

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

**THE
MARGIN BETWEEN DOCUMENTATION AND FICTION:
NINETEENTH CENTURY PARIS IN THE EYES OF AN
EASTERN SHEIKH**

By

SALAM MOHAMMAD AL-MOKDAD

A thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature

School of Arts and Sciences
October 2012



Thesis Proposal Form (Annex I)

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On 21/2/2012, has presented a Thesis proposal entitled:

**The Margin between Documentation and Fiction
Nineteenth-Century Paris in the Eyes of an Eastern Sheikh**

in the presence of the Committee members and Thesis Advisor:

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Proposal Approved on (dd/mm/yy): 21 Feb. 2012

Comments/Remarks/Conditions to Proposal:

*To focus on the comparative dimension of the
thesis. To seek primary sources written in English
in order to enrich the comparative dimension
of the theme.*

Date: 21/2/2012

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Program / Department: MA Program in Comparative Literature / Humanities Department
Date of thesis defense: Monday, October 29, 2012
Thesis title: "The Margin between Documentation and Fiction: Nineteenth Century Paris in the Eyes of an Eastern Sheikh"

Result of Thesis defense:

- Thesis was successfully defended. Passing grade is granted
 Thesis is approved pending corrections. Passing grade to be granted upon review and approval by thesis Advisor
 Thesis is not approved. Grade NP is recorded

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School: Arts and Science

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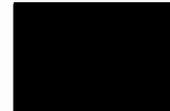
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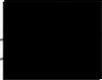
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the help and assistance of many persons. First, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Dr. Vahid Behmardi for his academic support and for his patience and understanding of my personal circumstances. I am also deeply grateful to my readers: Dr. Samira Aghacy and Dr. Latif Zeitouni whose valuable comments during the proposal defense helped me look at my topic from a new perspective. Thanks go also to my professors at LAU, and at LU earlier, who equipped me with the necessary tools and skills to succeed in doing this.

To my Mom
without whose encouragement and support
this would have never been possible

**The Margin between Documentation and Fiction:
Nineteenth-Century Paris in the Eyes of an Eastern Sheikh**

Salam Al Mokdad

Abstract

Published in the context of a larger modernization project, on the European model, of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire as a whole, and Egypt in particular, Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Tahtāwī’s *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* stands out as one of the earliest works of its type—in content and style. This thesis addresses al-Tahtāwī’s book as a literary representation, i.e. as one of the “stories” about the social life in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. It employs comparison in its analysis of the text’s severance from documentation and tendency towards fiction. Adopting Michel Foucault’s insights, it reads in the text’s inaccuracies— facts al-Tahtāwī misses or intentionally ignores, misinterprets or willingly distorts— truths about the different influences to which his account was subject, whether these were related directly to the author himself, to the society he was writing about or to, or even to the intentions and expectations of his supervisors and benefactors.

Keywords: Al-Tahtāwī, Nineteenth- Century Paris, East/ West Encounter, Travel Literature, Missions to Europe, American Travelers to Paris.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	page
I. Introduction	1-8
II. The Social Context: 19th Century Egypt and France	9-24
III. Al-Tahtāwī and his Book	
3.1 Al-Tahtāwī: the Student, the Teacher, the Reformer	25-32
3.2 The Book: <i>Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz</i>	33-37
IV. Paris through the Eyes of al-Tahtāwī	38-64
V. Al-Tahtāwī's Paris: Fiction or Fact	
5.1 Woman and Family	66-87
5.2 Cleanliness and Hygiene	88-93
5.3 Homosexuality	93-95
5.4 Racial Difference	95-97
VI. Conclusion	98-104
VII. Bibliography/ References	105-108

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When Rifāʿa al-Tahtāwī was chosen to accompany the first mission sent by Muhammad Alī to study in Paris, it was not expected that the 25-year old Azhar teacher's whole life, and maybe the history of Egypt, will be permanently influenced by this five-year journey (1826-1831). Al-Tahtāwī, who went to Paris as the *imām* of the mission and not as one of the students, could not but fulfill his innate enthusiasm for learning and love of knowledge, so "he threw himself into study" learning the French language first, and then reading in almost every domain from history and geography, to arithmetic and logic, to philosophy and literature (Hourani 69).

Upon returning to Egypt, and to account for his stay in France, al-Tahtāwī published a book he entitled *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, which he had drafted earlier in Paris, skillfully designing it in a way that, in addition to reporting what he saw there, gradually reveals the intellectual journey he went through from the moment he first came into contact with the culture of what he refers to early in the book as "the land of infidelity and obstinacy" (69), to the end of his trip when he came to realize that the Arabs and the French are in many respects "similar to each other" (365).

Introducing the book as this thesis's object of study, one finds that *Takhlīs al-ibrīz* has been ranked by one critic as "the first and undoubtedly the finest Arabic text of its kind written by one of the first and most influential Egyptians to travel to Europe in the

nineteenth century” (Naddaf 74). Other critics, like Heyworth-Dunne share Naddaf’s claim that the book is al-Tahtāwī’s “*chef d’oeuvre*” and considers it “the only human document of the age” (Heyworth-Dunne 964). He also finds in it “an interesting document” not only to the Egyptian reader but also “to the European scholar who wishes to study the psychological attitude of a pure Azhari towards an entirely different culture” (Heyworth-Dunne 403). Shaden Tageldin has gone further into considering the book “a revelation—and a translational one—of the complex psychodynamics of East-West cultural encounter in an era of European colonial expansion”. She concludes in a well-argued article that

Takhlīs al-ibrīz not only translates ‘French’ culture into ‘Arabic’ under clearly (post)colonial conditions of unequal exchange but roots that act of cultural transport in a theory of interlingual translation and gestures to the colonial seductions that engendered that theory. (Tageldin 429)

In a more literarily-oriented interpretation of the book, Sandra Naddaf elaborates on the text’s “play of oppositions” as shown in the first section of the second essay of the *Takhlīs*. She seems startled at the way “the text works through a varying series of oppositions between secular and religious, between intellectual supremacy and spiritual integrity, ultimately between east and west” (Naddaf 74). She finds that the reference to mirrors in the café in this chapter metaphorically suggests “the question of how one presents and represents the other” (Naddaf 74).

To explain this point, Naddaf draws on the text’s “manipulation of mirrors as both a narrative and descriptive device” as al-Tahtāwī describes the café in Marseille focusing

mainly on the existence of mirrors, and emphasizing “their ability to enlarge, to aggrandize” to come to the “moment of self-recognition” as he distinguishes his own image in the mirror. Al-Tahtāwī maintains “It seemed then that the cafe extended indefinitely, until I saw my own reflection in the mirror...” (Naddaf’s translation of the Arabic text 55). Naddaf finds in this moment of self-recognition a shift in the traditional role of the mirror as an alienating device. She writes

No longer does the mirror serve solely as a device to maintain a threatening status of difference and otherness. Rather it becomes both a means by which the unfamiliar can be accommodated and ultimately assimilated, as well as a means by which the familiar can be rediscovered and re-presented. The mirror can reflect both subject and object. (76)

In the preface to his book, al-Tahtāwī clearly sets the limits to which he plans to subject his travelogue— commitment to truth, “in all that I will say I will not stray from the path of truth,” and a “favorable judgment” of everything that really deserves such a judgment, i.e. of what does not “run counter to the prescriptions of Muhammadan law” (100). However, stating that one will not stray from the path of truth is one thing and performing such a commitment is something else, especially when one takes into account the different forces, internal and external, which had their impact on al-Tahtāwī and his book.

To start with, the genre itself, i.e. travel writing, is controversial considering its potential to satisfy the principle of objectivity in reporting an author’s observations in his trip. In his *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, Nigel Leask claims that

travel literature has always been torn between entertainment and instruction, and that “reviewers... were never satisfied that a travelogue was entertaining and instructive in equal degrees” (9).

Other factors which could possibly have hindered al-Tahtāwī’s attempt to maintain objectivity are his failure to accept things he witnessed which challenged his traditions and beliefs, and his continuous effort not to provoke Azharites if they detected in his words some kind of preference for specific western values or political authorities if they read between his lines a call for revolution. Besides, the situation in France during that period—the “unique volatility and instability” of the general condition and the “apparent paradoxes” prevailing in the society (Magraw 7) — might also have influenced the Eastern traveler’s aptitude to observe and report, to interpret and judge.

The following study addresses al-Tahtāwī’s representation of Paris as revealed in his book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*. It focuses mainly on his literary depiction of the social life in France in the third decade of the nineteenth century and compares the way al-Tahtāwī presents these aspects of the French life to the way they are presented in the historical reports of the period as they appear in documentaries referred to in the English sources considered, together with the accounts of other travelers to nineteenth century Paris, especially Americans.

To start with documentaries, the postmodernist argument that “all historians are storytellers who use a variety of literary tropes” (Magraw 120), or that society is “a fictive totalizing entity” (Magraw 4) is well taken and never ignored in this comparative

analysis. In this sense, al-Tahtāwī's book is viewed and evaluated, not as a historical record intended "to discover the face of this region," (99) which is what its author meant it to be, but as one of the *stories* employing travel literature as its *literary trope*. Consequently, the comparison will be, in no way, between al-Tahtāwī's image of Paris and reality, access to pure reality being actually unfeasible, but rather between the literary representation of Paris in al-Tahtāwī's *Talkhīs* and that created by other contemporary as well as late observers. To do this, this study seeks the help of various interpretations of the Parisian social system in the nineteenth century as presented by social historians. Though controversial and diverse in their conclusions, the social historians' theories depend basically on nineteenth-century literary representations of the city, be they travel books, novels, legal charters, official manuscripts, memoirs of master artisans, or working-class biographies, etc... For this reason, these works can no doubt provide relatively reliable data about the social customs, the life status, and the interpersonal and social relations in the nineteenth-century Paris.

Roger Magraw's *France 1800-1914: A Social History*, for example, is one study that offers a valuable "eclectic" perspective, which, despite being the opinion of an "ageing Marxist," willingly "borrow[s] the insights of fellow historians who have been inspired by discourse analysis, 'the linguistic turn', cultural anthropology, and Foucault." Taking these insights into account, the author insists that there necessarily existed then a French society to be approached and examined. He says at the end of the introduction "I remain unrepentantly convinced that there *was/is* a society out there which social historians can and should attempt to analyse" (11). Despite all the postmodern arguments indicated

above, this research adopts Magraw's attitude, for it stands midway between a "coherent structural narrative," considered impossible by postmodernists, and these latter's tendency to eradicate any sort of "ideological constructs" in favor of a study of "discourses about" and "representations of" the past. From such a moderate and comprehensive standpoint, and to recompense for inability to access French sources firsthand, it critically makes reference to historical and socio-cultural accounts of the French social life, like Magraw's, not to accept their theoretical backgrounds and conclusions, but to extract reliable firsthand content that would serve the purpose of this comparative study.

As for the accounts of other travelers during al-Tahtāwī's period, this thesis refers essentially to David Mc Cullough's *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* which, based on an extended bibliography, appealingly retells the intersecting stories of American travelers to nineteenth-century Paris: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Sumner, Samuel Morse, James Fenimore Cooper, Emma Willard, and many others. Mc Cullough traces the trips of American travelers to Paris from the moment they leave their motherland until they return, smartly exposing the French life, with its cultural, political, social, medical, artistic, etc... domains, via those travelers' representation of their experiences and impressions. It is worth noting here that Mc Cullough's "panoramic" presentation is not put forward in a merely chronological order, but looks more like interrelated topical narrative, "a catalogue of stories" set by the author "against Paris's cavalcade of rebellion, war, plague, Hausmannian urban renewal, fashion and invention" as a review in *The Spectator* describes the book. Another critic

defined the book as “an impressionistic and discursive” grand tour, “proceeding by way of crossed paths and capsule biographies” (Schiff np). The reader may come, in one chapter, across the names and impressions of a considerable number of travelers, while only one or two, are mentioned in the other when the content relates to their domains of interest. Chapter two entitled “Voilà Paris,” for instance, incorporates views and quotes from the majority of travelers Mc Cullough lists, conveying their impressions of the city, while chapter three with the title “Morse at the Louvre” revolves mainly around Samuel Morse’s artistic experience in Paris and chapter four skillfully describes the medical condition in nineteenth-century Paris through the experience of American medical students who were there during the nineteenth century.

Among the American travelers, this research focuses particularly on James Fenimore Cooper’s account for his trip to Paris as put forth in his *Letters and Journals*. The two main reasons behind this choice are: first the coincidence of Cooper’s stay in France with that of al-Tahtāwī, and the second is the fact that he was a writer unlike most of the other travelers in Mc Cullough’s book who were physicists, medical and legal students, artists, or mere pursuers of knowledge. The main source in this respect will be Cooper’s *Letters and Journals* in addition to a range of articles about the man and his literary as well as documentary produce.

The study tries to evaluate, through specific examples, al-Tahtāwī’s success in establishing accuracy the way he promises at the beginning of his book, and to analyze the real reasons behind inaccuracy or misinterpretation when they occur. It views al-

Tahtāwī's book as a literary representation, one of the many varied "representations of" and "discourses about" the famous city. It seriously considers, with the support of the other representations mentioned above, the different forces to which al-Tahtāwī's account was subject, be they related directly to the author himself, to the society he was writing about, or the one he was writing to, or even to the intentions and whims of supervisors and benefactors.

The first chapter introduces the environment al-Tahtāwī comes from and that where he spent the five years that changed his life. This chapter basically addresses the general, mainly political and cultural condition in Egypt as well as in Paris in the first half, more precisely the first three decades, of the nineteenth century. This is actually intended to set the social context for the events to be discussed in later chapters.

The second chapter lies in two parts. The first part presents a summary al-Tahtāwī's life particularly stressing his background, his achievements, his translation career, his oeuvre, and the influence of his Parisian experience on his intellectual life and his role as a reformer. Although he devoted his book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* to the relation of this experience, traces of the Parisian experience keep recurring in almost all his later works, emphasizing the fact that al-Tahtāwī in 1831 was a completely different person from who he was before the trip. The second part of this chapter is devoted to a general overview of al-Tahtāwī's book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, its genre, structure, and plot, as well as the way it was evaluated by critics.

The third chapter depicts the meticulous portrait of the city of Paris as viewed by al-

Tahtāwī. It relies on his representation of his observations and of the experience he underwent in his contact with the French society during his five-year stay there. It attempts to create as clear and extensive an image of the ‘capital-of-the-nineteenth-century’ Paris (Walter Benjamin cited in Prendergast 4) as al-Tahtāwī planned to convey to his generally Eastern, and specifically Egyptian, readers.

The fourth and last chapter, actually the core of this thesis, comprises a comparative analysis between the picture drawn by al-Tahtāwī, and that of historians, like Magraw and the others, as well as of the American travelers to Paris whose visits co-occurred with al-Tahtāwī’s or came a little later. This comparison is planned to shed light on and explain, in the clearest terms possible, how the “failings” al-Tahtāwī confesses at the end of his book— facts he misses or intentionally ignores, misinterprets or willingly distorts— do, in the Foucaultian sense, really tell much more than they “fail” to tell. They tell of the different powers that were at play in the foreign environment al-Tahtāwī was trying to portray, the worries and concerns that prevailed in his mind as he wrote his *Takhlīs*, and the ambitions and aspirations for his country’s progress that grew with every page he wrote and every fact he documented.

CHAPTER TWO

Egypt and France in the First Three Decades of the Nineteenth Century

As made clear in the introduction, this chapter engages itself in an overview of the general situation in each of Egypt and France in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. The fact that the two countries were in many respects connected presents itself as early as Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 if not earlier. Many researchers who have addressed the period of the subsequent three-year occupation, irrespective of their political and cultural standpoint, mark this event as a watershed in the history of Egypt. Though with shifting levels of emphasis, they agree that Napoleon's expedition, with its accompanying *savants* and the consequent *Institut d'Egypte*, did actually play an essential role in the rise of modern Egypt. Even sheikh ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Jabartī, the fierce opponent and severe critic of the French occupation, could not but show admiration for the scientific advancement of the French. He devotes pages of the chronicle, originally intended to account for Napoleon's expedition, for the description of Egyptian houses turned by administrators of the French occupation into what looks like public libraries where Muslim natives are not denied access to but rather received and allowed to refer to "all kinds of printed books in which there were all sorts of illustrations and *cartes* (*kartāt*) of the countries and regions, animals, birds, plants, histories of the ancients, campaigns of the nations, tales of the prophets... and such things which baffle the mind" (Jabartī 109). Al-Jabartī himself comments later, as he

finds himself “boggled by the science and technology...displayed at Bonaparte's Institut d’Egypt” that “such knowledge is beyond minds the likes of ours” (cited in Levingston 559).

It is really wondrous to read such statements of admiration from the same al-Jabartī who is elsewhere very hostile in his account of the French expedition. Not only does he compare the French to “demons of the Devil’s army,” portraying in full detail their usurpation of mosques, especially the Mosque of al-Azhar which they “trod in with their shoes...tied their horses to the *qibla*... treated the books and Qur’anic volumes as trash, throwing them on the ground, stamping on them with their feet and shoes...soiled the mosque, guzzled wine and smashed the bottles in the central court” (Jabartī 93), but he also seems undeceived by Napoleon’s appeal to Muslims in the famous letter which he analyses exposing the lies employed and the weak Arabic used (24-33). His hostility drives him at certain points to completely abandon objectivity, accusing French men of having “intercourse with any woman who pleases them and vice versa,” French women being even ready to have affairs with barbers in barbershops they pass by (29). However, al-Jabartī cannot help but see the obvious fact that the French skill in battle lay basically in their scientific progress, as opposed to the primitiveness and backwardness of the Mamluk preparations to face the invasion.

The occupation/expedition controversy, as Elliot Colla likes to call it, appears in almost every contemporary or later work, be it a work that merely chronicles or one which analyzes the event of invasion. Any thorough review of such accounts would notice that Napoleon’s invasion and occupation is treated by modern scholarship as an

opening of a modern era, not only in Egypt but in the whole Arab world. According to Elliott Colla, even those who are not ready to view the occupation as an event of cultural exchange insisting on the colonial nature of the invasion, or tending to question its “motivation and interest” do not deny the cultural accomplishments of Bonaparte’s *savants*”(1047). Muhammad ʿImāra, in his introduction to al-Tahtāwī’s works, compares the role of the French invasion to that of “an electric contact that touched the minds of the Easterners, especially the Egyptians and Eastern Arabs, to an extent that alarms and wakes, but does not shock and kill” by opening their eyes to such sciences as chemistry, geography, topography, history, administration and economics, arts, etc... (my translation 13). ʿImāra’s nationalist and Arabist aspirations are clearly revealed in his sharp criticism of the Mamluk rule of Egypt and the primitive means by which the Mamluks defended the great land against the French attack do not hinder him from acknowledging the success of the French accompanying scientific mission “in arousing and stimulating” nationalism and self-confidence among the Egyptians despite the failure of the military expedition (15). His standpoint fits very well with Colla’s category of “Egyptian nationalists (who) were willing to repress some of the negative aspects of the French Expedition so as to construct an image of benevolent exchange” (1046).

Edward Said, in his *Orientalism*, does not take the above claims on face value, nor does he adopt their conclusions. According to him, the real Western project, namely Napoleon’s project, has been, from the very first moment of bringing dozens of *savants* with the expedition, to present the occupation of Egypt as an attempt “to restore a

region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own profit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West” and, most importantly, “to dignify all the knowledge collected during colonial occupation with the title ‘contribution to modern learning’ when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts” for the orientalist text (86). That Napoleon succeeded can be clearly seen in the official commemorations of the two hundredth anniversary of the French Expedition in Egypt (1798–1801) referred to in Elliott Colla’s article when a wide range of events was planned by cultural institutions in each of France and Egypt “to commemorate the special relationship or, as it was officially labeled, ‘les horizons partagés’ that this colonial encounter engendered” (1044). Said, however, asserts that “the occupation gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient” though on the Napoleonic model. This was practically realized later in a great encyclopedia on Egypt prepared by the researchers and scientists who accompanied the mission, *Description de l’Égypte*, a twenty-three large volume book, published between 1809 and 1829, described by Said as a “great collective appropriation of one country by another” (84).

Thus, Egypt of the first third of the nineteenth century had just survived a French expedition which, despite its military failure, marked the beginning of new period in the history of the country. The occupation was terminated in 1801 when the Ottoman Army reclaimed the land of Egypt for the Ottoman Sultan. Among the troops, namely the Ottoman-Albanian Corps, was an officer who would play a key role in modeling the future of Egypt—Muhammad ‘Alī. Muhammad ‘Imāra claims that the people of Egypt

who, led by the ʿulemā, i.e. al-Azhar sheikhs, revolted against the French occupation, as well as against the absolute rule of the Mamluks or the Ottomans, chose Muhammad ʿAlī to rule them (16). Stanford Shaw agrees that the Egyptian people backed up the rise of Muhammad ʿAlī “who took advantage of the weakness of the old order” of Ottoman and Mamluk rule as a result of the French expedition “to sweep it away and begin Egypt’s long rise toward a modern and self-ruling state” (29). Thus, in the year 1805, and as a natural consequence of the above conditions, Muhammad ʿAlī became the Ottoman governor of Egypt and remained so until his death in 1848.

Shaden Tageldin successfully describes Muhammad ʿAlī’s Egypt as “a quasi-independent province of the Ottoman Empire” (428). Ehud Toledano, in his description of the socio-political situation in Egypt under the governorship of Muhammad ʿAlī, also states that Egypt formed an exception to the rule that characterized all other Ottoman provinces—as these became more directly attached to the Porte during the nineteenth century, Egypt took the opposite way. Unlike the case in the other provinces, the Pasha “increased his autonomy and carved out a mini-empire inside the Ottoman state” (5). To attain this goal, the ambitious Pasha launched a range of reforms which though related mainly to military organization, did also have their influence on the economic, social and cultural life.

Socially speaking, the Egyptian population was divided into two major parts; the elite — including pashas, beys, and effendis of both Ottoman and Mamluk hierarchy— and the rest of the population. This latter was a “heterogeneous” mass, which comprised what Ehud Toledano calls a “sub-elite”—including the Azhar ʿulemā, the urban rich, the

rural notables (*ashrāf*)— in addition to the common *fallāhīn* (farmers) who actually constituted the majority of the Egyptian-born population. The land production was controlled by the *waqf* sheikhs and *nazirs* through a tax-farming system (*Iltizām*) which gave those the third of the land revenues and pushed poor farmers, in many cases, into what was known as *corvée* or forced labor. After 1805, however, Muhammad ʿAlī’s reforms deprived the well-off *waqf* sheikhs of their wealth and led them to join the rank of the poor. Unfortunately, these reforms were not directed, as one might assume, for the profit of the society, but rather for the satisfaction of Muhammad ʿAlī’s dream of a “self-ruling state.” Toledano, based on reports from the period, asserts that the agricultural reform did not benefit the *fallāhīn* but “the large estate holders,” especially Muhammad ʿAlī “himself, his family, and his loyal elite members” (20).

As for the political system, no major changes took place in relation to power allocation and distribution. Egypt, under Muhammad ʿAlī’s reign, did not divert from the political system of absolute authority, for the aspirant governor was actually “operating within the political culture and playing by its rules of conduct” (Toledano 5). The only major change is the great blow that Muhammad ʿAlī’s reforms made to the power of the Janissary, or Mamluk beys, who had constituted the major authority in Egypt toward the end of the eighteenth century before the French expedition marked the beginning of their decline to be continued later by Muhammad ʿAlī, together with the effect of these reforms on the financial status of the tax-farmers be they rural notables or religious authorities. Albert Hourani makes it quite clear that Muhammad ʿAlī had no will “to reform the political institutions in the country,” nor did he issue any

“proclamation of rights.” Even the *‘ulema*, whose social and religious power over the Cairo population he badly needed to establish his power, were soon removed from the scene—in an accurate manifestation of the Machiavellian teaching to destroy those by whom a ruler attains power. Instead, he “formed a ruling group which included Turkish, Kurdish, Albanian, and Circassian soldiers” together with Europeans familiar with Europe’s politics and finances. Hourani cites, in this respect, Muhammad ‘Alī’s unwelcoming response to one of his Paris students as he told him he had studied civil administration, “It is *I* who govern. Go to Cairo and translate military works” (52).

If Muhammad ‘Alī did not make radical changes in the political system, at least in the first three decades of the century, then one might come to the question: What kind of system was that? In fact, the Ottoman Empire was ruled as an Islamic institution, where the Ottoman *Sultān* represented Prophet Muhammad’s Caliph, while the governors of provinces were *wālīs* in the terms of the early Muslim governments. As for the administration of state affairs, all political, judicial, economic, social affairs were managed according to the Islamic law (*Sharī‘a*). The province did not have a constitution in the present sense of the word. Just like in the central Ottoman Porte where the Sultan’s law (*Qanūn*) had to adhere to the principles of the Islamic *Sharī‘a*, the province governors were supposed to follow the same religiously inspired law. As a result, “the fourth institution of the Ottoman ruling class in Egypt was composed of the learned men, the *‘ulemā* who knew the law and the Muslim sciences to all their extent. The law was applied in courts by *Qadīs* (judges)... expounded and studied by jurisconsults (*Mūftīs*)” (Shaw 7). Thus, in the first part of the century, there existed no

civil legal system, but one controlled by religious men and acting by the Islamic *Sharī'a*. It is important at this point of discussion to note that Muhammad ʿAlī is not presented in any of the historical resources as a religious advocate, but as a smart ambitious leader who was able to manipulate the religious element, so deeply entrenched in the political and social institutions, to satisfy his dream of “political autonomy” as Toledano calls it. At the beginning of his reign, he, following Bonaparte’s example, worked to win the support of al-Azhar *ʿulemā* to help him come to power, being quite aware of their influence on public opinion though, as mentioned earlier, he soon put them aside. In order to win the Sultan’s as well as the Muslim public favor, Muhammad ʿAlī “sometimes acted as champion of Ottoman Islam” especially when he defeated the Wahhabis who challenged the ruling “chaliphal institution” of the Ottomans (Hourani 53, Hamza 63). Hamza claims that the Hejaz campaign, and re-winning the Holy Lands into the Sultan’s power, “clad the pasha in Islamic colors, allowing him to score moral-religious gains” (63). All this shows the great importance of religion in the structure and function of the political and social institutions in the first half of the nineteenth century and which continued for a long time later.

An important institution of nineteenth-century Egypt was the military. Before Muhammad ʿAlī, and until the end of the eighteenth century, there was no real official military institution in Egypt. According to Stanford Shaw, “the official military corps ... were no more than devices by which the ‘freed’ *Mamluk* followers of the *Emīrs* were given income and sustenance by the Treasury while remaining in the service of their masters” (9). Shaw even claims that the eighteenth century military was nothing more

than “legal fictions,” for the Governor did not have the power to call on the military corps without requesting that from their masters (the *Emīrs*, i.e. Ottoman nobility), who, in turn, did not always respond positively.

When Muhammad ʿAlī launched his ambitious project of consolidating power over Egypt, he realized the importance of reorganizing the military as an essential first step in this project. Until 1811, he tried to reform his troops on the French model, but the “unruly Albanian troops” were nonreformable. Dyala Hamza explains how Muhammad ʿAlī found in the Hejaz campaign a good chance to dispose of these troops, group after the other. Then, he started “building an army anew” depending basically on the conscription of Sudanese slaves, a project which witnessed a real disaster after the invasion of Sudan when thousands of the conscripted Sudanese died because of disease. Muhammad ʿAlī had no choice left but to resort to the conscription of the Egyptian peasants, a decision which marked a turning point in the lives of the poor Egyptian *fallāhīn*. Hamza reports David Farhi’s and Khaled Fahmi’s descriptions of the suffering of *fallāhīn* and the subsequent resistance to conscription which reached its height in the year 1824 in a revolt that broke out in Upper Egypt, led by an Azhar sheikh with thirty thousand followers who “declared Muhammad ʿAlī to be an infidel” (64).

Due to his great admiration for the French army and the model it represents, Muhammad ʿAlī’s reform plan demanded a success in deciphering the secrets of that army’s power. According to Tageldin, this same purpose of decoding “the secrets of French power” was actually the real reason behind the Governor’s agreement to send student missions to Paris; al-Tahtāwī’s being the first serious mission among them

(428). Albert Hourani speaks of increasing numbers of students being sent to France in organized missions starting the year 1826, an exchange turning Egypt of the first quarter of the nineteenth century into “ a vast experimental military laboratory” (Hamza 63). From the ranks of these missions “came the first considerable political thinker of modern Egypt, Rifā‘a al-Tahtāwī”. According to Hourani, the students in the missions “read French books and saw French life at one of those moments of revolution when the conflict of general ideas is embodied in the clash of opposing forces” (54). So, what was the situation in France during that same period?

To start with the political situation in France during the first part of the nineteenth century, it was, just like the whole century, a period of continuous conflict and rapid change on all levels of political conditions, social relations and class conflict, legal organization, religious concepts and directions, etc... In brief terms, and disregarding theoretical controversies about names and dates, the century was that of the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of a new Bourgeoisie. Roger Magraw, in a chronology of the events of the century, marks at least four major political changes only between the years 1804 and 1830, from Napoleon’s proclamation of the Empire and the Civil Code with the strong blow to aristocracy that it represented in 1804, to the First (Bourbon) Restoration in 1814, an attempt to retain or regain some of the aristocracy’s privileges, to the bloody as much as electoral Second Restoration in 1815 with its religious colorings, and, most importantly, the 1830-July revolution overthrowing the Bourbons for the last time.

Until 1789, the aristocracy owned most of the land and occupied most of the public posts—1 percent of the population owned 25 percent of the land, posts in the army, Administration and Church. Then came the outbreak of the French Revolution which turned the tables on feudalism and absolute privilege for the Monarchy — it declared the rights of man, nationalized church properties, cancelled the Noble titles, and established what came to be called Constitutional Monarchy in the place of absolute Monarchy. Within a decade, the country witnessed a range of events, some bloody, that gradually removed power from the hands of the formerly- ruling minority ending in the establishment of the *Code Civil* in 1804 within the proclamation of the French Empire. The revolutionary uprising was mainly led by a middle class of urban civilians not belonging to the nobles, of artisans growing increasingly literate, of peasants, and of soldiers. The origin of the term bourgeois, first used to mean the resident of the town, the part of the society intended by the term, and the exact date when it was conceived of as a power of change remain topics of debate among historians, the only solid fact remaining that “in the crucible of prolonged struggle with aristocratic and popular ‘others’ ... middle class identity was forged” (Magraw 34). Magraw even comes to assert that “Even if a self-conscious bourgeoisie had not made the Revolution, by 1830 it was evident that the Revolution had made the bourgeoisie” (33).

After the Revolution and until 1814, “a relative internal stability” supplied by the Napoleonic regime allowed for the confirmation of the Revolution’s achievements. Napoleon’s *Code Civil* had its crucial influence in this process of change. Commenting on the fruitlessness of the fierce resistance of the upper class to the rise of what they

called the *nouveau riche*, Balzac, known as the chronicler of the quandaries of post-revolutionary aristocracy, states that “There is no longer a nobility. Napoleon’s *Code Civil* killed it off just as cannon killed off feudalism” (cited in Magraw 26). The repeated military defeats in Europe, and the food and anti-conscription riots inside France, led to Napoleon’s resignation. Consequently, the aristocracy’s resistance realized itself in 1814 in the Bourbon Restoration, known as the First Restoration, which ended in the accession of King Louis XVIII to the throne. There is a general agreement among historians that this was the last real endeavor at establishing aristocracy as the dominant political class. The conflict, however, was partially consolidated by the Charter of 1814 which marked “a compromise between the Bourbons’ aristocratic and clerical supporters and the revolutionary Bourgeoisie” establishing “constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, legal and religious freedoms, maintenance of the Napoleonic Codes, and property rights of purchasers of church lands” (Magraw 20).

Despite all claims that aristocracy survived the Revolution untouched, changes were so clear to be ignored, and the desperate effort of former aristocrats to regain their glory provides enough evidence to this fact. This is not to say that aristocrats were totally eradicated, but rather that their benefits were gravely restricted after the Revolution. The new Bourgeoisie identity, however, was not in any way homogenous; it included a wide spectrum of social factions brought together mainly by their gains from the Revolution and by the danger posed to their interests by any aristocratic revival. Educated young people whose chance to a career was hindered by the ancient régime

and who found their way into bureaucratic office after the revolution, modest lawyers and local business men who also found access to public office, holders of confiscated and sold church lands perceiving the danger of the return of absolute clericalism, families of military young men gaining career opportunities due to the expansion of bureaucracy, army officers raged by the promotion of the returning nobility after the First Restoration, followers of Protestantism especially Protestant textile merchants and financiers who enjoyed religious freedom and economic and administrative power due to the Revolution after being previously denied these rights by the Catholic aristocracy, etc.. all beneficiaries of the Revolution and highly aware of the threat posed by the return of aristocracy constituted a *class moyenne* (a middle class), that later came to be called the Bourgeoisie.

A further indication of the emerging power of the masses and of the decline of aristocratic power shows in the occurrences Bonaparte's "Hundred Days". In this last attempt at winning back the Empire, Bonaparte, and in directing his battle against the Restoration forces, found his best chance in declaring himself "People's Emperor" and in arousing fear of the return to clericalism. This announcement worked, for even the peasants, who were heavily conscripted by Napoleon's regime, and who sometimes resisted conscription, ran to his support under this banner. This clearly shows that any real aristocratic revival had become practically impossible, especially in the presence of a *class moyenne*, that had become "a heroic agent of an emancipatory revolution against feudalism and absolutism, custodian of 'universal rights of man' and guardian of civilization against mob rule" (Magraw 14). Yet, Napoleon's last attempt did not come

to happy endings and he finally gave in, while Louis XVIII was reinstated as a King in a movement that came to be known as the Second Restoration in 1815. The Second Restoration, however, witnessed some bloody events of religious coloring, though deeply they were more expressive of political and social conflict. King Charles X had returned to France after the accession of King Louis XVIII, and as his Ultra-Royalist followers, known as émigrés, assumed electoral victory regaining some of their posts, ‘White Terror’ broke out in Midi (southern France) when these Ultra-Royalists “encouraged Catholic gangs to murder or forcibly ‘reconvert’ hundreds of Protestants and purchasers of church lands” (Magraw 162).

Within few years, the ex-émigrés continued to rise in power, until they controlled government and were able, in 1824, to guarantee the accession of Charles X to the French throne. At the same time, attempts at aristocratic as well as Catholic revival were taking place on steady pace, reaching the peak in 1825 with a law against sacrilege ratifying the death penalty for blasphemy and ordering the burning of Voltaire’s books. All this came after a gradual compensation in economic and political power for the ex-émigrés realized in a law of indemnification that needed to be presented in “conciliatory terms” to pass (Collins 40-5). In 1829, Charles X formed another Ultra-Royalist government headed by the hated Jules de Polignac. This event was actually the last straw, for the situation had become unbearable. An article in *Journal des Débats*, Aug. 10, 1829, vividly echoes the situation

So, the bond of love and confidence which united people and monarch is broken once more! We are faced yet again with the court with its old resentments, the

émigrés with prejudices, the priesthood with its hatred of liberty, coming between France and her king. What she has gained by forty years of toil and suffering is now to be taken away... (cited in Collins 80)

It had become quite clear that return to the Ancien Régime was doomed, and that the July Revolution of 1830 was inevitable to bring the Restoration, which had for more than a decade threatened the achievements of the French revolution, to its end.

Magraw depends on contemporary accounts to assure that, contrary to claims that July Revolution was not a Bourgeois Revolution against the threat of aristocratic revival, the aristocracy represented actually the “net losers” in this Revolution (21). The new King, ‘Louis Philippe, King of the French people’ ruled a constitutional monarchy under the reign of which the aristocrats witnessed a political decline giving way to the new Bourgeoisie to assume important administrative, economic and social positions. There is no stronger support for this reading of the 1830 Revolution than the insistence of Alexis de Tocqueville, son of an aristocratic Normandy family, that the French history from 1789 to 1830 was a “struggle to the death between the Ancien Régime—its traditions, memories, and hopes are represented by the aristocracy—and the new France, led by the middle class” (cited in Magraw 34).

Thus, France of the first three decades of the nineteenth century was a France of political instability and revolutionary turmoil that had its undeniable influence on all domains. Despite the Catholic conservative complaints that the disintegration of the society and the family—the increased migration to the city accompanied with a rise in crime, the decline in religious belief and practice in the face of emerging secularization,

materialism and immorality—were all results of the French Revolution is considered a little exaggerated; these claims remain partially rooted in real changes that were occurring to the society though on a slower pace than those traditionalists' fears implied. Some of the solid facts remain that the Napoleonic régimes did replace absolutism with “a blend of authoritarianism and populism,” and feudalism with a Civil Code that regulated the economic relations and legal affairs among citizens, that the Catholic religious power was seriously challenged by the confiscation and selling of church lands and the cancelling of tithes, and by the establishment of religious freedom not only for Protestants but also for minorities like Jews and others.

It remains necessary to devote a short part of this presentation to the conditions of the French army during that period. Unlike in Egypt, the wide conscription project of the 1789 French Revolution and that of Napoleonic rule played an important role in the establishment of the basis of a real army that would soon play an essential role in writing the history of the state. The army was really the main institution that reinforced the middle class in its process of uprising. Not only did three heads of state rise to this position from being army officers— Napoleon I, Cavaignac, and MacMahon— but this same army played a role in the implementation of a sense of patriotism among citizens which grew gradually until the end of the century. Wide conscription caused most, if not all, of the middle class families to have one or more of their members in the army resulting in a kind of awareness that led in late 1890s to an army whose members “perceived their loyalties to be to France, the *patrie* and the flag rather than to any specific regime” (Magraw 9). Magraw also refers to “popular almanachs, songs, and

lithographs” to prove that “families took pride in having a son in the army” and that “a soldier’s macho image and uniform had a real appeal” (9-10).

In short, the contact between Egypt of the East and France of the West in the first third of the nineteenth century realized in Muhammad ‘Alī’s first student mission to Paris was, in fact, a contact between a religious East of deeply-entrenched Islamic concepts of caliphate, religious jury and intellectuals, and an army held together by the concepts of jihad (religious war) and conscripted by force from conquered regions, and an emerging secular West which has already overthrown its absolute political and religious Monarchies, replacing them by an-equal-right Constitution, a literate population developing into a separate class of intellectuals, and a strong patriotic army of “technologically competent officers” chosen from the “professional middle-class” (Magraw 9). The clear disparity between these two worlds does really explain a lot in relation to al- Tahtāwī’s representation of nineteenth-century Paris.

CHAPTER THREE

Al-Tahtāwī and his Book

3.1 Al-Tahtāwī: the Student, the Teacher, the Reformer

Rifā'a Badawī Rāfi' at-Tahtāwī was born on October 14, 1801, the same year of Napoleon's retreat from Egypt, in Tahta, Upper Egypt to a noble (sharīf) family whose roots go back to Prophet Muhammad. Though originally rich, his father came to lose his strong financial standing due to the land reforms introduced by Muhammad Alī, the Ottoman Governor of Egypt then. It is, in fact, ironical that the same person who had brought misfortune to the father would be the reason the son would reach the fame he now enjoys. Muhammad Alī, whose reforms abolished the tax farming system, consequently impoverishing the noble Tahtāwī family, will himself, within some years, send a mission to France of which al-Tahtāwī will be "the most famous member... and the author of the only account" (Newman 28).

Al-Tahtāwī's early education came from his father and uncles; he memorized the entire Qur'ān under the supervision of his father and studied some texts from al-Azhar curriculum with the help of his uncles. His father died soon and the 16-year old Rifā'a headed with his mother to Cairo to join al-Azhar, the dream of every Muslim scholar in those days. At al-Azhar, al-Tahtāwī was lucky enough to have some of the best teachers, among them Sheikh Hassan al-Attār who left the strongest influence on al-Tahtāwī's personality and on his life as a whole. Noticing al-Tahtāwī's thirst for

knowledge, his skills, and his dedication to learning, al-Attār drew his student's attention, besides the regular Islamic education, to medicine, astronomy, history, and geography. Sheikh al-Attār had had the chance to visit Napoleon's *Institut d'Égypte* and had been impressed by the modern European sciences which he came to consider, together with the prosperous printing press, indispensable for the development of Egypt. It was, thus, natural that al-Attār would try to familiarize his promising student with such sciences, maybe anticipating a future role for this student in the renaissance of Egypt.

However, this was not the end of al-Attār's influence on al-Tahtāwī's life, for the insightful teacher would do his student, who had by that time become a proficient teacher at al-Azhar, a final and most valuable favor. When Muhammad Alī, in the year 1826, decided to send a student mission to France, al-Attār used his power to reserve a place for al-Tahtāwī as an imām in that mission. Alain Silvera, supported by al-Tahtāwī's biographers, claims that "it was only at the behest of his Azhar teacher, Sheikh Hassan al-Attār, that Sheikh Rifā'a al-Tahtawi was attached to the Mission at the last minute to serve as its imam" (9). So, the 25-year-old Tahtāwī traveled to Paris in the 43-student mission—he was one of the only eight Egyptian-born members who joined the Egyptian School of Paris (*École égyptienne de Paris*), the others being Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Circassians (Newman 27). The students were divided into small groups and sent to different boarding schools to facilitate their acquisition of the French language. Besides French, they were taught history, arithmetic, engineering and geography. They were tested on regular basis to check their progress and decide on the

subjects they would study next. After acquiring French, they went on to specialize in fifteen different subject areas, military and civil administration, artillery, chemistry, medicine, military engineering, naval affairs, government, mechanics and hydraulics, technical drawing and engraving, agriculture, natural history, and translation. Al-Tahtāwī was, from the very beginning, chosen for the translation domain. As he had always been at al-Azhar, and as his teacher al-Attār had foreseen, he was a very wholehearted and committed learner who devoured all sorts of books presented to the students of the school, and even bought others by his own money as one of his supervisors Monsieur Chevalier assures in a letter published in the *Takhlīs*. This letter also tells that al-Tahtāwī suffered from a weak left eye due to late-night reading and study (al-Tahtāwī 302). Al-Tahtāwī excelled in his studies and, as he tells in the *Takhlīs*, received the exam gift several times. The gift usually consisted of a book or a collection of books, which he rushed to read with the same eagerness. Within a short time, he was involved in translating books as soon as he finished reading them (al-Tahtāwī 297).

After five years, in the year 1831, al-Tahtāwī returned to Egypt. In his motherland, he was assigned his first position as a French teacher and translator in the School of Medicine in Abū Zaʿbal and, at the same time, the head of the preparatory school (for medicine). During this period, al-Tahtāwī, who had reached his thirties, decided to make a family. One cannot but notice that his marriage came at a relatively old age, considering the fact that he was a Muslim sheikh and an al-Azhar figure. This might be attributed to his financial standing before that age. As soon as al-Tahtāwī felt financially

secure, he married his cousin (Newman 41). In 1833, al-Tahtāwī was moved to the military school at Tura where he worked on translating books in geometry and military science.

The following year (1834) witnessed the release of al-Tahtāwī's most famous book, and the subject of this paper, *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, the travelogue he wrote to account for his stay in France. This is, of course, the date of publication, for an unmodified version of the book had, in fact, been submitted earlier in 1831 to the testing committee in the École égyptienne in partial fulfillment of the requirements of graduation (ʿImāra 44). The attack of plague, however, obliged him to withdraw temporarily to his mother town Tahtā. Luckily enough, this was no waste of time, for it allowed him to finish some translations he had already started in Paris. Al-Tahtāwī's *Takhlīs* was, by that time, gaining a good reputation in Turkey, where Muhammad Alī had sent translated copies to the high officials and students as well as to Constantinople. Al-Tahtāwī was not as lucky in his official service. He was once more transferred from the military school to become the librarian at Qasr al-ʿAynī school.

It seems that al-Tahtāwī was not very happy with the posts he was given. The idea of being a public servant continuously on the move according to whims of rulers and conspiracies of fellow officials would, very likely, be a humiliating experience for the Azhar graduate of noble roots. Heyworth-Dunne refers to this when he claims that, because of their financial neediness, persons like al-Attār and al-Tahtāwī were obliged “to pocket their pride and to seek employment in the new institutions” (963). Thus, it

was not long before al-Tahtāwī decided to write a proposal for Muhammad Alī presenting his aspirations for the future of education in Egypt and focusing mainly on the necessity of translation—his Parisian specialty— if Egypt were to rise to the rank of modern countries. His demand was, specifically, a school that would teach translation. Al-Tahtāwī’s request was soon positively answered and he himself was assigned the task of carrying out the project.

Whether it is al-Tahtāwī who founded the School of Translation which became later on The School of Languages (madrasat al-alsun) or whether he took charge of the school after a year of its establishment does not make a great difference in the undeniable influence he would actually have on the system of education in Egypt in the years to follow. The first achievement in this domain, as agreed by Heyworth-Dunne and Newman, was that al-Tahtāwī, for the first time, introduced an educational curriculum which was not restricted to military training but rather provided “general education” to the students joining his school. Moreover, Heyworth-Dunne highlights al-Tahtāwī’s special attention to the preservation of native culture beside the introduction of modern education — the course requirements included Islamic law and Arabic language beside European sciences, and the staff included Azharites beside French teachers. The French teachers were soon replaced by graduates from the Language school—a further sign of al-Tahtāwī’s interest in maintaining the native aspect of the curricula and the school.

The challenge was great and al-Tahtāwī worked hard to fulfill the requirements of the task assigned to him. Not only did he devote himself to “teaching late in the evening or before dawn,” but he also carried on his work of translation (Newman 46, al-Shayyāl 34). He translated some books, and revised the translations of others— including those done by graduates of the Language School. That he was successful can be seen in the huge sum and significant quality of translations published by the school, as well as in the range of posts which were allotted to the school alumni together with the vital role those would play in shaping the overall image of Egypt in the near future.

Documentaries count up to 2,000 translations in philosophy and logic, geography and other sciences, in addition to history, especially political history. The earliest of these translations were actually books that al-Tahtāwī himself had read in Paris and was willing to translate (Al-Shayyāl 27). The school graduates were people like Sālih Majdī, Abū’s- Sa‘ūd Efendī, Muhammad Kadrī Pasha, Muhammad ‘Uthmān Bey Jalāl, and other major figures from writers, translators and poets, to pioneer newspaper editors, to legal and educational reformers. Other signs of al-Tahtāwī’s accomplishment include the good reputation the school gained beyond the Egyptian borders—Newman traces an influence on the Tunisian educational reform— and the addition of multiple branches to the school under his supervision.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Alī, who immensely valued al-Tahtāwī’s efforts and achievements, had commissioned him the management of the library of European publications at Qasr al-Aynī in 1841, and the editorship of the official newspaper al-Waqā’i‘ al-Misriyya in 1842. Al-Tahtāwī had also gradually been promoted from *nāzir*

of the Language School to the rank of a major and then a colonel, which made him, from then on, Rifa'ā Bey. Yet, al-Tahtāwī's golden period came to an end with the end of Muhammad Alī's reign. Ibrahīm Pasha, Muhammad Alī's son and successor died before his father, and the next ruler, Abbās I, did not share his grandfather's favor of development and progress arriving from the West. As a result, al-Tahtāwī lost his privilege in the Ottoman court and was sent to Sūdān on a relatively humble mission when compared to the posts he occupied in Muhammad Alī's days.

As a head of a primary school for the children of Egyptian officials in Khartoum, al-Tahtāwī spent the next four years of his life (1850-54). It was definitely a degrading experience for the long-honored Bey; however, this did not lead him to perform his job less conscientiously. Al-Tahtāwī managed the school, devoted more time for his translations, and carried on his continuous effort to convince authorities to end his humiliating exile. Yet, exile gave al-Tahtāwī the chance to finish translating Fenelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* he had already started in France, which he gave the title *Mawāqī' al-aflāk fī waqā'ī' Tilīmāk*. On the superficial level, the book is the story of the adventures of the Greek mythological hero Odysseus, but the deeper message is a range of political views on what it takes to be a wise and just king. Such content was enough to make al-Tahtāwī postpone publishing the book even after his return to Cairo; he could not take the risk of annoying authorities one more time. This made the book wait until the year 1867 to be finally published in Beirut. However, the influence of Fenelon's ideas on al-Tahtāwī's thought was not only a reaction to the injustice he believed he was undergoing in his exile, but was rather realized, according to Newman,

in a “lasting impact,” which planted the seeds for al-Tahtāwī’s future publication of his book *al-Murshid al-amīn lil-banāt wal-banīn* (said to be inspired by Fenelon’s *Traité de l’Education des Filles*) (Newman 54).

Al-Tahtāwī was summoned back to Egypt after the assassination of Abbās I in 1854, a year which actually marked the beginning of a period during which al-Tahtāwī’s took on the task of reforming the Egyptian educational system. He was first appointed, by the new Khedive Sa‘īd Pasha, the direction of the European department of the Cairo Governorate, then the management of the Military School. Meanwhile, he worked, in collaboration with other officials, on the establishment of government schools around Egypt. He actually had a full plan which involved following the European example in the structure and curriculum of schools that would be open to all Egyptians and not only for the military, but his dream was still far from winning the approval of the Khedive. This dream would, ironically enough, come true after a while on the hands of a person believed, by many researchers, to be the real reason behind al-Tahtāwī’s plight with authorities—especially his Sudanese exile. That person was ‘Alī Mubārak.

Al-Tahtāwī’s career endured another couple of unproductive years due to a further whim of the Khedive. However, this period soon came to an end with the reign of Ismā‘īl who made al-Tahtāwī head of a new translation office, giving him the chance to publish a good set of books including translations of the Code Napoléon, and the French commercial codex under the title *Qanūn al-tijārā*, in addition to educational books like *al-Tuhfa al-maktabiyya li-taqrīb al-lugha al-‘arabiyya*, *Manāhij al-albāb al-Misriyya fī*

mabāhij al-ādāb al-ʿsriyya, and *al-Murshid al-amīn lil-banāt wal-banīn*. He also published some books on the Egyptian and Islamic history.

Rifaʿā al-Tahtāwī’s prolific life reached its closing scene in 1873, the same year which, interestingly enough, witnessed the opening of the first Muslim girls’ school in Cairo. The sheikh’s part in this achievement is actually as undeniable as the Parisian experience’s part in modeling the sheikh’s thought towards planning the Egyptian educational reform. Jamāl-eddine al-Shayyāl cites Ahmad Ameen’s remarkable comment that it was God’s will that “the imām of prayer becomes the imām of the scientific movement in Egypt” (my translation 24). Among al-Tahtāwī’s achievements and literature, this paper focuses mainly on the book he devoted for relating the journey to Paris, and specifically on the way he reflected the French society’s customs and manners as he saw and interpreted them in light of his social and religious background.

3.2 The Book: *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*

Many researchers and critics declare *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* not only as the most important book in al-Tahtāwī’s oeuvre, but also as an exceptional and very valuable publication of the nineteenth-century Egypt. Some even go further, as mentioned in the introduction, into proclaiming it as “the first and undoubtedly the finest Arabic text of its kind written by one of the first and most influential Egyptians to travel to Europe in the nineteenth century” (Naddaf 74). In light of this, one wonders how crucial it would be to attempt to place al-Tahtāwī’s book within one or another

literary genre. The assumption is that such a classification, if successfully attained, would make it easier to judge the work against a specific range of standards, and if not, would at least shed more light on the individual quality of the work, arguably adding to its value as a sign of al-Tahtāwī's innovation.

Al-Tahtāwī's *Takhlīs* is frequently referred to as a travelogue, i.e. as belonging to the genre of travel literature. To be accurate, the first title under which the book appeared was *Rihlat ash-Shaykh Rifā'a*, and a claim that al-Tahtāwī was writing travel literature wouldn't be unfounded, especially when we find that he was not the first Arab traveler to account for his visit to other countries. Professor Pérès in his *L'Espagne vue par les Voyageurs Musulmans de 1610 á 1930*, as cited by Heyworth-Dunne, came up with a remarkable list of Arab travelers who had written about their trips (401). D. Newman, in an article entitled "Arabic Travellers to Europe until the End of the 18th Century," agrees with Pérès, reporting travel accounts which go back to as early as the 10th century. Thus, clearly enough, travel writing was not a stranger to the Muslim world, though not as common to Egyptians as it was to Syrians and travelers from other North African countries. Having this in mind, together with al-Tahtāwī's own claim that he meant from the very beginning to follow his teacher Attār's advice and write "everything [he] saw that was strange and wonderous" so that it would be "useful to discover the face of this region" said to be "the bride among all regions" (99); one can easily say that *Takhlīs* was meant to be a travel book. According to Newman, al-Tahtāwī's book shares with travel literature or Arabic *rihla* its dependence on "personal observation," as well as its division into "clearly marked stages" i.e. an introduction, a

description of the actual journey to France, a report on the arrival and description of the country, and a report on the journey back home (90).

However, the undeniably didactic tone of the book on one hand, and its slip into autobiographical narration throughout on the other, might lead some observers to object to its classification as travel literature. This objection would, most probably, be based on the claim that travel literature has certain conditions, and that al-Tahtāwī does not accurately follow these conditions. Yet, referring to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, we find that not following conditions is exactly what attracts readers to travel writing. Hulme and Young say

Travellers will usually follow their instincts and opportunities rather than directions from home, and it is travellers' eccentricities and extravagances—in the literal sense of wanderings off—which have attracted many readers to the genre of travel writing. (5)

In his book on the aesthetics of travel writing, Nigel Leask, while referring to Coleridge, admits that “omission of personal narrative... in the interest of purely objective description left one with a geographical or statistical gazetteer, but not a travel book as such” (9). At the same time, he was well aware of the risk of getting too involved in “personal narrative.” He says, “Conversely, the substitution of ‘curious’ description by authorial egotism also risked banalizing the genre, offering sentiment, wit, or retro-irony in the place of the narrative project representing the foreign” (9).

In light of the above opinions, it seems that a clear definition of travel writing as a

genre is itself controversial, and, consequently, that coming up with a set of standards as hoped for at the beginning of this argument is almost impossible. Throughout the study of travel writing, reviewers have never reached absolute answers. Neither were they “satisfied that a travelogue was entertaining and instructive on equal degrees” (Leask 9). Taking this into consideration, together with the fact that the exact genre under which the book can be classified does not crucially influence the study at hand, one can safely place al-Tahtāwī’s book between the two genres of travel writing and autobiography having in mind that the two genres are naturally interrelated, for every travel book is undeniably a part of its writer’s autobiography.

As for the book’s structure and sequence, it is divided into two major parts: an introduction and the core of the book. The introduction includes four chapters. In the first chapter, al-Tahtāwī explains the reasons behind his journey and justifies his to travel to “the land of the infidels” primarily using religious excuses. The second chapter makes a list of sciences and skills needed for the development of Egypt. The third chapter is devoted to the description of the geographical position of France, while the fourth chapter presents the names of the leaders of the Egyptian mission to France and the school principles, especially the French geographer Edme-François Jomard.

According to S.M. Tageldin and A. Silvera, Jomard was the father of the idea of the *École égyptienne de Paris* [Egyptian School of Paris], and who “co-directed it with the Cairo-born, Marseilles-bred orientalist and poet Joseph Agoub (Ya‘qūb)” (Tageldin 429). Tageldin, in fact, emphasizes Jomard’s history as “a member of Napoleon’s 1798 Egyptian campaign and editor of the *Description de l’Égypte (Description of Egypt)*,”

which monumentalized the scholarship of Napoleonic occupation,” in order to expose the latter’s intentions behind the establishment of the school, literally “to extend the severed arm of that occupation with the prosthesis of imperial education” (429). This is not to say that Muhammad Alī approved of such a plan, but rather to show the different levels on which the school, and later on, al-Tahtāwī’s book, functioned. Tageldin fully explains two which stand as extreme opposites. The mission and the book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* were, for the Ottoman ruler, sources of “more instrumental insights into the European power” that Muhammad Alī “wished to emulate and rival,” while responding, at the same time, “to the French desire to educate Egyptians in the ways of ‘civilization’ and thereby reattach them to French empire in the wake of Napoleon’s failed occupation” (428-9). This argument is included to elucidate the great value of the book and back up the earlier-stated claim of its uniqueness, away from getting involved in a discussion of invasive drives and cultural war. Tageldin, moreover, goes further in her estimation of the book’s value into questioning the accuracy of the date Ferial Ghazoul sets for the birth of comparative literature in the Arab World (1904), and claiming that it was actually born in al-Tahtāwī’s book, i.e. in 1834(428).

As for the core of the book, it is divided into six major parts organized in titles referred to as essays and subtitles called sections. The essays discuss successively: the description of the route to France, description of the stay in Marseilles, the description of the city of Paris— its topography, geography, people, housing, food, clothing, entertainment, hygiene, medicine, charity, economy, religion, and scientific progress— description of the study plan followed by the students of the mission in Paris together

with letters of encouragement from the leaders, a report on the French revolution, and, finally, a description of the way sciences and arts are classified in France. The sections in each essay range in number according to the content of this essay, the longest being the third essay devoted to the description of Paris which contains thirteen sections addressing every detail of French life and which is the main focus of the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

Paris through the Eyes of al-Tahtāwī

Although al-Tahtāwī's book addresses a variety of topics in relation to his trip to Paris including geographical depiction, political and legal concerns, issues related to social life, and classification and description of sciences, the focus of this chapter will be on the way the author presents the French social life, the customs and traditions of the French people, their interpersonal and social relations, their education and occupation, and their entertainment and leisure. The main reference will be the third essay in the core of the book devoted for the description of every detail of the French life that al-Tahtāwī encountered himself or was told about by residents there, be they natives or other travelers. Focusing on the third essay will, in no way, hinder examining and commenting on any reference in the rest of the book to the social customs and traditions of the French which may enrich the study in any way. Thus, al-Tahtāwī's account, in the second essay, for instance, of what he witnessed in Marseilles— the station on the way to Paris— as well as of what he encountered on the way between Marseilles and Paris, will not be overlooked so long as it relates to the study at hand.

The first section of the third essay describes the topography of Paris, its geographical location, soil, climate, and surrounding area. Al-Tahtāwī explains the right pronunciation of the word Paris: \p\ not \b\ and \s\ not \z\ although many Arabs use \z\. He tells about the origin of the name being that of a French tribe, explaining that the city is the capital and seat of the French King. He describes its location with respect to

the meridian lines, its height from the sea, and its distance from Cairo and Alexandria. He also describes the weather in Paris as unstable; “it may vary in the course of one day” and is rainy most of the year (166). The houses and streets are designed so that water can run down the buildings and take its way in canals. As to how the French warm themselves in cold weather, their houses, hotels, factories, shops are all supplied with fireplaces. Here, al-Tahtāwī seems a little confused as to how umbrellas, known in Egypt as sun shields: “shamsiyyāt (parasols),” are used in Paris as rain shields. What is more, al-Tahtāwī notes that only women use umbrellas while “men can never do this” believing this difference to be related to cultural reasons or an asset for women, failing to notice that the shape of men’s hats makes umbrellas unnecessary (167).

The French soil is “fertile, rich, and productive” and the French people are interested in bringing foreign plants to their land. They were able to grow palm trees, yet these are fruitless ones used for the purpose of botanical research. As for their sources of water, there exists a spring of cold mineral water beside Paris, in addition to two rivers which cut across the city. Al-Tahtāwī highlights the Seine as the most important; its water being healthy, good for the preparation of food, as well as for the “dissolution of soil” which makes it suitable for washing. Here, al-Tahtāwī draws a comparison between the Nile and the Seine: the taste of water in each of the rivers is different though both are healthy. Naturally, the difference of soil, climate, and water between Egypt and France makes the fruits of these two countries also different. However, al-Tahtāwī never misses a chance to affirm that the richness and productivity of the French land is not a gift, but rather the result of the effort of its people. This wouldn’t have been “if it were not for

the Parisians' sagacity, skill, excellent organization, and their commitment to the interests of their country" (169). Al-Tahtāwī, at this point, is indirectly urging his people to be wise, organized, and to work hard to acquire knowledge so that they contribute to the welfare of their country. He says openly, "If only Cairo were maintained and amply provided with the means of civilization, it would surely be the queen of cities, the pinnacle of the cities in the world" (170).

Al-Tahtāwī sharp eye continues to spot and register every little detail of French life. He tells about mechanical techniques used to "refresh the air" in times of heat explaining the mechanism of the process and recommending a similar procedure for Cairo. He, also very enthusiastically, illustrates the way water is carried to the city through "subterranean ditches" instead of "camel backs." Such an association implies more than words can express. Yet, al-Tahtāwī's soreness for the retarded situation in Egypt finally finds one consolation in the form of a trivial similarity between Cairo and Paris; both have rows of trees around which would "run through and surround the city" (172).

The second section of the third essay, entitled "On the people of Paris," is a very important section and a key to the development of this thesis. It presents al-Tahtāwī's first impressions together with his more mature conceptions of the French people based on his own observations, his personal experience, and, most probably, his readings and his contact with fellow travelers who were expected to familiarize him with the new society. Al-Tahtāwī opens this part with a keen assurance that the Christians of France are intelligent, unlike the Copts of Egypt; and the reader feels that al-Tahtāwī is too

cautious not to shock the awareness of his people by referring to the French as intelligent. It is very unlikely that the witty sheikh failed to notice the invalidity of the comparison he was making, for the Christians of France were the ones to rule their land and take decisions on what is to be done for its progress while the Copts of Egypt were treated as second-rate citizens, referred to as *dhimī*, and denied even their right to education. This leads to a conclusion that al-Tahtāwī's comparison is less a reflection of his belief than a shrewd attempt to convince his people that the French he is introducing are not the same as the Christians they already know and are biased against.

Al-Tahtāwī proceeds to present a set of qualities which characterize the French people. These include curiosity, passion to learning and progress in their crafts, love of change—especially in fashion, “dexterity and agility,” inconsistency in mood but not in political views, love of travel despite great attachment to their nations “*awtān*,” friendliness towards strangers—especially if those were rich, “charity only in words and deeds” but not in “money and possessions,” “punctuality” in commitment, interest in their work, “love of recognition” yet “not pride and spite”, tendency to keep their promises—no treachery or cheating— and “sincerity” (175). In addition, he claims, the French tend to spend extravagantly on personal pleasures.

Next, he portrays men as “slaves of women,” who treat their wives “as spoilt children.” Not only does al-Tahtāwī see in every hint of respect by the French men towards their women a sign of humiliation for men, but he openly contrasts the French women's situation, being in “command” of their husbands, to that of the Eastern

women, who are treated “like furniture”(177). He also notes that French men usually think well of their wives and never tend to distrust them. Divorce, al-Tahtāwī says, occurs only when a man is “convinced of the immoral behavior of his wife” (177). The accuracy of al-Tahtāwī’s conclusions about the social position of woman in post revolutionary Paris is fully discussed in the next chapter.

Al-Tahtāwī then raises the issue of homosexuality. The French intolerance towards homosexuality, especially in the social environment he came into contact with, leads him to a hasty generalization that the Parisian society is devoid of this habit. He makes it quite clear that “The French consider homosexuality to be one of the most disgusting obscenities.” The French language does not even tolerate a statement describing such affairs, and, if they have to, the French prefer using “veiled terms” (178). Al-Tahtāwī views this as a further asset of the French with which he apparently closes his list of their virtues to begin a discussion of their vices.

The first of the French vices, according to al-Tahtāwī, is “the small measures of chastity deployed by most of their women,” and the “absence of jealousy” on the part of the men when it comes to their women’s talking, joking, and trifling with other men. This shocking fact becomes less surprising as al-Tahtāwī clarifies that, in this society, adultery is viewed as “a fault or vice rather than a mortal sin” (178). He then talks of Paris as a city “filled with a great deal of immorality, heresies, and human error” despite its prominent position in the world as an intellectual capital—he even calls it “the ‘Athens’ of the French (179).

The French people tend to base all their important decisions on reason. It is really questionable that al-Tahtāwī lists such a quality under the vices of the French. However, any ambiguity is removed as we look at the consequences. Their dependence on rationality and confidence in human power and in the reformatory capacity of civilization has led them to the belief that religions are replaceable and that a reason-based civilized society is ultimately possible. Likewise, another “bad custom” is realized in their “claim that the intellect of their philosophers and physicists is greater and more perceptive than that of the prophets” (180). Al-Tahtāwī, though he is just reporting the French views, finds it difficult to set forth this piece of information free of comment and thus objects that this reveals disbelief in fate, and consequently in God (180). He is, most probably, referring to Voltaire and Rousseau who were known for ridiculing prophets.

An important observation concerning racial issues that al-Tahtāwī makes is that there is no mixing of colors in France, and, consequently, it is very rare to find “a native Parisian with a brown skin.” Not only is marriage not allowed between white and black people, but the blackness of color is also associated with ugliness and filth. He supports this saying that black women are not commonly employed as cooks (180-1). It seems that this mention of marriage and women reminds al-Tahtāwī to elaborate further on the looks and manners of French women. They are beautiful and charming, and, at the same time, never deny men who approach them “amiable company.” In parties, they are always made-up, and they are nice to men whether or not these belong to the higher classes. Al-Tahtāwī, then, fully explains the following quote, “Paris is a paradise for

women, purgatory for men, and hell for horses” (181). He sounds very convinced of what this quotation says, which leads the reader to wonder about how fully he was able to understand the real situation of women in the French society then.

This is followed by an extensive description of the French language, its origin, vocabulary, rules for conjugation, rules for spelling and reading, and its syntax, continuously referring to Arabic as a standard for this comparison. However, al-Tahtāwī never closes this part without restating his preference for Arabic: “Arabic is the most eloquent, greatest, and most extensive and exalted language to the ear” (184). He tells his reader that not all the French are unfamiliar with Arabic, and gives the example of the French Orientalist Silvestre de Sacy who knows Arabic very well.

As for the arts and sciences, they have a very prominent position in the French people’s life. Every field of science, even the common, is respected and recorded in books. The interest in learning is common to men and women, and women intellectuals in Paris have produced great works especially in the two domains of literary writing and translation. In this country, women’s good looks and amiability do not distract others from enquiring about their minds and intellectual skills as well.

The third section of this essay is devoted to a full account of the organization of the French state in the first half of the nineteenth century. The concern of this thesis is the social life and not the political system in France; thus, only a short summary of this section which might pertain to a better understanding of social relations will be presented. France, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, was a hereditary kingdom, where the king enjoyed “fundamental power” and was not the absolute ruler.

Authority was shared by a set of five Councils, each specialized in a specific domain: the Chamber of Peers, the Chamber of Deputies of the Provinces, the Council of Ministers, the Privy Council, the Council of the King's Secret, and the Council of State. Al-Tahtāwī fully explains the specific role of each of the councils, and then proceeds to talk about the French Charter. The rights and laws in this Charter were classified into different sets of articles according to their objects. There were the rights of the public, the Deputies, the Ministers, and the Judges (189-205).

Al-Tahtāwī then introduces some of the changes that occurred in the Charter after the French Revolution. It is worth noting here that the concept of revolution as it exists now was not common to the Arab and Muslim world then, and that, as a result of this fact, al-Tahtāwī had to use the Arabic word *fitna* to express this concept. This poses no problem until the readers of his days realize his admiration for the changes imposed by this “*fitna*” and the articles expressing them. They would very probably wonder about the extreme discrepancy between the negative connotation of the word *fitna*, al-Tahtāwī's word for revolution, and the “precious” value of the articles brought into the Charter by this revolution like the guarantee of complete equality between all citizens, the organization of the taxation system in a way which, unlike in Egypt, does not bother the taxpayers, or the encouragement of every member in the society to pursue knowledge and work hard to acquire new skills rather than depend upon their fathers' wealth and status.

One cannot close this part without drawing attention to the great interest al-Tahtāwī shows in the press industry. One of the articles of the French Charter gives the French

people the right to express their opinions freely. This is achieved through the existence of “daily papers, called journals and gazettes” (208). These papers include news of all types, scientific studies, and “useful announcements and advice,” and although al-Tahtāwī is fully aware of the drawbacks of such publications, like the chance of including a lot of lies, he believes that they play a major role in exposing the good and bad deeds of people, naturally leading the public to follow the example of those who do good, and to witness the punishment of wrong-doers, and thus avoid committing their deeds (209).

In the fourth section of the essay, entitled “On the Housing of the People of Paris and Related Matters,” al-Tahtāwī expresses admiration of the French architectural designs and the craftsmanship shown in them despite the quality of the material they use which is not as good. He elaborates fully on the description of the walls, floors and ceilings of the Parisian houses, as well as the furniture of these houses. He is especially interested in the study room—“a place of work and reading”—where a visitor can find, besides books, the latest journals and newspapers presented to guests on equal footing with the home owners. This, according to al-Tahtāwī “bears testimony to the importance the French attach to reading books” (215). To check the accuracy of this generalization, one cannot but put forth a point: al-Tahtāwī is in Paris for learning, and it is, thus, very natural that the people he meets would be educated people, interested in reading and learning. What is not natural is for al-Tahtāwī to find in this “testimony” enough to the importance of reading for the French—all the French. We find him saying, that every house, rich or poor, “has a bookcase since the entire population is able to write and

read” (217). Another custom in these “splendid” receptions strongly appeals to the sheikh! The mistress of the house welcomes the visitors and sits with them until her husband shows up. This stands in complete contrast to the case in Egypt where a visitor is greeted by a chibouk (a long-stemmed tobacco pipe), “most often from the hands of a black slave” (216).

A classification of the houses follows. There are a) ordinary houses, b) the dwellings of the nobles, and c) the palaces of the King and Royal family. These last are open for the public who are allowed, after earning certain permissions, to visit them and view their “wonderful furniture” when the Royal family is away in the country. There are also residences for rent, with or without furnishing, but they are expensive. He even notices that couples sleep in separate rooms “if they have been married for a long time” (217).

As for travel, it is done for several reasons. The rich people travel to the countryside to escape the heat of summer, for the air is better there. Others travel to other countries, especially to spend holidays, because they are eager to know new places and “discover” other people’s customs. Women share this “passion for knowledge” with men and they travel for the same reason. He gives examples of French women who had been to Egypt to see the pyramids and their wonders. However, al-Tahtāwī uncovers another reason for the travel of women, especially higher class women, and this is when they get pregnant outside wedlock. In order to avoid the scandal, they travel to the country under the veil of tourism, and stay there until they deliver, and then entrust the baby to a nanny for a special fee. The reader assumes, upon reading al-Tahtāwī’s next claim that

this case is infrequent and that there are “women of great virtue” among the French, that the sheikh has overcome his tendency to make rash generalizations. However, a view at the next statement proves the opposite, for al-Tahtāwī generalizes again: the French women “who display quite the contrary,” i.e. who are not virtuous, “are the majority since the hearts of most people in France, whether male or female, are in thrall to the art of love” (218-19).

Al-Tahtāwī finally expresses his admiration for the cleanliness of the French houses which is not surpassed except by that of the Dutch and which keeps them safe from insect stings. For this last purpose, they also use curtains around their beds as mosquito nets. Another aspect he appreciates is the brightness of these houses attained by the skillful design of glass-pane windows that “allow light and air both inside and outside” (219).

The next section discusses the type of food of the Franks and their habits in eating and drinking. Al-Tahtāwī makes a list of the major foods: bread made in bakeries not homes, meat, legumes, vegetables, dairy products, eggs, etc... and shows special interest in the arrangement of chores and management of the bread market in a way that saves “time and money” and wards off any bread shortage in the city. He then presents a detailed description of how slaughterhouses are run. They are located on the “outskirts” of the city for hygienic purposes. He depicts the slaughter of sheep, bulls, and birds and is critical of the way bulls are tortured before they are killed (219).

As for the eating places, they are called restaurants, and are like locandas (hotel), equipped with all what houses contain, and supplied with food and drink. The Franks

use plates, forks and spoons for eating and “drink wine instead of water with their food.” However, they do not drink alcohol to get drunk, for they consider drunkenness “a weakness and a vice.” They never praise wine or write eulogies about it as Arabs are known to do in their literature. He expresses his wonder at the preservation techniques used by the French to keep their foods edible (milk for five years, meat for ten years, and fruits “out of season”), yet he finds their fruits with no flavor or sweetness, except for peaches. Their wine houses are the places of the “riff-raff” that go there with their women and never leave except when they are drunk, noisy but not belligerent (222).

He speaks, in the next part, of the clothing of the French. Men are free to wear what they like; they generally dress in black but are expected to wear hats anyway. They use underwear and are known for cleanliness. The wealthy among them change their underwear several times a week which keeps them safe from fleas. As for women, they dress beautifully but a little immodestly, wear little jewelry but never anklets. They wear long scarves of fur to warm themselves in winter. Al-Tahtāwī’s observant eye does not miss the “thin belt” that women wear over their dresses to make their waists look thinner and haunches fuller. He even notices that they “attach a tin rod to the belt which extends from the belly to their bosom” so that their posture remains straight.” The French women distinguish themselves from the Egyptian in that they never let their hair loose but always “gather it in the middle of their heads.” In summer, women tend to uncover parts of their bodies, especially the area around their necks, yet they never show their legs since, according to al-Tahtāwī, these “are not exceptional at all” (223-4). It sounds quite remarkable that such a depiction of every minute detail in the clothes

and bodies of the French women would come from an Azhar sheikh, expected, due to religious teaching, to avoid gazing at a ‘foreign’ woman, i.e. not attached to him by blood kinship or by marriage.

The last part of this section addresses the manner the Franks show mourning. They wear a specific sign for a specific period of time. This is placed on the men’s hats and on the women’s dresses. Al-Tahtāwī also refers to the use of wigs by people who are bald or who have “bad hair”. This habit has reached Egypt (225).

The seventh section comprises a vivid depiction of the means of entertainment used by the French. Since they are generally “not involved in the matters of devotion” and prayer, they tend to spend their leisure time at either of the following events classified into *grands* and *petits spectacles* including a) plays in which the actors look like the Egyptian *awālim*—professional dancers and singers who were banned by Muhammad Alī for their bad reputation— yet are refined and eloquent, b) *Opéra*, with the best musicians and dancers, c) *Opéra- Comique*, singing wonderful verses, c) *Théâtre- Italien*, where Italian verses are accompanied by splendid music, d) *Théâtre Franconi*, known now as Circus with all its wondrous shows. Al-Tahtāwī marvels at a statement that shows up at the end of each play, stating that “amusement improves the morals,” and even seems to agree with its claim if it were not for the “Satanic leanings” included in those plays. Otherwise, the theatre could have been “an institution with highly beneficial virtues” (228). He sets their performances in contrast to the dancing of the Egyptian *awālim* full of seduction and immorality.

Other sources of entertainment are Panorama, Cosmorama, Diorama, Uranorama, and Europeorama. Al-Tahtāwī was, in fact, introducing new terms which had no parallel in Arabic, and it seems that some of the words he used continued to be used in Arabic after him like the word “*ūbberā*” for opera.

There are also dance halls where two kinds of balls are held; public, open to all people, and private, with lists of people invited like in Egyptian weddings. He explains the rules of etiquette followed in such balls though he does not seem to understand them as such. One of these rules is that men do not sit down unless all the women present are seated while women are not expected to give up their seats to anyone. He finds in this, as well as in the tendency of any new comer to greet women first, a sign of “greater regard” for women than their men. In France, dancing is considered an art, and unlike the “morally depraved” and desire-arousing *awālim* dance in Egypt, is some kind of jump “devoid of even the slightest whiff of debauchery.” The French women dance with every man who asks them, whether they know him or not, and prefer to be asked by several men and brag about it. Another dance he describes is one in which the man puts his arm around his partner’s waist and holds her hand during the dance. Al-Tahtāwī demonstrates a softer, more tolerant attitude in his judgment of women than he does earlier in the book when he clarifies that “touching the upper part of the body of a woman... is not considered indecent by these Christians.” Not only this, but a man’s “good breeding” is determined by how much he talks to women and commends them (231).

Other entertainment activities common in summer time are public feasts which involve music, dancing, fireworks, and other activities. They include carnival days which stand for what the Copts of Egypt call *ayyām al-rifāa* (Shrovetide). During this period, nothing is prohibited that would not pose a threat to the general welfare of the kingdom. These are days of madness during which people wear masks and disguises assuming a variety of personalities, and committing all sorts of crazy deeds. For amusement, there are also vast public parks full of trees lined up in parallel rows for walkers to stroll along. There are restaurants and cafes, as well as chairs for rent, and Sundays are usually the most crowded in these parks. Two further amusement places are boulevards and flower markets. The first are walking roads surrounded by trees with several cafés along their path, musicians playing their instruments, and even women ready “to make the acquaintance of men, particularly at night” —Al-Tahtāwī is, of course, referring to prostitutes. They are also places where you can find lovers walking arm in arm. Flower markets, in addition to selling all types of flowers and bushes, also provide a nice and healthy walking area for lovers and seekers of relaxing strolls.

The eighth section of this essay addresses the issue of hygiene in the city of Paris. In this part, al-Tahtāwī focuses mainly on the great importance the French show to cleanliness and physical health. For this purpose, they practice variety of sports like swimming, horse riding, and other games. As for their bathes, they are of different types that he describes in detail. Al-Tahtāwī finds the French baths cleaner, more beneficial, and more decent than those in Egypt. Unlike in Egypt, there are no communal bathes in France since the French cannot see each others’ private parts. Besides, there are schools

which teach the basics of common sport activities which help improve bodily strength and health like swimming, acrobatics, and wrestling (233-4).

“On the Interest in Medical Sciences in Paris” is the title of the ninth section of this essay. This section provides a thorough portrayal of the medical condition in France in the nineteenth century. Paris, says al-Tahtāwī, is a central city in Europe where foreigners travel for learning various sciences or for medical treatment. There are a lot of doctors classified into two groups: a) general practitioners who study the different medical branches and b) specialist practitioners who, after this general medical training, specialize in domains like ophthalmology, mental illness, genital illness, skin disease, gynecology (he calls them doctors who “help women give birth”), orthopedics, and others. Patients either ask doctors to visit them at their homes, or they go themselves to the doctor’s home within fixed hours. Besides, there is a place called “house of health” for people who pay a regular sum of money for the medical services offered to them as well as their room and board. As for patients with problems in their bones, they visit special clinics to be treated and even to replace lost limbs by artificial ones. There are also special places equipped with all that is necessary for childbirth, in addition to public hospitals that provide free medical services for poor people.

Medicine has witnessed several great discoveries and al-Tahtāwī marvels particularly at a technique which uses magnetism as a means of anesthetization. He gives the example of a woman who had a surgery with no pain, for she was under the influence of magnetism, but unfortunately died a few days later. Al-Tahtāwī reports, but never discusses, the doctors’ claim that, since the woman survived the surgery, it is

reasonable that she did not die of pain. This is, in fact, a very naïve and uncritical response especially when al-Tahtāwī follows it by a conclusion that magnetism is a suitable treatment for chronic diseases.

He makes a list of the branches of medical sciences including anatomy, diagnostics, pharmaceuticals, pathology, surgery, gynecology and pharmacology. He also refers to the medical schools, especially the biggest of them, the Royal Academy of Medicine which is a council where the best doctors of France study and treat diseases which might pose public danger on the whole kingdom, like cattle diseases, and apply the Kingdom policies in relation to the general health of the people, like vaccination, finding and testing new remedies, and other activities. Al-Tahtāwī then presents a translation of a medical manual he had already done in Paris which summarizes the basic regulations of health and hygiene under the title “Advice from the Doctor.” He admits that it is a little out of context in this place of the text, yet says he has included it so that his people would benefit from its content. Daniel Newman, the translator in the version used in this thesis, excludes this section for he does not find in it any literary or historical value.

The tenth section of the essay tackles the issue of charity in the city of Paris. People generally use their skills and crafts to make a living and it is, in most cases, illness or some accident which makes them resort to other sources like begging. The large population of the city normally increases the possibility of facing cases of poverty. Al-Tahtāwī accuses the whole French community of “tightfistedness and meanness” and seems unconvinced by their excuse that generosity will encourage dependence, and consequently laziness, on the part of the poor. However, this lack of generosity of the

French is made up for by the presence of quite a good number of charitable hospitals and institutions. Al-Tahtāwī draws an extended comparison, with specific examples, between the generosity of the Arabs and miserliness of the Franks. He even extends his claim of stinginess to all the “civilized countries” (239).

The hospitals in Paris are managed by a council of 15 members and five divisions. A patient needs a doctor’s statement to be admitted to the hospital and, when he leaves, receives a financial donation to support him until he returns to work. The largest hospital is Hôtel Dieu where only the sick and injured are admitted, for other patients like those with incurable illnesses, chronic diseases, mental disorders, children, and pregnant women have special hospitals equipped to treat them. Saint-Louis is one example of such hospitals special for the chronically ill. Paris also has special homes for children “from the streets,” mostly illegitimate children, and others for orphans, where the orphan is taken care of until s/he reaches the age of 21. Other hospitals include some specialized in vaccination, one for incurable diseases, another for blind people, a third for the insane, and finally one for the war victims.

Paris also has a Council of Charity which looks after people who lose their livelihood for one reason or another. This provides aid on two levels: short-term, supporting those with temporary cases of unemployment, and long-term, for those who cannot work at all. Besides, on the banks of the rivers, there are rescue centers supplied with inhalers and first aid material to tackle cases of drowning. The funding for such charitable activities depends on the donations of people, and al-Tahtāwī expresses his

astonishment at the large sums of money that can be collected from such donations, especially that they come willingly from people he has already accused of stinginess.

In the eleventh section, al-Tahtāwī speaks about the earnings of the Parisians and their crafts and skills. He elaborates fully on their great love for work and enthusiasm for the making of money, together with their passionate readiness to face all kinds of difficulties for the purpose of success in their business. The most famous among the French businesses is banking, and bankers are two types: Kingdom bankers and private bankers. Both accept money deposits from people and give them yearly interests in return, and although the interests offered by the bankers of Paris are better than those offered by the State or Treasury bankers, dealing with the latter is more secure since the kingdom will never go bankrupt. There is also a company known as “partners of liability” which resembles in its functions and procedures the modern insurance companies. Among the famous Parisian businesses are the royal and private manufactories which work with metals (gold and silver), porcelain, wax, soap, cotton, and animal skins, and these industries are in continuous progress. Selling goods in large stores is another popular business where a trader is supposed to achieve a permission from the Treasury council in return for a sum of money in order to be allowed to open a store.

Since the business of commerce is a valuable source of profit for the country, there is a commerce school called *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce* (College for Commerce) specialized in training suitable personnel for this business. The prominent position commerce occupies in the prosperous industrial milieu in Paris is due to a set of reasons

including the organization of the land and water routes, the telegraph invention, the exceptional arrangement of mail and postal services, and the use of newspapers for advertising and promoting goods. Al-Tahtāwī shows his admiration for the system of transportation and the consequent benefit it lends to mail and postal services in Paris. He explains how different types of carriages, vessels, ships, and carts are used to carry people and goods across the city, and is highly appreciative of the ease by which letters reach their right destination because of using house numbers in addresses, as well as of the great respect the French attach to privacy in dealing with other people's mail.

Al-Tahtāwī, then, refers to the great importance of earning in the lives of the French to the extent that even their children express extreme happiness upon receiving any sum of money. Hard weather never hinders them from work, and even the simplest among them earns an adequate annual sum. However, this does not lead them to disobey the Kingdom tax policies, and they willingly pay taxes in accordance with their profits, thus keeping the prosperity of the French state. He relates this to the justice that prevails in that land so that a "tyrannical king or minister never lasts very long with them" (248). The affluence of the French is also a result of their excellence at saving and economizing, and the reasonable management of their financial affairs unlike the Egyptians.

The twelfth section is devoted to the description of the religion of the French who believe in Catholic Christianity, the religion of the state as well as of the majority of the people. Yet, according to al-Tahtāwī, the French are "Christians in name only" (249). They do not practice the devotional services of their religion nor do they restrain from

its prohibitions. He presents the example of the very few people who stop eating meat during the season of fasting. At this point, and maybe for the first time in the text, al-Tahtāwī includes a comment made by the aforementioned Silvestre de Sacy, “arguably the most important French orientalist of the nineteenth century” (Tageldin 422), upon reading the above claim, in which he objects to al-Tahtāwī’s generalization, considering it inaccurate and unfair, and clarifying that the number of God believers and virtue doers among the French “constitute an innumerable group of men and women” (249). From such a comment, al-Tahtāwī concludes that de Sacy himself is one of the religious which is the reason he is defending them.

Al-Tahtāwī is very critical of the Christian doctrine which forbids the marriage of the clergy; he finds it “dreadful” and believes it to increase “their sinfulness and moral depravity” (250). Another practice that he finds quite as unacceptable is the confession that common people are supposed to make to the priests so that they forgive their sins. The severe attack al-Tahtāwī makes on these two principles shocks the reader and arouses a question around whether de Sacy has read this part as well. However, a deeper observation shows that the sheikh has smartly chosen something which would be the safest to attack—safest because al-Tahtāwī’s audience will in no way be offended by such an attack, but would rather find in it a proof of al-Tahtāwī’s loyalty to his and their religion. At the same time, criticizing the devotional practices of Christianity does not pose the risk of repelling the Egyptian readers from the French simply because al-Tahtāwī has already repeatedly emphasized the detachment of the French people from the dogma of their religion.

He then enumerates the hierarchy of the Christian church from top to bottom: the Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop, Priest, Curate, and Deacon. As for the religious feasts, they include the Shrovetide, Epiphany, Fête Dieu, Le fête d'une personne.

The thirteenth and last section of the third essay deals with the organization of the sciences, arts, and crafts and focuses on the advanced state these sciences and skills have reached in the French land. The French scientists are never surpassed by any of their European counterparts. They are characterized by their critical thinking, but, despite their profound belief in reason, they have some philosophical concepts which detach from any rules of reason yet which they "twist and defend" so skillfully that people are convinced of their truth (251). According to al-Tahtāwī, logical reason is used by some of the French philosophers to make heresies and anti-religious ideas acceptable to the public. He makes it quite clear that it is unsafe for a Muslim not well-informed in the Islamic dogma to discuss religious or philosophical topics with them.

Al-Tahtāwī finds in the "simplicity" of the French language one of the reasons which renders its sciences and arts easier to be learned and comprehended by people from around the world. He issues a comparison between the Arabic science books which require readers to employ an extensive knowledge of Arabic rhetoric to understand them, and which are loaded with footnotes that make reading even more difficult, and the French books which demand a minimum familiarity with the basics of the language and are "devoid of any obscurities" and "ambiguity" (253). Interestingly, this style of the French will have its indelible influence on all of al-Tahtāwī later works.

Al-Tahtāwī, as he has done repeatedly throughout the essay, next presents another ideal image of the French people who crave for knowledge and have “a natural propensity for the acquisition of learning,” and who all, even the ordinary man and the child, speak like scholars and discuss “profound scientific questions” (253). Al-Tahtāwī’s next comment on the education of children in the French society foreshadows an overwhelming interest in the topic of education that shows later in his life, whether in the books he translates and writes, or in his career when he is employed by Khedive Saʿīd Pasha to contribute to the reform of the Egyptian educational system. He claims that the French children “enjoy an excellent upbringing,” and they get married between the age 20 and 25 only after they have completed their studies and that only few of the Franks of age 20 are without a schooling degree or a craft (254).

The idea of specialization among the French scholars and intellectuals attracts al-Tahtāwī’s attention. He states that after being generally informed about several subjects, “they devote their efforts to a special branch of knowledge” (255). He also makes it clear to his readers that the priests in Paris, unlike in the Muslim world, are specialized only in Christian theology; and the title “scholar” does not apply to them but rather to those who know one or the other of the rational sciences. He regrets the absence of most of these sciences in the Muslim world while they are in continuous progress in the French land that “new arts, skills, procedures, and perfections” are recorded every year (256). Al-Tahtāwī promises to acquaint his reader with some of these sciences in the coming parts of his book. He then expresses his surprise at the great similarity between the French and Arab soldiers in their immense courage and deep passion. They are even

similar in their tendency to juxtapose these two issues in their poetry as he shows through some examples he includes.

Al-Tahtāwī praises the French for the huge libraries they have; the 400,000-volume Bibliothèque Royale which includes Arabic books that are rare even in Egypt and some versions of the Qur’ān that are treated respectfully, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal with 200,000 printed volumes and 10,000 manuscripts, Bibliothèque Mazarine, the library of the Institut, the municipal library and other specialized libraries in the domains of botany, astronomy, medicine, and others. The state libraries count up to 40 and the scholars of France, whatever their economic status, form their own libraries accordingly with their financial capabilities. Repeating his arguable conclusion that all the people of Paris can read and write, al-Tahtāwī expresses his extreme regard for the fact that “it is rare to find anyone who does not own at least a few books,” and that the rich people allot a specific room in the house to be used as a library.

In Paris, there are also museums used basically for learning purposes and for enriching the practical knowledge of researchers. Besides, there is the Royal garden known as Jardin des Plantes where all types of plants are grown, and a wide range of animal species are gathered, and specimens of rock and soil from around the world are collected. Students of botany and pharmacology prefer studying in the place, for this gives them the chance to witness what they read about. Others interested in any field of natural sciences would also find in the garden enormous benefits. Other important places in Paris are the Royal Observatory devoted to the science of astronomy which al-

Tahtāwī describes in detail, and the Conservatoire (warehouse) containing equipment of all sizes and types, in addition to schools for various sciences, crafts and arts.

Al-Tahtāwī introduces in detail the different academies, societies and councils where the French scholars and knowledge pursuers seek intellectual progress and into which they organize themselves. He lists the academies and the corresponding societies and explains the tasks of each; these are: the academy of the French language (Académie Française), the academy of literary science and knowledge of history and archaeology (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres), the academy of natural and engineering sciences (Académie des Sciences), the academy of fine arts (Académie de Beaux-arts), and the academy of philosophy (Académie des Science Morales et Politiques). He also makes a list of the famous schools: Collège Royale de France, Ecole Polytechnique (the school of the totality of sciences), Ecole de Droit (the school of legal branches), Ecole de Ponts et Chaussées (school for bridges and embankments), Ecole Royale des Mines (for studies of mineralogy), together with schools of arts and crafts, of oriental languages, of history and politics of states, of botany and anatomy, of animal medicine, a specialized school for the deaf and dumb, and another for the blind, in addition to pensions, i.e. schools which teach small children reading, writing, practical sciences and other subjects.

The last part of this section returns to journalism, mentioned earlier by al-Tahtāwī, and the essential role it plays in promoting the public's political awareness and putting them in the picture of contemporary scientific discovery and invention. Journalists are free to express their political view and opinion in the methods of running the state — of

course within specific limits, and different groups of newspapers are devoted to different, and sometimes opposite, “schools of thought” and political aspirations. Yet, these journals do not avoid lying as the French community is known to do, and al-Tahtāwī finds them even more “mendacious” and prejudiced than the Arab poets. People can read books, newspapers, and other publications in reading rooms (cabinets de lecture) for a specific fee, or they can borrow them. This keeps them informed and up-to-date at reasonable expenses. The book trade is a flourishing one and the number of yearly publications is beyond count; this backs up what al-Tahtāwī has repeatedly said about the French thirst for knowledge and their zeal for reading and learning.

This is the end of the third essay, the main concern of this study as already mentioned, yet a quick look at the rest of the essays would be useful in the attempt at bringing together a detailed portrait of French life in the eyes of al-Tahtāwī. He devotes the fourth essay in the core of the book for the explanation of the educational plan designed by Jomard for the students of the mission. He elaborates on the residence plan, the courses, teaching and testing methodology, tells of the encouragement they received on regular basis from the ruler Muhammad Alī, refers to some of the letters he received from French scholars, and, most importantly, presents a detailed list of his readings and translations during his stay in Paris.

The next essay addresses the French revolution: its causes, events, and its political and legal consequences. Though not the essential interest of this study, one cannot but notice al-Tahtāwī’s enthusiasm and, at the same time, his astonishment at the ability of the Franks to object to their King’s policies to the extent of removing him, as well as at

the role played by the Chamber of Deputies in this revolution. The view of officials working against their king was not common to al-Tahtāwī who comes from a background where the ruler enjoys absolute authority and his political decisions are never discussed but only pleaded and besought. The proceedings and consequences of the French revolution are referred to later in the study only when that pertains to a better understanding of al-Tahtāwī's vision of the French society as opposed to that of others who wrote about this topic.

As for the last essay in the book, it comprises of a classification of the French sciences and arts with their divisions and subdivisions; a description of the grammar and syntax of the French language; a discussion of the art of writing together with the use of rhetoric in French in comparison to Arabic; a presentation of the principles of logic and the categories attributed to Aristotle; and finally an account of the science of Arithmetic as used and understood by the French.

What remains is an epilogue in which al-Tahtāwī tells about his return to Egypt and presents “a summary of this journey and the observations and ideas that [he has] carefully scrutinized and examined” (361). In this part, he reiterates some of his earlier claims and conclusions, and, most interestingly, corrects, or at least displays a more comprehensive view, of some others. His scrutiny and full examination leads him to the conclusion that the French are closer to the Arabs than the Turks or other peoples, especially in their “honour, freedom, and pride” (361). Consequently, the lack of jealousy on the part of French men regarding their women does not at all reflect a shortage in honor, for those men are “the most malicious” when their women betray

them (362). He even goes further into explaining to his Muslim readers that it is impossible to measure the chastity of the French women by their way of dressing, simply because these are never expected to wear the veil, but rather by whether they have received “a good or bad education” (364). A consequence of this education will be either loyalty to one partner or getting involved in numerous affairs. Here, al-Tahtāwī falls again into another one of his contentious generalizations when he makes loyalty a characterizing feature of middle class women as opposed to the upper classes and the riff-raff. Whether he was accurate or not is also discussed in the next chapter in light of contemporary historical records as well as travel reports by other visitors of the nineteenth-century France.

However, if al-Tahtāwī spends an effort to bring the French honor up to the level of the Arab, he finds himself doing quite the opposite when it comes to freedom. Here, al-Tahtāwī devotes almost five pages for relating a *mufākhara* (a literary genre taking the form of a ‘war of words’) between a king of the Arabs, al-Nuḥmān Ibn al-Mundhir, and the Persian king, Khosrow, where the Arab king succeeds in proving that “the love for freedom has also been part of the Arab character from ancient times” (370).

In the last part of his epilogue, al-Tahtāwī expresses his gratitude for the efforts of Maître Jomard, the organizer of the students’ residence and instruction in Paris, only to follow it by an extract of the latter’s preface to the book entitled *Almanac* in which he makes a list “of the priority of crafts and skills necessary for Egypt” (371). Such a quotation can be simply understood as an attempt by al-Tahtāwī to gain support for his

aspirations for the future of Egypt in front of the Khedive, from a person to whom the Khedive himself has entrusted the responsibility of the mission.

Al-Tahtāwī closes his book by urging readers “to read it carefully in its entirety” to understand its claims, notice its “failings” and forgive them,

Try to hide the defect when it appears—

As God forgives many sins!

In light of all that has been said so far, it is undeniable that al-Tahtāwī’s book is a valuable document not only as an Arab sheikh’s account of nineteenth-century Paris, but also as one of the earliest records of the east-west encounter, with all the connotations of these two functions. In *Takhlīs*, al-Tahtāwī wittily and skillfully tries to compromise between his precision as a documenter, his background as an Azharite, involving what he believes to be his obligation as a devout Muslim, and, most importantly, the expectations of the ambitious *wālī* and benefactor. It is exactly in the area between these diverse extremes that the comparative task of the coming chapter finds its field of action.

CHAPTER FIVE

Al-Tahtāwī's Paris: Fiction or Fact

Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Tahtāwī tries, in his book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, to present an image of nineteenth century France as he viewed it during his five-year stay there. He overtly states in the book's preface that his book is not only an account of the journey, but rather a sum of "its fruits and goals." In a statement of his real purpose behind writing the book, he wholeheartedly wishes that it will be "favourably received" by Muhammad ʿAlī, and that the people of the "Islamic Nations—both Arab and non-Arab" will be aroused with the help of its contents "from their sleep of indifference" (100). With this early reference to a further goal of the book than the mere representation of the reality of the French life, al-Tahtāwī actually, and maybe without being fully aware of it, poses an extra set of restrictions on his objectivity. In order for the book to become, as al-Tahtāwī wishes, a guide for the people of the Islamic nations in their awakening "from their sleep of indifference," it should, without doubt, present an imitable ideal, which balances the two images of a developed West and a traditional Islamic East. This will naturally influence the man's choice of what to record and what to ignore, what to stress and what to marginalize, what to merely mention and what to explain and justify.

This chapter undertakes a comparison between al-Tahtāwī's image of France as set forth in his *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, and the image that can be drawn from historical as well as literary representations of the city by foreigners whose stay in Paris

coincided with that of al-Tahtāwī. It focuses basically, for space and time restrictions, on aspects of the social life that al-Tahtāwī had chosen to stress, but also touches on other topics whenever necessary. This argument does not intend to supply absolute answers, but rather tries to stimulate a critical way of thinking about these topics.

5.1 Woman and Family:

Among the interesting issues al-Tahtāwī addresses in his book is his exposition of the status of the French women, and even more interesting is the fact that this topic, in particular, reveals a great deal in relation to al-Tahtāwī's inability to avoid judgmental comments. It also exposes the evolutionary track his opinion pertaining to this specific issue takes, which ends in an explanatory paragraph in the epilogue where he spends an exceptional effort to clarify that acts considered indecent by Eastern readers are not seen as such by the French, and to correct some of the earlier generalizations he had already made in his text. Throughout the book, al-Tahtāwī approaches different topics that deal with women and provides shifting levels of elaboration on each. He talks about women's appearance, clothes, and presence in social events. He also describes their domestic roles and their roles in the working field, together with concerns of adultery, divorce, and prostitution, and their achievements in the domain of intellectual skills.

Al-Tahtāwī, and upon his first mention of women during the first walk he takes in Marseilles, describes them as "beautiful" (152). He is quite astonished that "the women of this country are used to revealing their face, head, the throat as well as what lies

beneath it, the nape of the neck and what lies beneath it, and their arms almost up to the shoulders” (152). Later in the book, he offers a more detailed account. He confesses that he finds their clothes “pretty,” but, at the same time, that “there is a certain immodesty about them.” He reiterates the fact of their showing bare necks and arms, adds that they wear little jewelry and “never show their legs,” and sees it very agreeable that they do not leave their hair loose. Yet, he is alert enough to convey to his Eastern readers a fact which would minimize their expected negative attitude, “this (exposing bare arms and other parts of the body) is not considered indecent by people of this country” (223-4). Al-Tahtāwī’s description, so far, can be well supported by referring to a single nineteenth-century painting which portrays a woman. In such paintings, as well as in fashion reports, an observer can see or read about fashionable brocaded dresses exposing necks and sometimes even arms, hair collected by combs under embroidered hats, shawls and fans.

One, however, cannot disregard claims that the nineteenth-century witnessed a decline in the use of heavy brocaded dresses in favor of less tight neoclassical *à la greque* fashioned dresses. These latter were characterized by simplicity of style—flowing gowns with belts positioned “below the breast rather than at the waist” and textile—“transparent gauzes and light muslins” together with “draped shawls”. According to Claire Cage, “stiffly boned corsets and brightly colored satins and other heavy fabrics had become a relic of the ancien régime” in the nineteenth-century. Because “Neo-Grecian fashions were commended for liberating the maternal body and breast,” women started to follow the Grecian statuettes’ example of “nude arms and

bare breasts” (197). To support her claims, Cage cites the *Journal de Paris* comparing women dressed *à la grecque* to nude statues, and consequently posing a question which translates, “Haven’t you seen at spectacles, balls, in society, a crowd of figures, who are neither marble nor bronze, even more nude than these statues?” (200).

Yet, one cannot take Cage’s argument of the rise of neoclassical fashion to apply to the whole French society at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, especially when her main sources happen to be fashion journals and memoirs of female artists, simply confirming the fact that such way of dressing was new and specific to a particular segment of the society. Corsets and brocades did surely survive, and it is in this context that al-Tahtāwī’s next two notes on French women’s attire can be discussed. Al-Tahtāwī sounds remarkably accurate as he notices and registers the tiniest details, “It is also their (the French women’s) custom to wear a thin belt on their dresses with a view to making their waists look slim and their haunches full” (223). He also states that they “tend to attach a tin rod to the belt, which extends from the belly to their bosoms so that their posture is always straight without curves” (224). Unlike the reason he gives for women wearing stockings all the time, which does not prove convincing (he thinks they do so because their legs are not good-looking), he succeeds in explaining why they wear the thin “belt” and the “tin rod.” Many historians, especially gender history writers, assert that, in those days, the ultimate purpose of every French girl was to be “chosen” for marriage. According to Susan Foley, “girls were taught that the most important consideration for a successful future was to be pleasing to others, especially men” (36). Besides being sociable and friendly, “Being pleasing to others also implied being

physically attractive. Girls pursued the idealized figure of the wasp-like waist and delicate features, if necessary, by undertaking dramatic and dangerous diets” (Foley 37). Thus, as this quotation suggests, and in order to appear pretty, girls not only wore belts and corsets, but they were ready to starve themselves. Even if we accept Cage’s argument for the rise of neoclassical fashion, the underlying ideology remains “to regulate femininity and gender boundaries by evoking the notion of the ‘natural’ ” (196). The purpose was the reinforcement, through the dress, of the natural maternal role of the woman as opposed to the masculine role. The claim was that a woman’s bosom, “which has the duties of maternity, requires a salutary support” realized in the upward placement of the belt, and that freeing the body from practices which “smothered” it (supposedly stiff corsets), allowed for a “good appetite and good digestion” producing a healthy future mother.

Whether the women he met wore traditional or neoclassical dresses, al-Tahtāwī’s sharp eye could register and portray a figure very close to reality concerning their outer appearance. The question remains whether he would be able to retain his accuracy when it comes to issues that require interpretation like talking about women’s domestic and social roles, the nature of their relations and the function they satisfy in their society.

Before that, however, it would be essential to offer some explanation to excuse al-Tahtāwī’s surprise to see women with bare heads, necks, and arms. Following is a quotation from a travelogue of Egypt, by a U.S. woman travel writer, describing in detail the way Egyptian women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century dressed

when a lady goes out she wears ... a large, loose gown of bright colored silk which is confined around the waist by a band embroidered with gold. Next is put on the veil which is a long strip of white muslin concealing all the face except the eyes and reaching nearly to the feet. It is stitched at the top to a band about an inch wide which passes up to the forehead between the eyes and at the two upper to a band that is tied around the head. This does not render the wearer quite *hideous* enough and in order that the charms of her person be entirely covered, the lady then covers herself with a 'hobarah' The ends are gathered up in the hands and when this shawl ... is drawn around, the lady looks more like a walking mummy than a living being. (Warzeski 312)

The appearance of French women would surely surprise al-Tahtāwī who had, throughout his earlier life, only seen women whose charms were totally hidden from the eyes of foreigners in the above-described way. Moreover, in light of Cage's article, and assuming al-Tahtāwī had really come across women dressed *à la grecque* as described in that article, his surprise would be judged as very natural when the reader knows that these same dresses were criticized by Napoleon. Cage refers to the French Journal *Le Moniteur Universel* reporting "that Napoleon himself denounced the indecency of women's neoclassical dress" (200).

Another remarkable fact that al-Tahtāwī does not fail to notice is the difference between women of the urban areas and those of rural areas. He finds that "in these villages and small towns the beauty of the women and the freshness of their bodies exceed those of the women in the capital" (159). Besides, they are "less made-up"

(159). By “freshness of their bodies,” al-Tahtāwī actually means their good health. Again, and with reference to some historical reports of the period, the rural world in the nineteenth-century France was one “in which physical endurance was a prized quality. If female ‘weakness’ was inculcated in bourgeois girls, ‘delicacy’ was not valued where hard labour was the norm for both sexes” (Foley 85). Wives, in the rural areas dependent on farming and land revenues, were chosen with the consideration that they would join the labor force of their husbands’ families. The comment on their being “less made-up” is also accurate. In fact, it took the peasant society until 1880 for women start having interest in fashion. They started to desire ribbons, finery, dresses, and crinolines; and only then did they start “to wear brassières that exhibited their figures rather than tight bands camouflaging them” (Foley 86).

The American novelist, travel writer, and social critic James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) does not seem to share al-Tahtāwī’s great enthusiasm for French women’s looks or their attire. Not only does he sarcastically tell a friend that, in the Soirees he is attending, “Princesses and Duchesses are as plenty as hogs in the streets of Paris,” but he also finds them “not very richly attired” (146, 160). Other American travelers, however, seem closer in their attitude towards French women to al-Tahtāwī than they are to Cooper. David Mc Cullough cites one of those travelers, John Sanderson, commenting as he views fashionable women tread the gardens of Paris, “I never venture in here without saying part of the Lord’s Prayer about temptation ...” (44), and another, Nathaniel Willis so delighted to find that young attractive women “always handsome and always dressed in the height of the mode” wait on male customers in men’s wear

shops, that he confesses getting “nearly ‘ruined’ financially by one pretty sales clerk with a way of ‘caressing and caressing each of one’s fingers, as she tries on a pair of gloves one doesn’t want’” (34).

If it takes a woman’s eye to judge women’s fashion, then a valuable reference can be found in the favorable comments of Emma Willard, an American school owner and director, and another traveler to Paris mentioned by Mc Cullough. As she is in the Italian Opera watching a performance of *Otello*, she does not hide her gladness for being seated in a place where she can examine the audience— the French “genteel society.” She comments

I never saw so many well dressed ladies together before; but it was not so much new forms of things which I saw as it was a greater perfection of material, of making and putting on. In manners also, one remarks a difference between these people and those we see at home under similar circumstances. All seem to live not for themselves, but for others. Nobody looks dreamy—but all are animated—gentlemen are alert if a glove or fan is dropped, and ladies never forget the appropriate nod, or smile of thanks. (cited in Mc Cullough 48-49)

Thus, more than one American traveler to Paris, contemporary to al-Tahtāwī, yet devoid of the complications of his traditions and background stated above, share his admiration for the French women’s looks and fashion. The simple conclusion will be a plus point for al-Tahtāwī’s accuracy in conveying a reflection of the outer appearance of women in that period. Cooper’s indifference, thus, becomes an exception to the

attitudes of the other American travelers. This indifference can be explained either by the man's getting used to meeting women, for his fame that preceded him to France had placed him in a plenty of social occasions, like the Soirées of the above quotation, or by Cooper's frank confession that he is "by no means an adept in describing diaper, lamas, trains, diamonds or rouge" and that "a very short account must, therefore, suffice, for the table-clothes, ladies dresses and decorations" (193). When one reads such a declaration, it becomes reasonable to find the description of women Cooper presents in his *Letters and Journals* restricted to their wearing feathery hats, tartans and shawls in addition to what has already been stated above.

As al-Tahtāwī starts describing women's role in social events, his judgmental observations start to take wider space, matched necessarily with misunderstanding of the actual motives behind the actions he portrays. Al-Tahtāwī maintains that French women are "nice and amiable company. They always make themselves pretty, and mix with the men ..." (181). The lady of the house welcomes guests before her husband (216). "In social gatherings, a female is always treated with greater regard than a man." For example, a guest must greet the lady of the house before the men. Also interesting is the part on dancing and parties. A woman dances with whoever invites her "irrespective of whether the man knows the lady or not." She feels "pleased" if she is invited more than once by more than one man (230-31). Accurate observations as these are, they are misinterpreted by al-Tahtāwī. To him, women's contact with men in social events, and their dancing with strangers are indications of lack of chastity. Moreover, he finds in the practices of women greeting guests before their husbands, and of the master of the

house “regardless of his rank” coming “after his wife or the ladies of the house” into the room where guests are received, signs of humiliation of men. The fact, in this respect, remains that the French were doing nothing but sticking to the principles of etiquette.

Foley asserts that, in the nineteenth century

The rules of behavior at social events were strictly defined in manuals of good conduct. A young woman was instructed not to attract attention; to remain seated by her mother; to dance with anyone who invited her; never to meet a man's gaze directly; to remain within her mother's field of vision; to reply to questions but not to initiate conversation. (Foley 33)

A true lady, according to these manuals, was one who was “submissive, malleable, and modest” showing “no will of (her) own” (Foley 33). In light of this, and contrary to al-Tahtāwī's conclusions, when a woman danced with anyone who invited her, it was not necessarily because she enjoyed it, but because she was supposed to do so, or else she would not be conforming to the principles of “good conduct.” The same can be said about the principles of greeting guests and keeping their company.

But what is the other travelers' say in this domain. To start with, Cooper, though not very enthusiastic to the practice of description, does not fail to register this remark, “I saw a little difference in the manner of reception of our own country, excepting that everybody is ... announced, and that the ladies all entered and departed in front of their beaux, instead of leaning on their arms, as with us” (160). According to Cooper, this adds to the lady's look of grace though it weakens her “delicate and lady-like appearance.” Emma Willard, as the quotation cited earlier in the text suggests, is quite

aware of the difference between the American and the French culture in manners. The continuous state of alertness on the side of the individuals in French social occasions to the principles of etiquette—men in full attention to any dropping of a glove or fan and ladies ready to return the act of courtesy with a smile or a thanking nod. The American travelers do, for sure, demonstrate better understanding of the friendly attitude of women and of the men's tendency to give ladies priority. Cooper, too, notes that “Without doubt, society is more polished here than it is with us” (210). The American travelers, thus, see these acts within their natural limits as mere acts of good conduct, unlike al-Tahtāwī's exaggerated conclusions about the empowerment of women or their lack of chastity.

Yet, a glance at al-Tahtāwī's background serves to excuse him for misunderstanding. Nothing more is expected from a man coming from a culture where couples do not meet except after marriage if he cannot simply digest the scene of women meeting, talking to, and dancing with foreigners. Interestingly enough, “The Egyptian nineteenth century marriage ideal consisted of an arranged match between a man (young or old) and a young woman who did not meet before the ceremony” (Warzeski 311). With such a background, al-Tahtāwī viewed the French acts, and according to these conditions, he, at least before the epilogue, judged them.

The women's status at home and in the working field is another concern of al-Tahtāwī in his book. He talks about premarital contact between couples, the husband-

wife relationship, child upbringing, adultery, and divorce. He also refers to women's involvement in the labor force though he does not elaborate fully on this topic.

Al-Tahtāwī describes men as “slaves to the women ... and under their command irrespective of whether they are pretty or not” (177). Because he takes what he sees on face value, he interprets men's polite behavior as something that degrades them, while, in fact, the case within the bond of marriage in France then was completely different. Later in the book, al-Tahtāwī even makes the claim that women in France “are like men in every respect” (218). Was this really the status of women in that period? The answer demands some research.

Roger Magraw states that, although the Enlightenment brought about by the French Revolution was expected to defend women's rights, many feminists, and contrary to popular belief, “now argue that the Enlightenment ‘project’ was constructed not merely *without* but essentially *against* women, that the outcome of its discourses and practices was a strengthening of male domination” (317). According to Patricia Mainardi, the Civil Code really placed further constrictions on women in the domains of legal contracts and suits, marriage and divorce, as well as the control of one's property. The Code

treated a woman as a ‘minor,’ subject to paternal and ‘marital’ power. Article 213 insisted on her duty of ‘obedience.’ Her dowry and income belong to the husband. She required permission to seek a job...A husband could use violence for the ‘legitimate’ ends of ‘marriage’ and was granted *carte blanche* to kill an

adulterous wife. (Magraw 319)

Laura S. Struminger also cites one of the articles of the Civil Code that is even more indicative of the French women's status then. She says, “According to one [article], ‘persons declared unfit according to the law were minors, ex-convicts, and married women.’ ” Even scientists, in the wake of the French revolution, collaborated in the project of “justifying the continued civil and political subordination of women” through their development of “new biological theories of gender difference” (Hesse 130).

It is very interesting here, and may prove beneficial to the outcomes of this research, to notice the extreme resemblance between the way the Civil Code betrays the message of the Revolution, “which preached universal rights but in fact based those rights on male prerogatives over women” (Foley 23); and the way in which, in al-Tahtāwī’s motherland, only the aspects of the Islamic law that “sanctified the prevailing family structure” were put to practice, while other aspects “such as female rights to inheritance or choice of marriage partner,” introducing “countervailing tendencies which could actually threaten the integrity of the male-centered family” were rejected (Tucker 197). In an expression which reveals the great contradiction the French society was living and which may explain al-Tahtāwī’s erroneous conclusions, Magraw quotes Pierre Marrot, “We may live in a democracy. But this house is a kingdom, and I am the king” (319).

Even J. F. Cooper’s comment that the French women’s habit of entering a social gathering ahead of their “beaux” rather than leaning on their arms reduces their “delicate and lady-like appearance” reflects a traditional view of women as inferior to

men and dependent on them. The argument of feminists that the rules of etiquette tended to stress the woman's physical weakness and fragility in an attempt to confine her to the domestic role of the wife and mother, and to reinforce the claim that she cannot be independent, finds a practical realization in Cooper's note.

Thus, as made clear above, al-Tahtāwī's claims about "handing power to women" in the French society are actually baseless. Yet, we can simply understand why a person like him, coming from a culture where having slave women (*jāriyah*), who were bought and sold, was still a common practice (Tucker 185), would find in the smallest hint of respect towards women something abnormal, and consequently come up with faulty conclusions.

The second conclusion al-Tahtāwī draws pertains to the chastity of wives and jealousy of husbands. He accuses French women of displaying "a small measure of chastity", and their husbands of not being jealous "with regard to things that arouse jealousy among Muslims." The reason, according to him, is that, in the French culture, "adultery is part of the [human] faults and vices rather than a mortal sin" (178). Even when the reader thinks that al-Tahtāwī's rash generalizations have come to their end as he admits the existence of virtuous women among the French, he soon finds him writing that those who do not show "great virtue" are "the majority" (219). Al-Tahtāwī, judging every act of sociability on the part of women as a sign of a "low measure of chastity," concludes that French men do not care for their honor, and blames for this the society which accepts adultery as a normal behavior. In fact, this was not the case in France

then. The upbringing of girls, especially among the elite, placed great importance on home and the family. Women were expected to live up to the ideal of “*la femme au foyer*”—woman of the house, and for that purpose, female education was an essential topic. According to Whitney Walton, “The conventional view,” at that time, “was that girls should be educated in order to fulfill domestic duties successfully, including the early education of children” (33). Adultery was not an acceptable behavior as al-Tahtāwī suggests. The common assumption was “that women would marry and raise families and that their sexual and political activities would be confined to the home” (Walton 163). In addition, women were “under greater pressure (than men) to conform to the prevailing codes of conduct . . . , and their sexual behavior was more heavily criticized” (Foley 73). Magraw goes further in his portrayal of the real conditions controlling marriage then saying that “since marriage was a property transaction, the bride was expected to be ‘undamaged’ ” (319).

All this elucidates the unfairness of al-Tahtāwī’s assumptions as he accuses the majority of French women of not being “of great virtue.” He generalizes, starting possibly from a single example, saying that many French women travel to hide pregnancies resulting from illegitimate sexual affairs. Another generalization he makes is that the French are known for their “amorous passion,” the end of which may be the marriage of a young couple (219). This, too, is not accurate especially if we keep in mind the fact that marriage among the elite (in France) was influenced by “family considerations,” “financial considerations,” and sometimes by attempts to protect the “blood-lines” (Foley 38). This marriage was known as “marriage of reason” as opposed

to “marriage of inclination” which did not find its way into popularity before the 1870’s (Foley 38); while marriage in middle classes also took economic considerations into account. Such “considerations” left little space for marriage stemming from “amorous love” which al-Tahtāwī speaks about. However, al-Tahtāwī’s comment that Parisians “do not customarily allow marriages between a white man and a negro woman” is, in fact, supported by the above stated claims that they tried to protect “blood-lines.”

Adultery as an act of betraying one’s spouse was not really a prevalent aspect of the French society as al-Tahtāwī claims although exceptions did exist. What al-Tahtāwī may have misunderstood, at least before the epilogue, is another practice the title of which, in strict Catholic terms, is also ‘adultery’ but which is not equal in meaning to betrayal. This was a premarital sexual relationship brought about by economic necessity, and was, thus, characteristic of the middle or artisan classes. In fact, “Economic change was forcing young people to save for a longer period before they could afford to set up their businesses;” there were many “unmarried couples” who “lived together and legitimized their children when they married” (Foley 70). Al-Tahtāwī fails to notice that the type of adultery he is referring to is not one which requires jealousy, for, after all, the woman is faithful to a single partner, whether the relationship is legal or not. Struminger further supports this point offering statistical records

Since physical needs and economic preparedness did not always coincide, it was not surprising to learn from the 1844 marriage records that twenty percent of the couples studied were already living together at the time of their marriage, and

eight percent legitimizing children who had been born earlier. (90)

Though Cooper and the other American travelers do not address issues of family duties and responsibilities and the problem of adultery openly, the abundance of historical records, statistics, and articles from the Napoleonic Civil Code provide enough data about these topics to deem al-Tahtāwī's conclusions inaccurate. However, and in a clear contradiction to his previous claims, al-Tahtāwī offers a more precise account when it comes to the consequences of adultery. Divorce is the result in most of the cases. He asserts that though the "Franks do not have a bad opinion of their wives," any detection of betrayal will cause a husband to "leave (his wife) completely" (177). In the epilogue of his book, he also maintains that "Although they are devoid of jealousy," men become very "malicious" when their women "misbehave" (362). This is completely accurate judging from the Civil Code article that Magraw cites above which offers the betrayed husband "*carte blanche* to kill an adulterous wife." Another legal fact which exposes the seriousness of this moral crime is that divorce was prohibited in the French law, except in the case of proven adultery. Actually, many constrictions hindered the legalization of "divorce by mutual consent" and it was not before 1975 that divorce was allowed without any reference to adultery as a reason (Mainardi 219).

Maybe the biggest confusion al-Tahtāwī makes appears in his statement: "Experience has shown that in France chastity dominates the hearts of women belonging to the middle classes, while this is not the case for those of the upper classes" (364). The true situation in nineteenth-century France was almost the opposite. More restrictions on women's behavior existed in the upper classes, and elite women were under more stress

in relation to their social performance. When the grip of domesticity started to loosen on the French woman's role, it started in the middle class. On the other hand, adultery, though not betrayal, characterized the working classes due to economic reasons made clear above. Not only this, but working women were forced to endure sexual harassment for the sake of preserving their livelihoods (Struminger 33).

A topic addressed by some American travelers but referred to only shyly by al-Tahtāwī is the issue of prostitution. As he describes public parks and their visitors, he notes that these include women “who stroll around there in order to make the acquaintance of men, particularly at night” (233). Al-Tahtāwī never elaborates on the topic, nor does he return to discussing it later in the text. David Mc Cullough wonders at the real reason behind the absence of any mention of prostitutes in the letters home or the diaries of students traveling to Paris for study though he affirms that there existed “prostitutes of varying degrees of sophistication, allure, and price” in the nineteenth-century Paris (54). He concludes that parents' and teachers' warnings and the fear of the threat of syphilis might have been behind this overlooking. Maybe because he is older, one of Mc Cullough's travelers, John Sanderson, a teacher in his fifties, finds himself at ease addressing the topic. With no aim of justifying prostitution, he expresses his sympathy with the suffering of young working women in Paris whose low pay in jobs like shop clerks push them to making “arrangements,” under the name *grisettes*. A *grisette* offers all kinds of favors, nursing a sick client, working for him; she even builds a relation of “mutual dependence with him” which gives her a feeling of security and confidence. He makes an interesting comment saying that she is “the most

ingenious imitation of an innocent woman in the world” (cited in Mc Cullough 54). Sanderson even wonders how a man can “live entirely honest in Paris, where women of good quality are thrown in his face—women of art, of beauty, and refined education” (cited in Mc Cullough 55). Statistically speaking, Edward Shorter reports that “Prostitution in Paris tripled in the first half of the nineteenth century” (237). Al-Tahtāwī’s neglect of this topic might be indicative either of his lack of specific information about it, being unable as a student and imam to have direct contact with this part of the society, or of an intentional overlooking of an issue that he expects to arouse negative attitudes towards the French while the main purpose of his book is to set those as an ideal to be followed by the people of his country.

The next topic al-Tahtāwī skips addressing directly is the French woman’s role as a mother. According to social historians, and especially gender researchers, the mother’s role assumed not only a social but also a political importance during the nineteenth century. Whitman Walton uses the term “republican motherhood” to refer to this role defined as reformative and leading to “a radical change, both within the family and by extension to the larger society ...” (163). In the bloody conflict between the traditional Catholicism and the rising Protestantism, reports from the period tell that women were “deemed responsible for keeping men on the straight and narrow” (Foley 73), and that, in many instances, “Middle-class Catholic sons rebelled against their fathers” who approached secularism “because they were product of a home environment created by pious mothers” (Magraw 321). These mothers were the last protectors of Catholicism in an age when anticlericalism, if not secularism, was taking over the society. Such reports

clearly expose the inaccuracy of al-Tahtāwī's portrayal of women as "paragons of beauty and charm" whose mere concern in life is to appear pretty, attract the attention of men and dance with most of them, and who are very likely to have sexual intercourses outside wedlock. Many, not to say most, of the nineteenth-century French women were responsible housewives and mothers, and even al-Tahtāwī himself notices that "their children are always prepared to learn and acquire (knowledge), and enjoy an excellent upbringing" though he fails to see the role women play in this "excellent upbringing" (254).

Moving to women employment, the book includes few references to this issue. Without a lot of elaboration, al-Tahtāwī reports what he saw in the coffeehouse at Marseilles— a woman managing the place (152). This scene surprises him, and it is most likely that this is a key fact on which he bases his conclusions about equality between men and women in the French society, or his idea of French men "handing power to women." In fact, women's introduction into the labor force was not enthusiastically welcomed by the French society. Struminger notes that "male craftsman and bourgeois women frequently agreed on the proper place for working women — the home." It was argued that women who worked outside the home were in danger of sliding "into immoral ways," that they were unable to fulfill the duty of educating their children, and that they failed to provide "home comforts and well-cooked meals" for their laboring husbands (39). The first argument, at least, is well-supported by John Sanderson's above-quoted identification of *grisettes*, and, more importantly, his reference to the female shop clerk who almost drove him bankrupt

because of her habit of “caressing and caressing” his fingers while helping him try out some gloves. Other reports say that even doctors used their authority to argue against women labor. These “debated whether friction between the legs caused by pedaling” of the sewing machines “caused sexual stimulation” (Magraw 326).

The fears and concerns about women’s work did not come from nowhere; they had their motives in real life experience. Working women were surely subject to different kinds of pressures. Struminger even claims that “the problems of sexual exploitation, prostitution, unwanted pregnancies and children, who had to be cared for, were unique to women workers.” In developing this point, she refers to contemporary critics like Villermé who “noted the prevalence of sexual compliance being virtually a job requirement in some cases;” and Thouvenin talking about bosses who “boasted that they had forced themselves on twenty of their women workers by offering to increase their wages if they didn't resist and threatening to reduce them if they refused” (35). However, one cannot overlook another fear which stimulated this opposition to women’s work— the belief that wage earning would subsequently pose the threat of empowering women and shaking the established arrangement of gender roles.

Yet, women’s suffering in the labor field did not end here. Although women worked under conditions similar to those of men, Struminger points out that the latter did not allow women to join their clubs but rather argued against their right to be equally paid for their work (i-ii). Magraw states that even “In 1910, when male skilled workers earned 8 francs per day, 50 percent of Parisian female home-workers received under 2 francs” (326). In this sense, women employment, viewed by al-Tahtāwī as something

exciting and worth recording, had a hidden face which his eye, unlike that of American travelers' especially Sanderson, either failed to detect or intentionally ignored so that he could carry to his countrymen a positive view of women labor.

That Cooper did not approach the issue of women's work can be related to the fact that his contact was with the elite, while it was basically the middle class and peasant women who actually shared in the labor force. In the elite, the woman's power was reflected in the role of motherhood. According to Cage, "Women's health and roles as mothers were considered vital to the well-being and regeneration of the nation" after the Revolution. She cites Suzanne Desan's claim that the family had become "the moral, affective, and economic bedrock" of Post-revolutionary France. Still, it is very likely that Cooper might have seen some working women, but it seems that the issue did not grab his attention to the extent of writing home about it as al-Tahtāwī has done.

While portraying French women, al-Tahtāwī could not overlook commenting on their excessive interest in the pursuit of knowledge. They are even ready to travel for that purpose (218). According to him, "they have a passion for knowledge, for discovering the secrets of beings and learning more about them" (218). Besides, they "have great literary ability." They write in an "elegant, well crafted, and faultless" style. From this observation, he jumps to a conclusion which sounds somehow controversial. He says that "the saying '*the beauty of a man is his mind, that of a woman her tongue*' is not applicable to this country" (188). Of course, there existed women writers in nineteenth-century France, and some of them were great, but there was not total freedom in their choice of what to read or write. The example of *Madame Bovary* stands

out in this respect. At the beginning, French women writers, just like British, used pseudonyms to sign their writings. In order to be accepted in the post-revolutionary society, women intellectuals had to establish balance “between the two poles of feminist equality and republican motherhood”. The “Republican mother” is a title that was proposed to refer to a political role for women based on the assumption that since the natural duty of the woman was to marry and raise families, her power as a mother can be used “for reform, even radical change, both within the family and by extension to the larger society” (Walton 163). This was the case of George Sand, Marie d’Agoult, Hortense Allart, and Delphine Gay de Girardin, four women writers of whose biographies appear in Whitman Walton writes her *Eve’s Proud Descendants* (2000). Those biographies uncover a lot of the problems and challenges that women faced in their pursuit of learning and self-expression through writing. During that period, there was a continuous effort to limit young girls’ freedom in selecting books to read. Mothers, as one of the writers states in her diary, used to hide books they perceived to be “dangerous” to the morals of their daughters in locked boxes. According to Foley

The need to discipline young girls’ imaginations and aspirations explains the many warnings against permitting them to read novels. ... Girls were encouraged instead to read literature that reinforced the female virtues of modesty, conformity and self- sacrifice. Such books showed the pitfalls of rejecting the normative female role. (35-36)

There was a negative view of intellectual women which was not exclusive to the public. Even Rousseau referred to “the intellectual sexual liberties of the decadent

salonnières” versus “housewives’ simple virtues” (318). Magraw explains the role of the *philosophes*’ like Diderot who “by prioritizing ‘reason’ and labeling women ‘more delicate and spiritual than cerebral’” did, in fact, deny “women’s capacity for active citizenship” (317).

Although he made a good judgment of women writers’ production, al-Tahtāwī could not notice the struggle those intellectuals had to survive for the purpose of being recognized in domains pertaining to learning and knowledge, and his claim that French women’s minds were more valued by their society than their tenderness does not prove accurate. However, it is really so appealing that al-Tahtāwī, the foreigner coming from a background where women’s literature was totally absent, would give the French women of intellect their due in full, at the time when their own citizens, supposedly sons of the French Revolution, whose main slogan was *equality*, would not.

In contrast to al-Tahtāwī, Cooper is very critical of the French people’s, and especially the French women’s intellectual abilities as well as of their willingness to learn. In one letter home, he writes

It is scarcely possible for a person of esprit to be more limited in their ideas than an ordinary Frenchwoman. Even the men are terribly one-sided in their knowledge. It is difficult to find a Frenchman who has seen anything that can render a true account of it. Their extravagant vanity renders them so soon satisfied, and their love of exaggeration is so monstrous, that nothing is regarded with a plain, common sense mind. (Cooper 246)

This stands in complete contradiction with al-Tahtāwī's

You should know that Parisians distinguish themselves ... by their keen intelligence, profound perceptiveness, and depth of the mind when treating recondite issues... They are in no way prisoners of traditions. Rather, they always wish to know the origin of things, while seeking proof to support it... (173)

and also with "Indeed, women also have a passion for knowledge, for discovering the secrets of beings and learning more about them" (218).

One wonders about the real reasons behind this extreme incongruity between the two travelers' opinions. Was Cooper biased in his judgment against the French? Was al-Tahtāwī dazzled by the sight of literate men and women and home libraries to the level of coming up with faulty generalizations? Is the disagreement a case of relativity that has to do with the two men's backgrounds? Or was the ambitious Egyptian sheikh actually describing a utopian ideal he wanted his countrymen to imitate rather than a real city he lived in? One cannot give a final answer, but, at the same time, one can easily assure that James Fenimore Cooper, the American author whose books were being published, discussed, and criticized in France, and who was continuously invited to literary and social gatherings where he surely met a wide range of the social and intellectual elite was more equipped to check the intellectual skills of the French, and especially French women, than a sheikh who spent his time in the city not only as a student, but also as an imam sent to look after the other students to protect them from moral corruption.

5.2 Cleanliness and Hygiene:

An important topic that both Cooper and al-Tahtāwī address repeatedly in the former's *Letters* and the latter's *Takhlīs* is that of cleanliness and hygiene. In fact, discrepancy in the two men's opinions concerning this issue is clear as early as the moment of setting foot on the French land. This can be noticed in the two men's response to the routine requirements that travelers to France were supposed to endure before entering the country— quarantine isolation in the case of al-Tahtāwī, and obligatory medical examination with Cooper. Though the two men's feelings about the experience might, most probably, have been similarly negative, for it was a time-consuming, not to say humiliating procedure, the way each of the two men represents this experience is different. As al-Tahtāwī tries to trivialize the suffering and humiliation of an 18-day stay at the quarantine, engrossing his readers' attention in a detailed description of the vastness as well as the natural and architectural beauty of the place, Cooper is at ease to show his dissatisfaction and disapproval of letting his children wait at the Custom house to be examined before resting from their long journey.

Al-Tahtāwī says

We ... arrived at a house outside the city. This was used for quarantine (karantīna) as, following their custom, anyone coming from foreign lands must go through quarantine before being allowed to enter the city... The lazaret where we stayed during the quarantine was solidly built, and contained large buildings and gardens. It was there that we became aware of the high-quality construction of

this country's buildings which are filled with gardens, fountains, etc... We stayed in this place for 18 days without ever leaving it. However, it is very spacious and there are large gardens and vast areas for walking and to relax in. (149-50)

One can easily notice the effort spent by al-Tahtāwī to tell his readers back home that quarantine was a general customary practice, and that the period the mission spent there was neither boring nor humiliating. Though it was not quarantine but merely simple examinations that Cooper and his accompanying family had to experience, he tells his friend, Mrs. Pomeroy, in a letter “We arrived at Havre in the middle of the night, and had to undergo the examination of the Custom house at that hour—*Each individual was personally examined*— Think of that; before even the children could get into a bed” (149). While al-Tahtāwī does not complain about an 18-day period of isolation but rather tries to excuse the French for such a practice, a reader finds Cooper disapproving of keeping his children awake until “*every individual is examined.*”

The discrepancy in the two men's opinion appears even more clearly in their description of the measures of cleanliness in the city. Al-Tahtāwī marvels at the cleanliness of the French houses, and claims that, because of this, the people of Paris are devoid of “venomous vermin” and insects. He even comments that

The commitment on the part of the French to keeping their houses and clothes clean is truly wondrous. Their houses are always bright because of the many windows, which are placed with such magnificent engineering skill that they allow light and air both inside and outside the houses. (219)

and even when he speaks about men's clothes, he claims that what characterizes them is "not the ornamentation but the extreme cleanliness," adding that the rich among them change their underwear "several times a week" (223). Moreover, the French bathes are cleaner than those in Egypt (233).

On the contrary, Cooper's earliest letter from 1826 Paris reads "when we first entered a French Inn, through the dirt and filth that had been accumulating for ages... our hearts began to sicken for the comforts of home—But luckily one can get accustomed, even to dirt" (149).

In another letter, and though he shares al-Tahtāwī his attribution of the qualities of politeness and stinginess to the French, he disagrees with him on the issue of cleanliness. He says "There is an unaccountable mixture of gentility and meanness, of tawdriness and dirt, in all that I have yet seen in France" (152). He repeatedly mentions dirt, bugs and fleas, and seems confused at this "strange country made up of dirt and gilding, good cheer and soupe maigre, bed bugs and laces" (145). Cooper's insistence on dirt as a distinctive quality of the French land and people tells, most probably, that this is not a rash judgment on his part. More importantly, his sarcastic depiction of a personal experience with a man from the elite, actually "a certain prince de Borghese, once a brother-in-law of Bonaparte and the richest subject of the Pope" adds credibility to his claims facing those of al-Tahtāwī. Cooper says in an extremely sarcastic tone

On each hand, there were three rings of precious stones—Emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. Now I do affirm, that if a servant of mine should presume to approach me with such dirty paws, as had his Eccellenza, he would be in imminent danger

of receiving his cogné— Positively, they were begrimed! What think you of this specimen of a Prince?... I just laid my clean, white, ringless, long-fingered, plebian paw hand by the side of his paw to shame the fellow, but though he witnessed the action he seemed only to pity me because I had no Emeralds on it.

(210)

One can still say that this prince might be himself an exception, or that Cooper might be deliberately exaggerating the scene. But what about his serious, yet ironic, assertion that “France is a charming place for a residence if you can get out of the dirt (164). Accepting either claim requires reference to some historical records addressing the same issue. George Vigarello traces the development of the concepts of cleanliness in France since the middle ages. Although he concludes that “the bath had gradually gained ground in the first half of the nineteenth century,” and that soap was a change in practice introduced at the beginning of that same century, the actual statistics Vigarello reports reflect a “disparity between hygienic practice and theory in the first half of the nineteenth century” (167-173). These statistics also mark the year 1832, the year of the death of the first victims of cholera, a turning point in the history of cleanliness in Paris. It is worth noting, here, that both Cooper’s and al-Tahtāwī’s texts referred to in this comparative study were written earlier than this date. Vigarello’s book also clarifies that cleanliness practices, realized for example in the abundance of baths, did not supply equal chances for people from different social classes as well as from different residence places. The “wealthiest districts” had the best access before 1830, and the

“newest bourgeois districts” after that. Not only this, but an 1835 study cited in the book concludes that “a Parisian ... took between three and five (baths) a year” (185).

Even later in the century, Suzan Foley reports that in the urban area,

The absence of sanitation facilities meant that sewage and house-hold garbage contaminated in the streets... In Paris, apartment blocks might have only one toilet on each landing. Night soil carts emptied their contents into the Seine creating a health hazard. Apartments often had no running water above the first floor where wealthier tenants lived.. Since there were no bathing facilities, personal hygiene was poor. (59)

Facts, therefore, do not really support al-Tahtāwī’s claims about the extreme cleanliness of the French people. Again, one wonders whether al-Tahtāwī was really unaware of these facts as he painted his shiny picture of the French people, their houses, and their baths, whether he was really deceived by the part of the society he was in contact with, or whether he was manipulating the travel writer’s chance of selectiveness to achieve his ends of modeling his audience’s response to his book. This is not to reject the possibility of a relative concept of cleanliness between the East and America leading al-Tahtāwī to see as clean what the American judges as dirty.

To arrive at a better perspective, it would be beneficial to refer to the opinion of another Eastern traveler to nineteenth-century Paris, Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāk, who, at a certain time, would become one of the major editors of *al-Waqā‘i‘ al-Misriyyā* managed by al-Tahtāwī (Badawī 69). Al-Shidyāk relates a different story than al-Tahtāwī’s regarding the cleanliness of the French. Devoid of most of al-Tahtāwī’s restraints, and

freer to describe Paris with the eye of the social critic rather than the reformer, he depicts the Parisian streets as always wet and dirty, the buildings as multi-floored, poorly lighted and ventilated, with stinky, dirty toilets the doors of which cannot be locked (al-Shidyak 633-35). Was al-Shidyāk actually describing a different Paris? How come that all those travelers, with their different backgrounds, agree on something which al-Tahtāwī contradicts? Even the answer that the concepts of cleanliness were relative between the East and the West is partially if not fully refuted by al-Shidyāk's contribution, and there remains for one more time the only answer—that al-Tahtāwī's will to present France as an example that the people of his own country would follow in their pursuit of reform and progress had actually surmounted every other tendency, even his tendency to fulfill his own promise of maintaining objectivity.

5.3 Homosexuality:

One of the topics addressed in al-Tahtāwī's book is homosexuality. In the context of listing the assets of the French, and after stating that French men do not tend to think badly of their women, he touches on the topic of homosexual relations. According to him, one of the "praiseworthy aspects of their nature" is "that they do not have any propensity towards the love of boys." He asserts that "it is a lost sentiment about them and one that is rejected by their nature and morals" (178). Even the French language rejects the expression of such a kind of relationship, and translators from Arabic to French tend to adapt any text including reference to homosexuality, so that the love of a

boy becomes love of a girl. Because “The French consider homosexuality to be one of the most disgusting obscenities” (178), one will never hear people talking about it.

Neither Cooper nor the American travelers of Mc Cullough’s book seem to approach this topic openly, nor even insinuatingly. The only hints to the possibility of these travelers hearing about or witnessing such cases appear in the recurrent reference to the Palais Royale. The first time Mc Cullough mentions the palace, his expression is “Palais Royale, with all its famous enticements ...” (27). One of those Mc Cullough’s travelers, Wendel Holmes, in a letter to his parents, explains that “the Palais Royal was the great center of the luxury and splendor of Paris” (29). Travelers would also tell that the palace contained tailoring, shoemaking, and textile shops. On the second floor, one could also find jewelry shops, restaurants, and gambling houses. Nothing is said about homosexuality. Even the elder travelers, like Sanderson, free from teacher’s warnings to the extent of speaking openly about prostitution have ignored homosexuality. Was this practice really absent?

In a study of the history of homosexuality in France, Michael Sibalis considers Palais Royal as “one of the key sites of homosexual visibility for almost a century” between 1780 and 1870. Sibalis supports Mc Cullough and his travelers’ claims about the Palais being “the very heart of the city.” He even cites historians like Mercier in the 1780s referring to the place as “the temple of sensual pleasure,” and travelers like the English Henry Redhead Yorke calling the 1802 Palais Royal a “Temple of Sin” (120-21). Sibalis notes that those visitors and writers never “alluded directly” to the issue of

homosexuality in their writings. If homosexuality was ignored in these writings, this is not proof enough that it did not exist.

Sibalis presents quite an extensive list of primary material that he has sought in the police documents of late eighteenth and nineteenth century France which indisputably support the claim of the existence of a homosexual subculture in Paris then. From the confessions of male prostitutes in archival police interrogations, to instructions of the Paris Prefecture of Police, to memoirs of Chiefs of Police all cited in the book, one becomes certain about the presence of the practice, and consequently, of al-Tahtāwī's inaccuracy in his claim that "it (homoeroticism) is a lost sentiment about them and one that is rejected by their nature" (178). In another important study on homosexuality in Paris, Régis Revenin even "argues that homosexuals were neither isolated nor invisible" in nineteenth-century Paris but rather that "The homosexual subculture was extraordinarily dense in Paris in the last decades of the 1800s and the early 1900s." Despite the agreement of medical and sociological works cited in the book on the social disapproval of the practice of *pédérastie*, as it was known, Revenin counts tens of sites which were considered meeting places for homosexuals—public gardens, including those of Palais Royal, the city's great boulevard, specific bars, cafés, tea rooms, and restaurants, and even "the four thousand open-air urinals in Paris at the turn of the century" (Aldrich 149-50).

Yet, al-Tahtāwī was not mistaken in his statement that the French avoided open reference to this practice in their written discourse, and there is no better evidence to

support this than an excerpt from a petition by the licensed Palais Royal shopkeepers directed to a police prefect. They say

they have the honor of informing you that for a long time the Galerie d'Orléans has been infested by a crowd of good-for-nothings who have chosen it for carrying on their hideous business, which one is ashamed to name... The Palais-Royal has been purged of the female prostitutes that dishonored it, but today these vile beings whom we denounce to are worse: they accost men! (Sibalis 123)

The words used to refer to homosexuality as a “hideous business which one is ashamed to name” do really reflect a public disapproval of such a practice which does not contradict al-Tahtāwī's conclusions made above.

5.4 Racial Difference:

The topic of black/white relations in France is another issue that al-Tahtāwī's discusses, and forms conclusions about. He reports that the majority of the Parisians belong to the white race, and that it is rare to find a French native with a brown skin. He explains the reasons behind this, claiming that custom does not allow marriage between white men and black women or vice versa. He confidently asserts that the French associate blackness with ugliness, and that they do not usually employ blacks for cooking or domestic work for they consider them “devoid of cleanliness” (180-1).

At least in the part of Cooper's *Letters and Journals* related to the time he spent in France, whether in his first voyage (1826-1828) or his later stay, one hardly finds any reference to the topic of race. Cooper's opinion pertaining to this issue, however, can be clearly read in some of his other works, be they novels or non-fictional works. It is actually seen as a great loss that Cooper, the enthusiastic supporter of the American democratic republic of "the first major American novelist to make use of Negro characters" in his novels, would assume, as Henry Boynton says, a "tolerant... attitude towards the institution of slavery" (O'Daniel 164). In an article discussing Cooper's treatment of the black, O'Daniel regrets the failure of the writer of *The American Democrat* to get in touch with the message of democracy when it came to the rights of the black, or to share in the efforts of his friends, William Jay and William Dunlap, who were anti-slavery activists. According to O'Daniel, Cooper insisted on justifying slavery, especially the American slavery institution, despite the fact that his wealthy family had never been slaveholders. O'Daniel quotes Cooper in *The American Democrat*

Slavery is no more sinful, by the Christian code, than it is sinful to wear a whole coat, while another is in tatters, to eat a better meal than a neighbor, or otherwise to enjoy ease and plenty, while our fellow creatures are suffering and in want. ... It is quite possible to be an excellent Christian and a slave holder, and the relations of master and slave may be a means of exhibiting some of the mildest graces of character... In one sense, slavery may actually benefit a man, there being little doubt that the African is, in nearly all

respects, better off in servitude in this country, than when living in a state of barbarism at home. (165)

Although this justification sounds shocking to the modern reader, it really helps clarify the reasons behind Cooper's dismissal of reference to the situation of the blacks of France in his letters home. However bad the conditions of the black race in France then and however negative the attitude towards them, it wouldn't reach the level that this quotation reflects. What supports such a claim is the great astonishment that one of Mc Cullough's travelers, the medical student Charles Sumner, expresses upon witnessing "two or three blacks, or rather mulattos" at the Sorbonne, "well received by the other students." To Sumner, it was a "stunning revelation" to see the blacks "standing in the midst of a knot of young men, and their color seemed to be no objection to them." He even asserts that "with American impressions," that "seemed very strange" (Mc Cullough 131). Cooper's patriotic spirit which made of him while outside America "a self-appointed defender of American institutions," pushed him into illogically supporting slavery to the extent of writing a "Defense of Slave-Owning America" during his stay in Paris.

These are, in short, some of the topics that al-Tahtāwī and the American travelers to nineteenth-century Paris noticed, registered and made conclusions about. In the study of these sometimes similar and, at other times, different ways of representing one truth, one might not arrive at an exact depiction of that truth, but will most probably provide a better comprehension of the forces that were at play when those different readers of nineteenth-century Paris painted in words the image of city

which, as agreed by historians and literary people, was more of an enigma than simply a city.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

If conclusions about whether the importance of al-Tahtāwī's *Takhḥīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* lies in its value as a documentary or as a work of fiction remain debatable, what is almost undebatable is that the mission to France, which produced the book, came as an intersection of intentions among the different institutions involved in that mission. First, the Ottoman court, specifically Egypt's ambitious Governor Muhammad ʿAlī, was willing to establish a strong military power with the help of Western sciences. Al-Azhar, or more accurately some enlightened Azhar teachers, had started to realize the necessity of widening the horizons of the religious school graduates through familiarizing them with those sciences—in a period when the term intellectual in the east was firmly associated with the religious man. Another party whose intentions might have possibly been met by the mission is the Western institution of colonialism. In light of Edward Said's argument referred to earlier in this thesis, the orientalist project of colonialism demanded an East which was retarded, barbaric, devoid of *modernism* in all its aspects so that it serves, in Edward Said's terms, as a "pretext" for the colonial text. In this context, educational missions from the East seeking knowledge in the West become a necessity for the reinforcement of the view of the former receiving modernization from the latter. The scope of this thesis's argument demonstrates that it is

at one time the clash and at another the balance among these different intentions which has produced the book *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*.

As the introduction to this thesis has made clear, this study, adopting Michel Foucault's claims, has addressed al-Tahtāwī's book as one of the "discourses about" and the "representations of" Paris of the nineteenth century. According to Foucault, history is but a set of discourses about a certain period which have been appropriated by the dominant institutions of that period. Literature, he believes, is one of the rare possibilities of resistance to this power. In this context, *Takhlīs*, as this thesis has argued, is a work which, while apparently conforming to the power of the appropriating institutions—the court, the Azhar, the western teachers and supervisors, and even the Egyptian literate society, does resist this power through a variety of means, be they related to content or style.

From the very beginning, and as explained earlier, al-Tahtāwī has his audience in mind. He is quite aware that a public unfamiliar with Western customs would be shocked if these are bluntly presented to it then. He also knows that al-Azhar authorities would not be ready to hear of philosophers and thinkers replacing religious men, or to accept scientific facts contradicting their essential beliefs, for example about the shape and movement of Earth. As for the political authorities, al-Tahtāwī had to make sure that any reference to a political or legal practice in Paris is put forth in a way that would not provoke a negative reaction on their part if understood as a call for imitating this West or reproducing its revolutions. The organization of the text, in fact, is itself one of

the means of defense assumed by al-Tahtāwī. For this purpose, the text unfolds in a way which stands parallel to the evolutionary track that al-Tahtāwī's opinion of the French people—their life, customs, political and religious practice— had taken during his stay in France. It opens with preconceptions and prejudices considering the French land one of “Infidelity and Obstinacy,” and tries, at every possible chance, to offer excuses for sharing in the mission, be they verses from the Quran or prophet's quotes which encourage the pursuit of knowledge, and to make promises not to favor anything that runs contrary to the teachings of Islam. Gradually through the book, al-Tahtāwī starts supporting his arguments with the opinions of philosophers and scientists sometimes beside, and other times instead of, religious justification. In the epilogue, al-Tahtāwī becomes an attorney of the French institutions, and their moral and political system, explaining to his readers that, for example, the looks and acts of French women which might shock them as Arabs and Muslims are not considered indecent in France, or that “after having investigated the morals of the French and their political system it appears to me that they more closely resemble the Arabs than the Turks or other races” (361). Had al-Tahtāwī said what he says in the epilogue at the beginning of his work, he would, most probably, have lost a wide range of his audience who would judge him as having gone off the rails of faith and sold his soul to the devil, allegations which he did not completely escape.

Thus, this simple trick has really given al-Tahtāwī's text an excellent chance to resist the assumptions imposed upon it by the audience it is addressed to. Another means of resistance employed by al-Tahtāwī is the deliberate dismissal of certain topics or the

superficial reference to others, sometimes using vague or general terms. An example on this is al-Tahtāwī's choice not to elaborate on the topic of prostitution in Paris, which he mentions just once throughout the text, referring to prostitutes as women "who stroll around there in order to make the acquaintance of men, particularly at night." Al-Tahtāwī seems to assume the attitude of a naïve observer whenever he wants to avoid the negative response of his audience. He leaves it for the reader to conclude who those women are.

This naïve attitude, however, is used by al-Tahtāwī not only to ignore but to focus on certain topics. It does actually prevail in the fifth essay devoted to relating the events of the French revolution. In this essay, al-Tahtāwī relates every single detail he was able to learn about the French revolution; and a reader cannot help but wonder why the man had decided to abandon his caution and speak in elaborate detail about something which would expose him to the anger of the political authorities in Egypt. One answer might be that al-Tahtāwī employs the same naïve attitude, addressing the issue as if he is simply documenting the events of a *fitna* (notice again the implications of the Arabic word explained earlier in the paper) objectively, without showing any kind of personal involvement, whether approving or disapproving of the revolution. This claim of assumed naivety is supported by 'Izzat Karnī who, upon studying al-Tahtāwī's and other Arab thinkers as pioneers in the establishment the concepts of justice and freedom in the Arab world, wonders whether it was extreme "innocence" or extreme "shrewdness" that guided al-Tahtāwī's choice to include a whole essay on a purely political issue. Karnī prefers using the term "artificial innocence" to describe the

attitude assumed by al-Tahtāwī to avoid blame (41). Another possible explanation for al-Tahtāwī's brave choice not to ignore such a troublesome topic might be that he had determined what is important and what is more important. Faced by this choice, al-Tahtāwī had decided to risk the banning of the publication of the book because he found it necessary for the people of his country to know the reasons behind and the episodes of the French people's uprising, together with the achievements of their rebellion which formed the core of the civil code, dealt with earlier in the third essay. If al-Tahtāwī's main purpose was to set an example for the people of Egypt and other Islamic nations to guide them on their journey of awakening "from their sleep of indifference," then it would be necessary for them to know of the political achievements of the French as much as of their scientific achievements.

That al-Tahtāwī prioritizes the more important motive to the less can also be clearly seen in his readiness to sacrifice even accuracy for the sake of the greater purpose—setting a good example his people to follow. The major argument of chapter four and the core of this thesis has been the exposition and interpretation of al-Tahtāwī's diversion from truth in the relation and analysis of his observations of the French social customs. As shown in the thesis, and despite explanations which relate al-Tahtāwī's inaccuracy to his cultural and religious background, or to the relativity of the circumstances between France and Egypt, the fact remains that al-Tahtāwī did intentionally dismiss some of the facts and deliberately misinterpret others so that the image of Paris depicted fits with the ideal image he had in mind from the very beginning. Al-Tahtāwī, however, is not the only one who does this. As shown earlier in

this paper, James Fenimore Cooper, also diverts from objectivity when he illogically justifies the practice of racial discrimination and enslavement in America in his ceaseless attempt to affirm the prominence of the American institutions. Thus, in such a context, the conclusion that al-Tahtāwī had a pre-conceived image of Paris, and that he took what fit that view and skipped what did not does gain credence.

A question that poses itself here is: if al-Tahtāwī was that inaccurate, then how comes that he received all those approving comments by his French teachers he has published in the book? It is really astonishing that the only objection to al-Tahtāwī's claims about France is De Sacy's refusal of his generalization concerning the religious commitment of the French people as made clear in the third chapter of this paper. One wonders what would lead the Western teachers and supervisors of the Egyptian mission to be satisfied with al-Tahtāwī's book despite its problems. Is it because the book coincides with the colonial discourse about the relation between the East and West, that which presents the West as the source of modernity and progress and the East as lacking of these qualities and seeking them in the West? Do Edward Said's claims find their realization here? Were the French teachers ready to forgive subjectivity and misunderstanding in favor of a more polished representation of the West? And, more importantly, did al-Tahtāwī end up serving the West despite his intentions? Was he, after all, and maybe without realizing it, conforming to the appropriating institutions of the day rather than resisting them? The favorable depiction of the West is exactly what the colonial project, pointed by Edward Said, demanded in order to support its mission

of modernizing the primitive East, and in this context, al-Tahtāwī's book stands as pandering to this project, not an act of resistance to, this project.

Another important question: Was “modernization” on the Western model what the East really needed? Was the sample presented by al-Tahtāwī actually applicable to Egypt, and on a wider level, to the East then? Or did the East actually need an example that takes into account the social, cultural and religious background of its societies? Does the occupation/expedition controversy also apply to the case of al-Tahtāwī and his book? That there are persons and institutions who were not ready to receive al-Tahtāwī's model and take it for granted as the best can be obviously seen in the opposition that the man faced during his life from many a politician and intellectual, as well as in the deliberate overlooking of any reference to his contribution to the renaissance of Egypt by many who documented that period (ʿImāra makes a list of those in his introduction to al-Tahtāwī's anthology).

In short, no matter what al-Tahtāwī's intentions upon writing *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* had been, the impact of the book has, in many respects, surpassed these goals. While the enlightened al-Azhar sheikh meant to write something which would contribute “to the improvement in civilization of the Egyptian provinces,” by familiarizing the East with the necessary tools for progress realized mainly in Western sciences, the book itself came as a valuable documentation for the early East/West cultural contact revealing truths about the nature of relation between these two cultures, the tension marking that relation, as well as the political and social conditions

prevailing in the countries involved. The literary text has, as usual, actually resisted the predetermined restrictions and conditions, be they author-imposed or institution-imposed, to offer a valuable chance for viewing the wider picture—the paradoxes marking the French social and political life, the degree of seriousness of the Egyptian authorities regarding the civilizing mission, the possibility of a genuine embracing of reform by the Egyptian religious, like al-Azhar, and social institutions, and, most importantly, the place of this whole experience within the context of the wider colonial project. This, in fact, is what shows the real value of al-Tahtāwī's book.

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