning that a common literary heritage is key to cultural survival in times of war. Not only were the Arabs he was teaching to appreciate their own heritage struggling under the yoke of British colonialism, but Italy—whose fascist government Nallino served—would invade Libya in 1911, after which he was summarily dismissed, only to continue to support his government to ‘fight or rule over Muslims’ (Reid 2002: 42).

Although there is as yet no concrete proof to suggest that Ḍayf was directly influenced by Nallino’s offer of Arab literary rejuvenation. However, the socio-political role Ḍayf gives to literature and the dangerous work of analytical criticism resonate too strongly with Nallino’s prescriptions to be coincidental. Furthermore, Ḍayf was in Egypt teaching Arabic literature at the time, but more importantly, Azhar students and faculty were encouraged to attend all lectures by European scholars so that they may learn modern methods of study. Thus, it is safe to assume that Ḍayf would have been familiar with Nallino’s lectures.

That said, Ḍayf’s internalisation of decline is far more apparent than any other thinker discussed here. He internalised the entire gamut of orientalist stereotypes, and he declared Arabs’

23 It has been the European experience, he urges, that in times of war, conflict and fragmentation, unity is preserved via a common literary heritage (Nallino 1970: 19). The study of the Arabic literary heritage is essential to maintaining Arab unity (18).
brave, sensitive to speech and words, quick to get angry, does not like stillness, is not inclined to serenity, is easily provoked at the slightest instigation, is easily angered over trifles, is of an honourable soul, does not accept humiliation, sacrifices all to defend his honour; the most dominant of his characteristics are honour and love of vengeance’ (Ḍayf 1921: 165).

The best poetry, for them, is that which contains bombastic statements and terms that aim to capture the attention of listeners, and have an effect on their souls and psyches, regardless. That is why there is a focus on vocal forms (’alfāẓ)’ (Ḍayf 1921: 166). According to him, Arabic poetry is too sentimental and lacks in imagination, and Arab creativity is paralysed by a blind adherence to imitation and their sense of exceptionalism unjustified.

Arab writers and poets did not ‘allow themselves the liberty in terms of imagination and of speech [to expand the meanings associated with these limited emotions] because they insisted on imitating the ways of traditional poetry’ (Ḍayf 1921: 41). Moreover, traditional Arabic criticism has been unresponsive to social transformations, he objected (Ḍayf 1921: 129). This entailed ‘وَقَفَتْ حِرَاقَةُ الْعَلَّمِ، وَالآدَّبَ... وَقَفَتْ حِرَانَةُ الْعَقْلِ وَالأَفْكَارِ’ Critical, poetic and scientific stagnation echoed the stagnation of mind and thought (Ḍayf 1921: 132). The internalisation of orientalist values is nowhere more evident than when he noted that the Thousand and One Nights is of little literary rhetorical and stylistic value and of little value in terms of accurately reflecting Muslim society at the time but could not bring himself to suspect or question the orientalist esteem for this inferior literature. Instead, he justified this interest by going against the very historicism he advocated and upholding
Orientalists’ opinions, regardless of the dictates of his own more informed judgement. He further disclosed that even if not an accurate reflection of Muslim life at the time, *Thousand and One Nights* contains many accuracies regarding what went on in their minds (Dayf 1921: 39; footnote 2, continued from 38).

From being a guitar with one string, Arabic literature becomes dangerously loaded with socio-political potential. This transformation has as its condition of possibility the internalisation of decline. Blind imitation, a lack of creativity, decontextualised perspectives—whether in the form of a lack of historical perspective or in the form of a dissociation from lived experiences—and a critical practice, *balāgha*, that is limited to the study of form are just some of what these early modern literary thinkers took for symptoms of decline. Although the degree of historical and contextual commitment may be disputed, several critics have observed their presence in the discourse. Some have stressed *balāgha*’s centralisation of ‘the communicative context of a given discourse activity and accounts for the pragmatic functions of word order change in the Arabic sentence’ (Abdul-Raof 2006: xiii) and an awareness of the audience’s psychologies and contexts. Added to that is the ‘political, exhortatory and gathering oratory, which is a vital aspect of rhetoric’ (Abdul-Raof 2006: 33). As for creativity and innovation, Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (720–57), whose translations from Persian ‘led to major public awareness of foreign thought and culture’, established ‘a new literary style in writing known as *al-* iṣlīb al-muwallad (the style of the non-native speaker of Arabic) which is characterised by clarity, explicitness, and accurate selection and usage of lexical items’ (Abdul-Raof 2006: 35). In terms of the historical perspective, this was arguably present in the critical heritage, albeit not in the modern Herderian understanding of historical consciousness and of history as episteme. The Arab and Islamic historical scholarly tradition housed divergent conceptualisations of history (see Heck 2002: 7). The *balāgha* scholars’ awareness of historical context must be acknowledged even if, as was often the case, thematic continuities trumped chronological considerations, but that is hardly saying that there was no historical perspective. In short, the critical discourse was not monosyllabic and repetitive (Smyth 2006).
Conclusion: the structural imperatives governing the transition to ʿintiqād

Michael Allan argued that ʿadab, understood as paideia, became literary through ‘its institutionalization as a modern discipline at places like Dār al-ʿUlūm (1871) and later, the Egyptian University (1908)’ (Allan 2012: 175). However, the process is much more complex and drawn out than Allan’s point implied. ʿAdab became literary, and literary knowledge shifted from balāgha to ʿintiqād through epistemic transformations in conceptualising the nature, value and function of the literary. This did not come about through the mere process of institutionalisation as Allan would have it because lay processes of thought were also involved as illustrated above. Nor is the institutionalisation of Arabic literary studies processed ‘as a mode of separation’ of ‘modern, secular, and new from what is said to oppose each’ (Sacks 2007: 33) as Jeffrey Sacks argued in ‘Futures of Literature: Inhitat, Adab, Naqd’. The process of instituting modern Arabic literary studies was more a transactional process than a ‘fractured site’ (Sacks 2007: 32). Moreover, this shift from balāgha to ʿintiqād was influenced by structural imperatives designed to institute the epistemology of modernity, one faction of which was literary epistemology.

Aria Nakissa, a legal scholar, revealed that the 1872 Azhār reforms and the consequent establishment of Dār al-ʿUlūm as a means of combining ‘traditional Islamic sciences and forms of knowledge and pedagogy adopted from the West’ (Nakissa 2014: 215) instigated an epistemic shift in the study of Islamic law. He also argued that from the 11th century onwards, there was an epistemic shift from the traditional Islamic paradigm of knowledge, in which language and grammar dominated the epistemic hierarchy to the modern episteme, in which the natural sciences emerged as the new paradigmatic model for knowledge imbibed from the West. Although Nakissa’s focus is Islamic law, the close relationship between law and language makes his observations pertinent to situating the deliberations on literary thought.

In the traditional language-centred paradigm, pedagogy was organised around a series of texts, which were to be understood and memorised, hence the importance of commentaries; the ‘careful attention to the linguistic properties of words’ (Nakissa 2014: 225) and the utilisation of
syntax, morphology, and rhetoric from language studies therein. Conversely, in topic-based European pedagogy, the selection of texts was changeable. With the introduction of European knowledge and the exposure to models of European pedagogy that valued research, discovery and novelty, frustration amongst Azhār students with the intensity of grammatical studies increased. The modernisation of pedagogical practices involved a struggle for control over meaning.

Linguistic disciplines were classified as means rather than ends and were therefore relegated to secondary status by government ordinance (1896), which also ‘placed restrictions on the use of commentaries’ (Nakissa 2014: 233). The views of the thinkers discussed here illustrate the ramifications of this perspective, especially in the conceptualisation of ʾintiqād as the science of literature.

Other structural imperatives also supported the transition to ʾintiqād as modern literary epistemology. For instance, students from Azhār’s Dār al-ʿUlūm were paid stipends to attend lectures by modern scholars who lectured on Arabic and Islam (Aroian 1978). Employment opportunities, access to government positions and social mobility likewise depended on imbibing modern methods from the educational institutions. This process of course generally meant acquiring these methods from orientalists employed and charged by the state to offer training in modern methods of knowing. The booming literary market with its vibrant print circulation, the countless journals and the emerging class of effendiya all depended on this epistemic transformation for success. As literary thought progressed, the delegitimisation of older ways of knowing the literary was cast as an act of liberation from irrationality, ahistoricism, subjectivity and disempowerment.

Whatever motivated these thinkers resulted in transformations in literary value, which in turn transformed the value of literature. Literature became valuable as a mirror of society, an instrument of social engineering, a means of cultural revival and a source of political power through its ability to harness thought and creativity. As Abu-ʿUksa illustrated in his study on freedom and
debatable

24 Teaching qualification requirements at Azhār were a ‘doctoral degree, a firm grasp of the latest Western advances in their fields and an ability to teach in Arabic’ (Reid 2002: 33).
the formation of ideologies in the Arab world, the formation of ideology involves a primary stage ‘in which ideas are formulated as certain morphological signifiers in the language’—this signifier, in the current undertaking, is ‘intiqād. He also discussed a secondary stage, ‘in which ideas are politicized and turned into words that are used in political confrontation. This last stage manifests the domestication of ideas by acquiring a socio-political function in the examined discourse’ (Abu-'Uksa 2017: 13). It is hard to imagine that the emergence of early modern Arab literary thought did not contribute to this process of ideological formation.

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