Acculturation as Enlightenment The early origins of comparative studies and the background of binary opposition: Self/Other

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Abstract. The research presents some of the early efforts that launched the discipline of comparative research in the Arab world which developed in the twentieth century into the broader concept of ‘acculturation’. It presents the nationalist agenda of the pioneer researchers in reclaiming the Arab heritage manifesting its positive effects on world literature and initiating a new era of enlightenment during and after the period of decline and colonization. The research presents this genre of studies as a suitable and credible arena for enhancing human understanding boosted by intellectual similarities rather than differences.

1. Introduction
This study presents the aspects of acculturation, intellectual and literary dialogue between the self and the other as manifested in the Arab comparative studies starting with the twentieth century and beyond. The research presents the early foundational efforts of Muhammad AlKhaliidi, Sulayman Albustani, and Qustaki AlHimsi, reaching to Muhammad Hilal who is considered the prime inaugurator of the discipline. The study does not present a historical record of comparative research at the time but a reading of the cultural dimensions and their importance in acculturation and mutual correspondence. It emphasizes the openness of the Arab culture to all human cultures with a spirit of intellectual sorority through which East meets West on grounds of mutual benefit and exchange. “It is about time that Western and Eastern researchers stopped boasting and exhibiting signs of superiority and egotism while belittling and mocking the other. East and West are fed up with the mutual pejorative descriptions exchanged by historians. It is time to put an end to the legacy of hatred, misunderstanding and fanaticism of the crusades and open a new phase of human and global communication based on mutual respect and access to knowledge” (Isa, 2011, p.16). In this respect, this neutral meaning of globalism, away from ideology and politics, becomes a crucial component of acculturation.
which emanates from comparative studies and an emerging awareness of the other. Acculturation means the interaction of cultures and modes of thinking in different contexts (AlBazei, 2000,p.117). These contexts include place and geography as West and East, North and South, religions as Islam and Christianity, or modes of thought as tradition and modernism. Moreover, “Acculturation is currently used as a synonym for globalization.” (www.alukah.net.) This research maintains there is a difference between the two as the former refers to the human participation in the production of knowledge while the latter refers to the consumption of knowledge produced by the dominant centre. Hence arises the importance of acculturation as it presents our vision to the other. It also means the interaction between the self and the other to produce a new cultural formula that reflects a modern and civilized view of the world. This view is the accumulation of various cultures cooperating together to produce knowledge capable of improving human life.

More than a century has passed since the start of the Arab comparative research with the publication of Rifa’a Al-Tahtawi’s book in 1832 Takhlis Alibriz fi Talkhis Bareez (A Paris Profile), Muhammad AlKhalidi’s articles “Tarih ‘Im AlAdab ‘nda Allfrinj Wal ‘arab” (The History of English and Arabic Literature) serialized in Al Hilal magazine in 1902 and Sulayman Albustani’s book Muqadimat Aliladha (An Introduction to the Iliad) in 1903. The early inauguration of this discipline echoes a new cultural trend interested in mutual dialogue between nations at a time when the Arab world has been trying to escape the Ottoman grip which enclosed the region in a vicious circle of backwadedness and cultural retardation. Such works of these pioneers present the inaugurational period of the Arab comparative studies (1801-1873) which culminate in the publication of Muhammad Hilal’s book (Comparative Literature). This book is a start of a new national phase to which many writers have contributed such as:

- Najib AlHadad’s article “Muqabala bayn Ash‘r Al‘arabi Allfranj” (A Comparison between Arab and Western Poetry) in AlMuqataf magazine in 1897.
- Nqola Fayyad’s articles on “Balaghat Al‘arab wa Allfranj” (The Eloquence of Arabs and Westerners) in AlMuqataf magazine in 1900.
- Sa‘id AlRituni’s article “AlBayan Al‘arabi wa AlBayan Allfrangi” (Arab and Western Rhetoric) in AlMuqataf magazine in 1902.
- Fakhri Abu Assu’ud’s book Fi AlAdab Al Muqaran (On Comparative Literature) in 1936.
- Najib Al‘aqiqi’s book Min AlAdab AlMuqaran (Texts from Comparative Literature) in 1948.

The main issues that have boggled the minds of the early Arab comparativists during the first stage of acculturation, which is the focal point of this paper, included defining the identity of Arab literature during the Enlightenment, tracing the meeting points with Western literature and presenting the subjects of interest to Arab writers and intellectuals. The comparative studies have led to the evolution of acculturation in the postmodern period to enhance the importance of compartivism in arts and literature. This period has witnessed a massive rise in the production of comparative works such as: Salah Fadel’s Risalat AlGofran wa AlComidywa Allahiyya, Hosam AlKhatib’s AlAdab AlMuqaran ‘la Masharif Alqarn AlWhid wal ‘shreen, Izideen AlManasra’s AlNag Althaqafi AlMuqaran, Said Alloosh’s Madaris AlAdab AlMuqaran, Abdul Nabi Istaif’s
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AlMadrasa AlSulafyya wal Aladab AlMuqaran, Natheer AlAdma’s AlAdab AlMuqaran Ilā Ayn?, Makarim AlOmari’s Muatharat Arabiyya wa Islamiyya fi AlAdab AlRosí, Muhammad Shahin’s Eliot wa Athrohu ‘la Salah Abulsaboor wa Asyyab, Muhammad Rajab AlBayyomi’s AlAdab AlAndalusi Bayn Ata’thor wa Atta’theer, Muhammad Abid AlJabir’s Hiwar Athaqafat and Ihsan Abbass’ Malamih Younaniyya fi AlAdab Al‘rabi.

These writers and comparative studies took two contradictory paths:
The first is internalist and conservative aiming to solidify and unveil the presence of the Arab national voice and cultural persona and its effects on world heritage. The second path celebrates the broad mindedness of Arab intellectuals, their extensive knowledge of world heritage and their adoption and embodiment of modernism and new perspectives.

With the advent of globalism and the hegemony of the American discourse and cultural models, postcolonialism has appeared as a reaction against attempts of silencing and kidnapping the cultural heritage of world literature. The writings of intellectuals such as E. Said and his book Orientalism 1979, The End of History by F. Fukuyama 1993 and The Clash of Civilizations by S.Huntington 1996 have had a deep impact on steering and guiding the attention and dialogue, in the academia and elsewhere, towards novel perspectives.

Fukuyama’s thesis emphasizes the necessity of building Western democracy, in its American version, on the ruins of the backward tribal and religious systems. This view clearly expresses the cultural centralization of the West. It also makes way for the theory of the ‘End of History’ which gives cover to American imperialism and strengthens the power of the neocons who maintain the opposition of America vs. the others. With the appearance of the theory on the clash of civilization, ideology played a greater role in culture and identity conflicts. In this respect, Huntington regards Islam as an enemy of the West and a source of annoyance. These theories are a response to the criticism of Edward Said in his book Orientalism in which he condemns the Western culture because of its support to the oriental and colonial project which destroyed some countries with the claim of bringing them democracy and civilization. According to Said, Orientalism created this horrible dichotomy of Islam vs. the West.

On the other hand, the last two decades of the twentieth century and the twenty first century are labeled as cyber and telecommunication centuries. They have brought the Arab world some degree of instability with the waves of political change and democratization that engulfed the region, especially in the period known as the Arab Spring. The domination of technology and social media has left its imprint on arts and literature and paved the way for the appearance of new literary and critical disciplines such as cultural, feminist and environmental, ethnic and translation studies. Translation studies, in some academic fields, have replaced comparative studies in the eighties and nineties. Susan Bassnett, an advocate of this change, is more aggressive in describing this substitution as a ‘decline’ of comparative studies altogether (1993) but despite these radical voices, the effect of comparative studies on the Arab culture and civilization and its view of the ‘Other’ is profound and outstanding, especially those presented by the pioneers of comparative literature, discussed in this paper, at the beginning of the previous decade.

Still, the comparative studies at the dawn of the twentieth century have been an individual effort rather than an institutionalized discipline and some writers, not schools, have dominated the field such as: Muhammad AlKhalidi (1902), Sulayman Albustani (1904), Qustaki AlHimsi (1935) and Muhammad Hilal (1953).
The importance of AlKhalidi’s contribution is that he is the first to present a stylistic comparison between Arabic and English literature which traces instances of Western quotations from Arabic literature especially during the period of Islamic renaissance and expansion. His articles “Tarikh ‘lam AlAdab ‘nda Allfranj Wal ‘arab” (The History of the Pioneers of English and Arabic Literature) also include a contextualization of the historical and social aspects that contributed to the development of Arabic literature and the early history of French literature onto the period of Victor Hugo who was deeply affected by the Arabic style of writing that he read about extensively in the Spanish translations of Arabic literature (Al Manasra, 1987,p. 124). The nationalistic inclination of highlighting the effect of Arabic Literature on its Western counterpart is evident in his works. He focuses on the aesthetics of Arabic literature and how it inspired world literature; therefore, he entitled a number of his articles as: “Iqtibas Allfrinj Aqasisahum ‘an Al’arab” “The Quotation of Western Stories from Arabic Literature,” “Iqtibas Allfrinj Al’ulum ‘an Al’arab” “Western Scientific Quoting from the Arabs” (ALKhatib 1985). AlKhalidi adds that such acculturation and quotation which “started between the Arabs and Europeans during the eighth century played an integral role in dialogue and rapprochement and succeeded in bringing nations together where politics has failed. Relations were sustained in war and peace and left a deep impact on civilization.” (Ibid, p. 72)

AlKhalidi’s research follows Ibn Khaldun theories advocating the role of the oppressor in educating the oppressed. He contends that the oppressed is infatuated by the oppressor and tends to imitate his style of life and modes of thinking. His work represents a milestone in the history of comparative studies and researching the effect of the “self” on the “other” (www.goodreads.com). While AlKhalidi’s voice and argument seem defensive at times, at others, he presents a futuristic outlook for a historical renaissance to deliver the Arab world from the shock of encountering Western civilization after colonization (Jad’an, 1981, p. 9)

AlKhalidi represents a generation of writers who strove in the first half of the twentieth century to revive the pillars of Arab-Islamic civilization, and thus regain a state of self satisfaction to compensate Arabs and Muslims for their losses after the period of Western colonization. So, AlKhalidi’s project expands beyond literature to include a comprehensive scheme of unveiling the lost and forgotten Arab tradition and civilization to achieve some sort of balance for the Arabs. He has been one of best to perform this ‘revivalist’ mission since he was well informed in Western culture being married to a French lady and working as an Ottoman consul in France and meeting with the renowned intellectuals of his day (Azzirikli, 2000, p.64). All these conditions have reflected on his comparative studies and resulted in writing ground breaking books and studies such as:

- Risala fi Sur’at Intishar Addin AlMuhamadi (A Message on the Quick Spread of Islam)
- Muqadimah fi AlMasa’lah Ashsharqiyya (An Introduction on Orientalism)
- Kitab ‘an Tarikh Asuhwaniyyah (A Book on the History of Zionism)

The titles of these books prove that his research is not confined to literature but spreads to other cultural disciplines and this earned him some impressive titles like the ‘pioneer of applied comparative research’ (AlKhatib,1992, p.167) and the ‘historical pioneer of comparative literature in the Arab world’ (AlManasra,1987, p.143)

This clearly shows the views of AlKhalidi and his perception of the “other” are based on nationalistic overtones and an absolute rejection of Zionism and his warning against
its growing dangers prior to the occupation of Palestine (www.Alquds.com).

On the other hand, Sulayman Albustani (1856-1925) has written on the effect of Greek literature on the Arab tradition in his two hundred introductory pages of the translation of Homer’s Iliad. This introduction is the first example of the Arabic comparative lesson that has drawn the attention of the Arabs to Homer and encouraged future generations of Arab researchers to pursue this line of study. Albustani’s work represents the openness and broad mindedness of the Arab-Islamic culture and its interest in the cultures of the ‘other’, especially in the Abbasid dynasty during which translation had flourished. This has inspired the critic Ihsan ‘abbas to write a comparative book Malamih Yunaniyya fi AlAdab Al’arabi 1977 (Greek Aspects in Arabic Literature) highlighting the legacy of Homer and his effect on Arabic Literature even in areas that contradict with Islamic values such as writing about idolatry and wine. ‘‘abbas’ research is also important in revealing ancient Arabic sources that celebrate the intellectual and literary presence of the ‘other’ in the Arab culture.

The difference between Albustani and AlKhalidi is that the former’s intentions are humanist while the latter is nationalist. Albustani is not interested in studying the mutual effect between cultures but rather in finding similarities between Homer’s poetry and old Arabic poetry. Albustani wants to express a form of cultural and human unity and show similarities in the creative process. He applies the concept of ‘general literature’ to his research which means studying the similarities between various forms of literature from different cultures (Wellek qtd in ‘asfour, 1987,p.316). ‘General literature’ is interested in human literature, international schools and literary trends regardless of boundaries, language or ethnicity (Tahhan 1982,p.118). Albustani adopts this stance of equating Arabic and Greek literature comparing the Greek poet Homer to the famous Arab poet Imru’ AlQays. “He further compares between the epic poetry of the Iliad and the war and the chivalry poetry of the Arabs. He takes a specific interest to translation as a medium between cultures.” (AlManasra,1987,p. 152 ) Furthermore, AlHimsi bases his book AlMuwazana bayna AlUl’uba Allahiyya wa Risalat AlGhufran wa Bayna Abil’ala’ AlMa’arri wa Danti Sha’r Attilyan ( A Comparison between the Divine Comedy by the Italian poet Dante and The Epistle of Forgiveness by the Arab poet AlMa’arri ) on the idea of mutual effect. AlHimsi focuses on tracing the means by which The Epistle of Forgiveness reached Europe via Andalusia, showing the positive effect of Arabic literature over European and giving instances on how Dante quotes AlMa’arri . AlHimsi’s work opens way for other researchers to follow in his footsteps and some, such as Salah Fadl, have dedicated books to discuss the effect of the Arab-Islamic civilization on the Divine Comedy.

Nevertheless, Husam AlKhatib asserts that it is Muhammad Hilal who founded the discipline of comparative Arabic literature (1916-1968) since he possessed all the necessary potentials including “a specialized certificate, knowledge of foreign languages (French, Persian, English and Spanish) and application of clear comparative standards and comparative theory in his studies” (1985, p.214). In addition, he focuses on the role of comparative studies in the arena of human and national exchange and wrote a number of books that apply his theories to literary texts such as: AlAdab ALMuqaran 1953 (Comparative Literature), Dawr AlAdab ALMuqaran f’ Tawjih Dirasat AlAdab Al’arabi AlMu’asir 1956 (The Role of Comparative Literature in Guiding Modern Arabic Literature), Annamathij AlInsaniyya fi Addirasat AlAdabiyya ALMuqarnah 1964 (Human Models in Comparative Literary
Studies). In his book, *Dawr AlAdab AlMuqaran fi Tawjih Dirasat AlAdab Al’arabi AlMu’asir* (The Role of Comparative Literature in Guiding Modern Arabic Literature), Hilal analyzes how the Arab poet Ahmad Shawqi is affected by western literary trends in his play *Majmun Layla* and by La Fontaine in his animal stories. In *Annamatihj AlInsaniyya fi Addirasiyat AlAdabiyya AlMuqarnah* (Human Models in Comparative Literary Studies), “he discusses the role and image of the hero in Maqamat (anecdotes) AlHamthani and AlHariri and how they are translated to Persian literature and the depiction of Yusif and Zulaykha, Faust, Juha, Aladdin and Cleopatra” (*'abdulatif, 2007, p.388). Hilal stresses “the importance of comparative studies in improving the interaction and understanding of people and cultures and publicizing national literature worldwide to become part and parcel of human literature. In this sense, literature is not secluded; it becomes part of interdisciplinary studies that help in understanding humanity and societies and enhance cooperation” (Hilal., 1956, p.26). Hilal succeeds in enlarging the scope of literature to include other intellectual and cultural aspects of research.

The early interest of Arab comparativists, Palestinian, Syrians and Egyptians, in comparative and acculturation studies is attributed to cultural and geographical aspects including the location of the Arab culture on the crossroads of other civilizations, which opened way for immediate contact and exchange. “In the late nineteenth century, the European view on reviving other cultures through acculturation dominated the cultural research and civilization was viewed as a progressive creation rather than a past achievement” (Mazlish, 2004, p. 105). This search for identity and the conditions of the cross cultural exchange has not only been confined to the work of the comparativists who are interested in the modern Arab culture but extends to become a national project in which many Arab intellectuals have participated regardless of their ideological backgrounds. Although the research has started as comparative, it has moved on to the wider arena of acculturation. Researchers have been on quest and the Holy Grail is none other than asserting the Arab identity and contribution during the years of downfall and colonization. All the various ideological agendas, Islamic and liberal have been unified to voice and achieve the same cultural project of enlightenment. “The ‘Salifis’ worked on reviving the glories of the past and accommodating it to fit the current needs of reform and independence, the Arab liberals, who received western education, predicted the upcoming enlightenment with a project based on Arab-Western components which they copied from the writings of Ibsen, Shaw, Voltaire, Rousseau, Freud, Marx and other renowned figures of European thought.” (AlJabiri, 1988, p.36)

The previous examples of comparative and acculturation studies show that Arab intellectuals have provided solid evidence on the early contribution of Arabs to human civilization beyond all efforts of denial and erasure. It also proves that ability of comparative studies to initiate dialogue and reconciliation between East and West, Self and other on grounds of respect and acknowledgment, a valuable option which should be pursed to compensate for the culture of hatred and rivalry created by politics.

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التثاقف والتثوير الأصول المبكرة للدراسات المقارنة وخلفية المعارضة الثنائية:
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مستخلص: يقدّم البحث بواكير الجهود الأولى في ميدان الأدب المقارن في العالم العربي و التي تطورت في القرن العشرين إلى اعتناق المصطلح الأكثر شمولية و هو ‘المثقفة’. ينال البحث مسارات الأدب المقارن و تشمل مسار تعزيز الذات الوطنية و الذي تابعه رواد الباحثين العرب مستلهمين التراث العربي و أثره الإيجابي على الأدب العالمي و أدب عصر النهضة خلال و بعد عصر الانحطاط و الاستعمار، و مسار آخر يؤكد على التأثير المتبادل بين الأدب العربي و غيره من الأداب العالمية في عصر الحداثة و ما بعدها.

يقدم البحث ميدان المثقفة و الأدب المقارن كميدان مؤثر لاثراء المعارف الإنسانية و إرساء حالة من التناغم و التفاهم بتسور ممهدة بالمشابهات لا نقاط الاختلاف.