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The Islamicate *Adab* Tradition vs. the Islamic *Shari'a*, from Pre-colonial to Colonial

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Contents

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1. Introduction: Religion, Distinction, Differentiation

The goal of this paper is to provide a bird's eye view on what might qualify as 'the mother of all distinctions' within Islamicate history affecting the regulation of human conduct. It is a rather 'soft' distinction, whereby the ethical and literary tradition of *adab* works as an harmonious counter-point, more than as a sheer alternative, to the normative discourse sub-sumed under the notion of *shari'a*, the law originating from Divine will (*shar'*). *Adab* does so, however, while clearly affirming a distinctive, non-divine (and in this sense 'secular') source of norms of human interaction. The paper is divided into two parts: the first delineates the traits of *adab* in pre-colonial times, while the second focuses on key transformations it underwent during the colonial era.

The background of the 'normalcy' of this process of distinction is in the view, cultivated by an important branch of the comparative historical sociology of religions and civilizations, which sees religion in a variety of regions as differentiating itself from cosmological holistic views and rituals during the so-called Axial Age (ca. 800-200 BCE). This *Ur*-differentiation, as it were, of religion was facilitated by its main carriers (i.e. increasingly specialized religious personnel) mostly by invoking transcendence. This was conceived as a realm that imposes norms of ethical and compassionate behavior on all members of a given collectivity, including its rulers. The operation, originally performed by a variety of prophets, philosophers and sages (from Isaiah through Plato to the Buddha), institutes a principled au-tonomy of religion from other social fields. At the same time, however, the carriers of religious visions aspired to embrace the entire human condition, including its being torn between immanent interests and transcendent norms.[1] Over the long-term, this initial differentiation of religion opened up the social space to a cascade of further differentiations, which instituted

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1   Karl Jaspers (1953), *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, NJ and London: Yale University Press); Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (1982), "The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics," *European Journal of Sociology* 23/2: 294–314.

the autonomy of politics, the law, the economy, art, etc. via distinctions from comprehensive religious claims. Yet while we observe such successive fields differentiating from religion and creating non-religious or secular spaces, discourses and institutions, the initial differentiation of religion from the archaic and holistic understanding of reality still operates, as it were, in the background. This needs to be taken into account since we often tend to take this *Ur*-differentiation for granted or forget it altogether. Neglecting this might lead to rather unilateral views of the carriers of religious authority as intrinsically hostile to the process of differentiation, while they were its prime outcome and beneficiaries, and the (at least indirect) helpers of several among the later waves of differentiation.

On the other hand, the outcome of differentiation processes is rarely clear-cut and without residues. Often, ambivalence prevails and the boundaries between fields are drawn in uncertain ways. Beyond the West and its modernity, this ambivalence is precisely what, in many cases, prevents differentiations of secular spaces and forms of action from becoming sharp and producing fully autonomous spaces governed by field-specific values and norms. Differentiations do occur, but they appear most often as soft, ambivalent and hazy—like the one I am going to describe.

In what follows I will offer a schematization (and therefore a simplification) of what might be considered the key distinction within Islamic traditions between a religious and a non-religious (and in this sense secular) source of normativity of human conduct. I will also provide some examples of how the distinction operates. Differentiation and distinction are not used interchangeably, as precise synonyms.

2. The Tradition of *Adab* in Pre-Colonial Times

From quite early stages after the onset of the Islamicate civilization, one observes the crystallization of two major discursive traditions, both of which consist of intersecting dimensions of narration, habitualization, and, ultimately, normativity, albeit in a variety of combinations and degrees. They are the tradition associated with the idea of *adab*, which I am going to define in some detail, and the tradition governed by *hadith*, the increasingly systematic body of reports/narrations providing the quantitatively, and to a large extent also qualitatively, most solid 'database' to the entire normative system subsumed under the keyword of *shari'a*. While *hadith* takes shape as a tradition originating from prophetic action and speech

(through the chain of narrations, habitualization, and normativity unfolding within Muhammad's inner circle),[2] the origins of *adab* are more fluid and mixed, mainly because this genre alternately invokes (pre-Islamic) Arab and Persian components and 'roots.' What is not contested is that it has no specifically prophetic origin, though it did find an important place within the prophetic tradition of *hadith*. As networked sets of narrations with their more or less certified transmitters, both traditions crystallize in late Umayyad/early 'Abbasid' times, between the 8th and 9th century CE.

In this paper, I will focus on *adab*, the non-prophetic and, in this sense, non-religious tradition, primarily designating the quintessence of practical wisdom accumulated over the generations: the opposite, in principle, of a type of knowledge and practice originating in revelation. What is most remarkable, until the colonial epoch, is that the two traditions seemed to harmonize rather than to clash, in spite of their tendency to maintain a basic mutual demarcation (even by the authors who cultivated both). But a principled distinction was seldom over-emphasized either. Therefore, I hypothetically call it a soft distinction.

By representing a quite fundamental type of practical wisdom acquired through learning, *adab* rapidly became a key Islamicate concept of etiquette and mastery of forms (including, if not mainly, life forms). It designates the right, proper way to order and invest interests and values within social interaction. Even more fundamentally, as famously defined by Barbara Metcalf, it is "proper discrimination of correct order, behaviour and taste."[3] *Adab* was primarily cultivated by courtiers and literati within various Islamicate courts and their bureaucracies, but it was more than mere self-complacent aristocratic refinement. Thus, one step further, the most general definition of *adab* would embrace the ensemble of the ethical and practical norms of virtuous and beautiful life. Far from eclipsing with the collapse of the High Caliphate during the 10th century CE, *adab* became even more ubiquitous during the Middle Periods (10th to 15th century), when it morphed into a key Islamicate concept linking life conduct to the ways of governance and statecraft: a key human practice helping

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2   Recep Şentürk (2005), *Narrative Social Structure: Anatomy of the Hadith Transmission Network, 610–1505* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); Wael B. Hallaq (2013), *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press).

3   Barbara Daly Metcalf (1984), "Introduction," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 2–3.

subjects to deal with what, in a Machiavellian vocabulary, we would call the conundrum of virtue and *fortuna*.[4]

Adab legitimately intersected the core dynamics in the production of religious knowledge and throve alongside the *shari'a* tradition and its norms based on Qur'an and, even more, *hadith*, which—we should not forget—is a narrative corpus through which the Prophet's wisdom of character shines and becomes exemplary, and so normative. It is important to observe that unlike their Sasanian predecessors, merchants operating within the Islamic ecumene often had a share in the court culture where *adab* flourished, even while keeping an ambivalent relation to court milieus. This participation of non-aristocratic strata in *adab* also facilitated an intense interfacing, if not exchange, between *adab* and *hadith*. Qur'anic verses could be woven into the edifying stories of the *adab* genre such as in the *Kalila wa Dimna* (an 8th century translation of ancient Indian fables), without however altering the inherently mundane teachings of the genre.[5]

We could even define *adab* as a discursive tradition in its own right, including aesthetical and entertaining dimensions alongside edifying and normative ones. It stressed the requirements of civilized interaction at court, but also outside of it, namely with administrators and literati of other courts, with religious scholars, with traders, etc. It taught a know-how that was integral to the building of social relations. Thus, more broadly, it also served the goal of conflict prevention and social integration. Therefore, it embraced style and distinction, in the sense famously elucidated by Pierre Bourdieu,[6] to the extent *adab* emphasizes a superior knowledge of social complexity and the nuances and vagaries of human interaction which are caused by the proliferation of difference in taste, values, and interests among human beings. This knowledge of 'social commerce' helps human subjects to maximize their own reputation also by way of eloquence, good speech, and effective communication.[7] Such an approach is supported by the idea that good speech and elegant manners are not just an embellishment, but a necessary ingredient of good, cultured, civilized life. In turn, this is seen as a condition for developing a capacity for discernment between good and bad, harmful and useful, pleasant and unpleasant, in what

4   Neguin Yavari (2014), *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (London: Hurst).

5   Yavari (2014), *Advice for the Sultan*, 57.

6   Pierre Bourdieu (1979), *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit).

7   Paul L. Heck (2018), "Contested Fields, Knowledge Mobility, and Discipline Crystallization," in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam.* Ed. Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell), 177–94.

turns out to be practical reason and ethical formation at once, either in principle dispensing of the use of religious references.

From the zenith of 'Abbasid rule onwards, the two traditions of *adab* and *hadith* consolidated their normative grip over vast social strata in parallel to each other. One can in principle distinguish the culture and knowledge of the '*ulama*', of the *fuqaha*' and the *muftis*, largely dependent on *hadith*, on one hand, and the *adab*, court culture of the scribes and bureaucrats, on the other. Not surprisingly, Marshall Hodgson described the *shar'i* culture as "piety-minded", yet also suitable to regulate multiple aspects of social life, to aid the integration of various types of popular religiosity within a coherent institutional framework.[8] Similarly, the cosmopolitan court culture, which was originally reconstructed at the center of the 'Abbasid empire on the basis of the Sasanian model, never pretended to suppress or replace the knowledge that rose by studying *hadith* and practicing *fiqh* with the support of Qur'anic piety.

Particularly some Sufi trends contributed to blend these two traditions, most notably during the transition between the Middle Periods and the modern era.[9] *Adab* took root ever more solidly while being increasingly codified and practiced within a variety of Sufi brotherhoods, which thus contributed to interlacing court and government milieus, trader circles and the 'commoners'. In several cases, *adab* became a crucial concept not only for Sufi practice, but also for theory, in that it occupied a central place in several Sufi manuals addressed to aspirants and practitioners. Sufi brotherhoods played a mediating role between the courts and the commoners. Sufi leaders did not merely receive a higher culture from the courts, but enriched it through their active presence within courtly milieus, while engaging in daily practice and dialogue with a great variety of subjects and groups within society at large.

To summarize this analysis, we could say that the culture of *adab*, while initially radiating from court milieus, could embrace wider social groups, particularly thanks to its absorption by the higher middle strata, with commercial entrepreneurs at their center. This class showed a propen-

8   Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1974), *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, I-III (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 273–5.

9   Ira M. Lapidus (1984), "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 38–61; Alexander Papas (2008), "No Sufism without Sufi Order: Rethinking Tarîqa and Adab with Ahmad Kâsânî Dahbidî (1461–1542)," *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 2/1: 4–22.

sity to imitate and appropriate aristocratic life styles, also by acquiring the social prestige resulting from becoming patrons of the arts and sciences. Yet it was also because of the role played by some Sufi brotherhoods that the process was not a merely unidirectional and sharply vertical 'trickle-down' as in the European cases studied by Norbert Elias.[10] It was more a case of appropriation and diffusion, across various milieus, of both the prestige-laden label of *adab* and the practices and disciplines of self-cultivation associated with it.

Playing more generally on this Eliasian analogy, one could argue that *adab* helped in establishing a significant nexus between the cultivation of the self, on the one hand, and general ideas of integration of the body politic, on the other. This happened not only because *adab* provided an ethical grammar to the high bureaucracy, but also because of its frequent association with discourses on the 'circle of justice' and/or through the genre of 'mirrors for princes,' both of which contributed to the political literature of the epoch by defining virtues and duties of rulers and administrators. Within this wider field, incidentally, the use of *hadith* was not so rare and was remarkably combined with tales of non-prophetic exemplary characters.[11] We might even hypothesize a certain isomorphism between the *adab* and *hadith* traditions in matching character-building with ideas of a general (cosmological and socio-political) order—a hypothesis that might re-orient the analysis of the underlying discourse through targeted inquiries.

Adab therefore complexified (and to some extent civilized) the predominantly military character of political rule in the Middle Periods and facilitated its transformation during the transition to the early modern era.[12] Especially after the advent of Mongol rule and the ensuing crystallization of a dualism between dynastic law (the Mongol *yasa*) and the *shari'a*, *adab* could work as a civilizing emollient on both sides. Thus, overall, the distinction innervated by *adab* was not unidirectional. When I suggest the existence of a soft distinction, I do not intend to state that the distinction excluded a challenge of prophetic tradition, but rather to emphasize the process-like and open-ended character of the distinction. This could serve multiple goals by acting in a two-fold way on the self and in shaping social interactions (in this sense, being socio-cultural, civic, and ethical) and at

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10   Norbert Elias (1983), *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell); Norbert Elias (2000), *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell).

11   See: Yavari (2014), *Advice for the Sultan*.

12   Armando Salvatore (2016), *The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell).

the level of governance and via the issuing of rulings and decisions (so having a political and even legal significance).

This idea and practice of *adab* was also entertained by several religious scholars and enlivened parts of the *hadith* corpus itself, in spite of the fact that *adab* is a non-Qur'anic term. One *hadith* presents the Prophet as a champion of *adab*. Likewise, one can look at the fields of *adab al-mufti, adab al-fatawa, adab al-qadi*, explicitly addressed to the practitioners of *shari'a* law.[13] The most drastic argument to justify such ultimate compatibility consisted in stressing that *adab* is 'obviously' Islamic, since it promotes virtue: as such, it cannot be against Islam. But such understandings, wherever available, are the outcome of a long-term absorption process that does not invalidate the principled autonomy of *adab* as a non-religious type of discourse—only that the distinction is soft and ambivalent, not hard and straightforward.

Moreover, we can observe an internal differentiation within *adab*, and even *adab* operating as a factor of differentiation between various social functions and fields. The mother of all differentiation is in *Adab al-dunya wa-l-din* of al-Mawardi (d. 1058), where *adab* is simultaneously, yet differentially applied to "the world" (*al-dunya*) with its complex relations and "the religion" (*al-din*) as the ethical pursuit of the hereafter. However, this malleability of *adab* also included a promise of reconciliation of differences, as evident in al-Ghazali (d. 1111), for whom the *adab* of the self and the *adab* of political community basically coincided. On the other hand, in his famous *Ihya 'ulum al-din, adab*-related chapters are divided up in discrete sections like between *adab al-akl* (food), *adab al-nikah* (marriage), and *al-adab fi-l-mujalasa* (courtly, polite society), but also *adab tilawat al-Qur'an* (Qur'an recitation). The consequence is that *adab* is essentially a method (or even a metanorm) more than a sheer norm, to be applied to all aspects of life, including the fields regulated by the religious sciences and the *shari'a*.

In the same way in which the Islamicate ecumene is bigger than the Islamic religious community proper (the *umma*), there seems to be an ethical code that the religious scholars themselves have to acknowledge as having a broader purchase than the religious law. Therefore, the *fuqaha'* should also be well-versed in *adab* since this enables them to improve their capacities to read and interpret the Qur'an and *hadith*. Moreover, *adab* was

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13   M. Khalid Masud (1984), "Adab Al-Mufti: The Muslim Understanding of Values, Characteristics, and Role of a Mufti," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press): 124–5.

addressed to rulers and their key advisors and viziers/ministers, with a frequent emphasis on the virtue of self-restraint and the rational control of passions instrumental to implementing a viable statecraft (as it happens in the previously mentioned, often ambivalent 'mirror' genre).[14] Accordingly, we have *adab al-muluk* (kings), *adab al-sultaniyya* (sultanate), *adab al-wuzara'* (ministers), and *adab atba' al-a'imma* (the elite).[15] *Adab* was addressed to the leaders and their followers, to the 'big' and to the 'small' ones within society and politics, in terms of power and social standing: *adab al-kabir* (big) was matched by *adab al-saghir* (small).[16]

In this way, *adab* provides a narrative and normative umbrella for a soft and malleable type of secularity or, as I prefer to say, secular civility, and corresponding grids of distinction. *Adab* should also be connected to other concepts, practices and institutions that have been identified as potential carriers of secularity within pre-colonial, Islamicate history, like the lukewarm, highly ambivalent reliance on *shari'a* in the 'mirrors' for princes, the advent of dynastic law with Mongol and Turkic empires (*yasa*, *qanun*), but also *adab*'s mutual relations with *siyasa*. This is the concept we normally translate as 'public policy' or, more modernly, just 'politics,' but which in fact circumscribes a borderline area of human activity that is both legitimized from within the jurisprudential dimension of the *shari'a* tradition and escapes it for delineating a separate field demarcating the autonomy of rulers from a too rigid application of religious norms.

One can hypothesize that this regulating impetus of the *adab* tradition was driven by the perception among Islamicate cultural elites of various epochs that the normative import of *shari'a*, though of essential importance in keeping together the Islamic ecumene, could not be self-sufficient in the task of governing the complexity of the ecumene itself and the increasingly complex relations with its partners and foes. Therefore, we could see the fields of *shari'a* and *adab* as not just building a symmetric binary of distinction/differentiation but also as engaging in a continuous mutual accommodation through which each could be constructed as the internal limit of the other: while devotion to the *shari'a* and its implementation

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14   Yavari (2014), *Advice for the Sultan*.
15   Paul E. Walker (2011), "Social Elites at the Fatimid Court," in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*. Ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London and New York: Routledge), 106.
16   Jan-Peter Hartung, (2011), "Enacting the Rule of Islam: On Courtly Patronage of Religious Scholars in Pre- and Early Modern Times," in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*. Ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London and New York: Routledge): 302–3.

require the civilizing restraint of *adab, adab* in turn cannot openly contravene *shariʻa.*

To sum up this review of pre-colonial times, rather than searching for forms of secularity as distinguished from religion, we identify socio-cultural forms delineating ways of distinction, of softer distinction, between a corpus of norms of prophetic origin constituting the *umma* (the community of the faithful proper), and a type of civil ethic innervating a 'civilizing process' of sorts. During pre-colonial times, within the wide and internally diversified Islamicate realms, ways of distinction remained largely open-ended and allowed for a fluid process of continuous demarcations and re-amalgamations. Moreover, whatever kind of secular distinction might seem to emerge, it acquires a narrative and a habitualized form rather than a normative one. This finding matches the hypothesis that we face "different levels of sharpness and quality of distinction"[17] when we move beyond the West and beyond colonial modernity. This hypothesis also resonates with the view of Thomas Bauer, who, by stressing the Islamic (or Islamicate) "culture of ambiguity," helps shed light on an in-built capacity of Muslim historic actors to differentiate spaces and concepts without necessarily creating irreversible institutional differentiations.[18]

3. The Transformation of *Adab* during the Colonial Era

The relationship between *adab* and *shariʻa* was subjected to strains and changes during colonial and post-colonial times, without however producing a linear transformation toward a 'hard distinction' of religion vs. secularity. It is rather that the two traditions could no longer harmoniously (and tacitly) co-exist and interact. Starting in the late 19th century, several Muslim reformers saw themselves compelled to clarify the mutual relations between *shariʻa* and *adab*, which frequently, though not always, led them to subsume one under the other. Quite often, moving toward the 20th century, *shariʻa* happened to take the upper hand: a *shariʻa*, one should add, not seldom 'purified' from its historic substantial reliance on the *hadith* corpus, where its normative content was aligned with narration and habitus and therefore porous to *adab*. At times at this historical

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17   This was the formulation used by Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Christoph Kleine during the inaugural workshop, held in June 2016, of the HCAS *Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities* that they direct at Leipzig University.

18   Thomas Bauer (2011), *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Frankfurt: Verlag der Weltreligionen).

juncture, one even has the impression that *shariʻa* leapt out of its normative armature altogether to become a sort of metanorm.[19] Curiously, however, something similar seems to have happened to *adab* as well, to the extent that it morphed into an abstract value or ideal of proper, civilized modern behavior. This development unfolded in the context of the rise of a print-based public sphere that favored conceptual abstraction over narration and habitualization.

In the process of imposition of colonial patterns of governance particularly during the 19th century, the traditionally balanced relation between *shariʻa* and *adab* was increasingly disturbed, if not unsettled. Indeed, both narratives promised to help redeploy the type of subjectivity and governmentality that was in high demand within the new modern colonial settings.[20] During the first half of the 19th century in the Egypt of Mehmet Ali, not yet subject to colonial pressures and interventions but committed to ideas of modernization influenced by European models, the leading scholar and reformer al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) was still able to reconstruct a precarious balance between *shariʻa* and *adab* amidst the new aspirations and turbulence of the age.

In classic theories of the body politic, *adab* operated as the knowledge code inspiring the proper execution of the differentiated tasks of the various organs and limbs of the body. This approach was reworked by al-Tahtawi in ways that could transform *adab* – traditionally incumbent on both the ruler and the subjects – into a unitary engine now specifically centered on the hearts (*albab*) of the 'people,' a newly emergent category of a proto-nationalist dictionary. As shown in a recent study by Ellen McLarney, al-Tahtawi defined *adab* by referring to modern French concepts like liberty, equality, fraternity, but also and most crucially to justice and political participation/consultation.[21]

The contemporary/modern *adab*, or "*adab* of the age" (*al-adab al-ʻasriyya*), theorized by al-Tahtawi is ever more centered on the self-mastery of individual citizens[22] but is also of growing importance for politics, *siyasa*.[23] The connection between *adab* and *siyasa* pre-dated the colonial

19   Armando Salvatore (1998), "La shariʻa moderne en quête de droit: Raison transcendante, métanorme publique et système juridique," *Droit et Société* 29: 293–316.

20   Timothy Mitchell (1991), *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

21   Ellen McLarney (2016), "Freedom, Justice, and the Power of *Adab*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48/1: 25.

22   Ibid., 31.

23   Ibid., 34.

era, as previously noted. But now within *siyasa* the individual subject is prioritized over the ruler and his court for occupying the stage where the dynamics of the wider society and polity unfold. This shift resonates with the idea of the civilizing process of Elias, or, according to an author like Tim Mitchell, with a Foucaultian view of the capillarity of power and its circulation, with subjects acting as nodes in the social system.[24]

Al-Tahtawi also called for education and cultivation of language, intended as proper speech, no longer being a prerogative of the courtier and administrator, but now extended to a wider public. This step was reflected by al-Tahtawi's own linguistic interventions and reforms, helping to move from an elite-centered lexicon to a discourse and dictionary that could be appropriated and shared by the general public.[25] Interestingly al-Tahtawi, after training as an *ʿalim*, had become an expert in translation (particularly from French to Arabic). The new socio-political Arabic lexicon that he contributed to create, also as the editor of the first official, printed government bulletin in Egypt, was increasingly needed for kickstarting a program of higher education on a larger scale outside the traditional system of instruction controlled by religious scholars, and for propelling the first print media of the age.[26]

We can see here a process of adaptation and appropriation of earlier meanings of *adab* in order to cope with European colonial modernity, which was increasingly married to a strong notion of secular civility. Therefore, interventions like those of al-Tahtawi can be interpreted as finalized to define an autochthonous type of secularity whereby *adab* appears as a marker of a soft distinction. But what is most remarkable at this juncture is that the previously scattered working of *adab* as a metanorm of good conduct serving a variety of social and political roles (including those of religious personnel) becomes now much more integrated as a civilizational project. As put by Ellen McLarney, al-Tahtawi "maps—or translates—the *adab* of one sphere into the *adab* of another"[27], from individual creativity through learning proper linguistic skills to bodily composure and discipline.[28]

The focus is increasingly laid on reciprocity, as in the relation between the *ʿulama* and the *mutaʿallimun*, i.e. the teachers and the students/learners, but also between parents and children and rulers and citizens, whereby

24   Mitchell (1991), *Colonising Egypt*.
25   McLarney (2016), "Freedom, Justice, and the Power of *Adab*," 36.
26   Ibid., 27–8.
27   Ibid., 37.
28   Ibid., 42.

adab facilitates balancing their mutual rights and duties. In this way, *adab* becomes the source of a discourse of rights, which the *shari'a* tradition had not shunned but formulated in rather indirect ways. Al-Tahtawi also comes pretty close to formulating *adab* in terms of freedom, equality and fraternity (yet matched by mercy and compassion), and is also quite explicit in grounding the *adab* of freedom in terms of a broadly natural rather than strictly divine law.[29] However, the way *adab* was distinguished from *shari'a* was subject to significant changes. The distinction was not really hardened, but remolded in ways that started to expose it to a continual, mutual, explicit attrition.

The *'ulama'*, a category that al-Tahtawi does not see as restricted to religious scholars, are redefined as precisely those teachers who secure this *adab* of freedom from oppression, as the main interpreters and teachers and disseminators of *adab* to the general public. In parallel, the ethic of citizenship is increasingly anchored in the virtuous consciousness of the individual, regardless of social class and level of instruction.[30] This is a big transformation, but not the sudden emergence of a class of secular intellectuals opposing or competing with religious scholars. Interestingly, this change is facilitated by retrieving the traditional metaphor of the "heart," which now explicitly mediates between the private sphere of the inner forum and the public realm of responsibilities for the nation.[31]

It is also important to note that in spite of his deep knowledge of French concepts, and particularly of the French modern political dictionary, al-Tahtawi insisted on molding his vision on the basis of the traditional vocabulary of *adab*.[32] Accordingly, the *'ulama'* are now tasked with teaching *adab al-mu'asharat*, i.e. the *adab* of social relations. And here *tanwir*, "enlightenment," comes onto the scene. The *'ulama'* should enlighten the people, the citizens, the common men to know their rights and learn self-mastery. The instrument of *tanwir* is *ta'dib*, the verbal noun that designates the enforcement of *adab* as a program of discipline and training.[33] Now *adab* is increasingly dynamized as such a *ta'dib*, as an education-disciplining process and project, and is frequently framed in the context of the new concept of *tamaddun*, a quite explicit naming of the civilizing process. Becoming popular in the second half of the 19th century, this is a keyword that explicitly

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29   Ibid., 37.
30   Ibid., 38.
31   Ibid., 39.
32   Ibid., 40.
33   Ibid., 41.

reflects, on a linguistic level, the process-like character of the transformation and its centering on urban modes of behavior.[34]

Contemporary with al-Tahtawi, the wave of Ottoman reforms known as *tanzimat* also favored a reformulation of *adab* (*edep* in Ottoman Tutkish) as a larger and more inclusive cultural matrix that could help educate and civilize the political community (and deliver it from ignorance and error) better than a *shari'a*-based social discourse. Some scholars have referred to the use of *adab* in the 19th century as an 'invented tradition' but others, starting with Şerif Mardin, have objected to it, stressing a stronger line of continuity of *adab* culture among the Ottoman ruling elite from the zenith of the empire in the 16th century up to the so-called long Ottoman century, the 19th.[35] Indeed, the reforms did not start with the *tanzimat* but much earlier, in the 18th century, and elite criticism of the stagnation of the empire even earlier than that.

Overall, in Egypt as in the center of the Ottoman Empire and in other parts of the Islamicate realm, there were attempts to upgrade the narrative and normative culture of *adab* into the matrix of a rather self-sustaining project. This consisted in reconstructing, from the top down, viable patterns of secular civility and belonging, catering to an ever more differentiated grid of social classes and groups. Among the vast array of measures affecting such fields were the reforms of the military, finance and the law, the institution of schools for aspiring civil servants, and the launch of identity cards or papers. Such measures exemplify the extent to which the practical dimension of reform was matched by a quite vocal dimension of collective representation, which could rely on a reconstructed and even potentiated view of *adab*.

From the end of the 19th century until the 1920s a deepening and re-elaboration of the teachings of key classic authors (like the previously mentioned al-Ghazali, al-Mawardi, but also Miskawayh and Ibn Khaldun) facilitated a reconstruction of *adab* as a complex code for ways of being and appearing (and for managing their mutual tensions). This area of intellectual endeavor and public discourse produced increasing distinctions among the *adab* of different, often very specific, issue-defined fields: like between an *adab* providing instruction about how to cope with military occupation, how to educate children, how to be a wise consumer, how to

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34   Michael Gasper (2008), *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

35   Şerif Mardin (2006), "Continuity and Change in the Modernization of Turkey," in *Contemporary Islam: Dynamic, not Static*. Ed. Abdul Aziz Said, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, and Meena Sharify-Funk (London and New York: Routledge), 101–6.

cut up an artichoke or keep a distance from one's partner in a polka, but also how to avoid an excessive display of one's own religiosity in public. *Adab* became a compass for shaping a dizzying variety of civilized self-other relations.[36]

Al-Tahtawi's interventions clearly pushed the boundaries of the conceptual network gravitating around *adab* with the goal to facilitate a growing participation of the educated public in articulating a modern conception of social commerce. Interestingly, however, this operation of promoting a conscious process of self-formation open to the citizenry is facilitated *shari'a*'s revitalization as a tool of participatory disciplining of the rising Egyptian nation. With the late 19th century author al-Nadim (1845–1896), the European colonial pressure becomes the explicit motivation for recombining the two traditions of *adab* and *shari'a* against the background of a deepening program of legal reform that risked to pit positive law against religious norms.

The result, with al-Nadim, is the promotion and dissemination of an idea of a type of *adab* now more than ever explicitly rearmed as a disciplining engine, working through the internalization of rules of social intercourse, and ultimately feeding into the program of implementation of *shari'a* in all spheres of social life. Trying to summarize the new relationship, we can say that while now *adab* is conceived as the motor of the civilizing process, *shari'a* works increasingly as its ideological armature, both having to fit their civilizing discourse into the new reality of law codes and law courts. In the process, however, *shari'a* becomes ever more essentialized and, in its public propagation as Islamic normativity, severed from its traditional narrative framework and habitualizing prism. Not by chance, many reformers called for a return to the Qur'an—a call entailing a marginalization of *hadith*. From the late 1920s onward, Islamist mobilization and discourse will take over this task of re-energizing *shari'a* within the parameters set by reformers like al-Tahtawi and al-Nadim.

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36   Iman Farag (2001), "Private Lives, Public Affairs. The Uses of Adab," in *Muslim Traditions and Modern Techniques of Power*. Ed. Armando Salvatore (Hamburg: Lit/New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction), 95–122.

4. Conclusion: Continuities and Breakthroughs in the Working of *Adab*

In this long trajectory, we have observed a proliferating variety of forms of *adab* expressing ideas and practices of secular civility; a process that sharply accelerated during the colonial era. However, factors of continuity stand out in this long trajectory, and the most significant appear to be:

    a) A principled reliance on 'non-religious' sources

    b) The regulation of life conduct ('values') via appeal to a collective ideal of good life, practiced from the inside out with the aid of exemplary models to be followed

    c) An often tacit work of restraining potential excesses in the implementation of *shari'a* both from without (social relations) and from within (the self).

In this long drawn-out process, we see an increasing blurring of *adab* as an emic concept with etic notions of secular civility originating from within colonial discourse.

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