Research Article

Post-(De)colonial Thinking and the Other Half of Western Modernity: Abū Hayyān al-Tawḥīdī's Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam

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Abstract

The postmodern condition constitutes an extremely important threshold from which we can productively engage with the modern episteme. However, what has been identified as a new historical rupture in postmodern theory does not mark the end of modernity as the new world system is both reminiscent of the colonial past and symptomatic of its neocolonial impulse. This entanglement between the colonial past and the neo-colonial present urges us to foster new epistemic sovereignties and cognitive paradigms in conversation with the postcolonial and decolonial visions of the world. If the postcolonial perspective involves the critical reconsideration of the Eurocentric legacy of modernity as a form of "cultural hegemony" and "epistemological bias", the decolonial perspective seeks to delink from "the universal fictions of modernity" and subvert the legacy of Western "global linear thinking". Informed by this critical consciousness, the aim of this paper is twofold; the first is to reconsider the problematic relationship between Islam and modernity from a postcolonial standpoint, while the second emphasizes the importance of the decolonial option in our endeavor to shift the geography of reasoning from Western cannons of thought into non-European traditions of knowledge. The article explores Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's philosophical spirit as an instance of early Arab-Islamic humanism. Informed by postcolonial critical consciousness, I believe that the need to revisit the Muslim intellectual legacy of the "Golden Age" is vitally important to subvert the modern imperial episteme and reenergize hope in the ability of non-Eurocentric traditions of knowledge to foster new cognitive paradigms and canons of thought.

Keywords: Arabo-Islamic modernity; Modern episteme; Postcolonialism; Arab humanism; The Decolonial option

مقالة بحثية

التفكيـر مـا بعـد اللا-كولونيالـي والنصـف الآخـر للحداثـة الغربيـة: إنسـية أبـي حيـان التوحيـدي فـي عهـد النهضـة الإسلاميـة

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ملخص

لقـد شكلـت تجربـة مـا بعـد الحداثـة منعطفـا هامـا استشرفت مـن خلاله أصـوات الهامـش أفقـا جديـدا للممارسـة والتفكيـر فـي الغـرب. غيـر أن المنعطـف مـا بعـد حداثـي فـي السـياق مـا بعـد كولونيالـي لا يشـكل قطيعيـة إبسـتيمية مـع فكـرة الحداثـة الغربيـة بـل يجسـد امتـدادا لهـا، الأمـر الـذي يدعونـا إلـى البحـث عـن آفـاق بديلـة عـن تقاليـد الفكـر والمعرفـة الغربيتيـن القائمتيـن علـى مركزيـة أوروبـا وسـيادتها التاريخيـة حـول مشـروع الحداثـة. يدعونـا هـذا التعالـق بيـن الماضـي والحاضـر إلـى الانفتـاح أكثـر علـى تجـارب المجتمعـات الإنسـانية الأخـرى. فـإذا كانـت الرؤيـة مـا بعـد كولونياليـة تنطـوي علـى إعـادة النظـر فـي خطـاب الحداثـة كشـكل مـن أشـكال الهيمنـة الثقافيـة و"العنـف الإبسـتيمي"، فـإن الخيـار اللا-كولونيالـي يسـعى إلـى فـك الارتبـاط مـع كونيـة الحداثـة الغربيـة ويراهـن علـى تعدديـة إبسـتيمية تحتفـي بثـراء وغنـى التجـارب الإنسـانية الأخـرى. مـن هـذا المنطلـق، تهـدف هـذه الورقـة إلـى اسـتشكال مفهـوم الحداثـة الغربيـة بالتركيـز علـى تجربـة أبـي حيـان التوحيـدي وعلاقتـه بالنزعـة الإنسـية العربيـة الإسـلامية المبكـرة. إن الرغبـة فـي اسـتكشاف فكـرة الإنسـية عنـد أبـي حيـان التوحيـدي تسـعى إلـى تحقيـق هدفيـن رئيسـيين: (1اسـتشكال السـياقين التاريخـي والمعرفـي للحداثـة الغربيـة، 2) تغييـر جغرافيـة التفكيـر نحـو معـارف الجنـوب، وإبـراز مسـاهمتها فـي بنـاء تاريـخ الأفكار ومعالـم الحضـارة الإنسـانية الحديثـة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحداثة العربية الإسلامية، الإبستيم الحداثي، ما بعد الكولونيالية، الإنسية العربية، الخيار اللا-كولونيالي

1. Introduction

The contentious history of modernity, Islam, and the West continues to offer one of the most intriguing sites of scholarly and academic inquiry. The body of knowledge produced on the subject has transformed into an important legacy, documenting the experiences of both Muslim and non-Muslim historical responses and claims to it. Scholars, researchers, and academics dealing with modernity can be largely categorized into two major camps: those who see Europe as the sovereign subject of history, claiming chronological precedence and epistemological agency on modernity as a unique experience of historical change and progress and those who look at it as the product of humanity's richly and widely-diverse traditions of thought and wisdom. Nowhere have these views been significantly negotiated and epistemically contested than in the fields of postcolonial and decolonial studies. The two disciplines offer some of the most ground-breaking critiques to modernity, reminiscent of the colonial past and symptomatic of its neocolonial impulse. This entanglement between the colonial past and the neo-colonial present urges us to foster new epistemic sovereignties and cognitive paradigms in the Global South, particularly in the Muslim world, and stronger epistemic solidarities in conversation with the postcolonial and decolonial visions of the world.

The historical and epistemic scope of postcolonial and decolonial studies includes not only the European experience of modernity but also the distant past, such as the Arab Islamic, Latin American, Asian, and African legacies, marking thereby a collective endeavor to foster alternative pathways to the future and a global memory formation, documenting the experiences of non-Western traditions of thought and knowledge. The Arab-Islamic tradition of thought offers one of the richest resources through which we can confound the modern episteme and reclaim historical agency on modernity as an important facet of Arab-Islamic civilization during the "Golden Age". The range of possibilities available is boundlessly wide and so diverse; the focus of this article, however, will be on the intellectual legacy of Abū Hayyān al-Tawḥīdī during the Renaissance of Islam. The desire to revisit the humanist legacy of al-Tawḥīdī from a postcolonial and decolonial perspectives serves two major goals: 1) to redefine the historical and epistemic scope of Western modernity and 2) to redirect the geography of reasoning towards non-Western categories of thought and traditions of knowledge, highlighting their historical imports and contributions to the making of world histories and civilizations.

2. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam

The body of works produced by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (930-1023) has left an important legacy to posterity. Some of the most important philosophical, literary and Sufi works he wrote include Al-Baṣā'ir wa al-Dhakhā'ir, Al-Hawamil wa al-Shawamil, Al-Imtā' wa al-Mu'ānasa, Al-Isharat al-Ilahiyya, Al-Muqabasat, Al-Sadaqa wa al-Sadiq and Mathalib al-Wazirain. The rediscovery of such epistemic legacy represented by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and many other intellectuals from the "Golden Age" of Arabo-Islamic civilization is vitally important as the need to foster new cognitive paradigms and canons of thought is more significant than ever before in history. The aim of this new epistemic vision is to delink from "the universal fictions of modernity" and subvert the legacy of Western "global linear thinking", focusing instead on the other half of the story documenting the emergence of non-European epistemologies and traditions of thought and knowledge.[1] The end of cognitive empire and the coming of age of the epistemologies of the Global South[2] envisions a new epistemic horizon, where such Eurocentric claims to epistemological agency on the history of modernity seem to be relentlessly contested by the emergence of new epistemic sovereignties and cognitive paradigms in the Global South.

The desire to rediscover and re-explore the intellectual legacy of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī is informed by a decolonial critical consciousness, which seeks not only to problematize Western experience of modernity but also to delink from its Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge and hegemonic categories of thought. The aim is to shed light on such early instances of Arab Humanism and the remarkable contributions of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī to the flowering of the cultural and intellectual life of the Arabo-Islamic world during the "Golden Age". Doing some sort of archaeological work, we find out that the definitions developed for the concept of "modernity" are numerous and wide-ranging. In *The Spirit of Modernity*, Taha Abdurrahman identifies two major trends with respect to the notion of modernity: while some regard it as a continuous historical experience, which began in Western countries starting from the sixteenth century, the Renaissance and reformist movement, followed by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and then the Industrial, technological and most recently information revolution. Others define it in terms of its major characteristics and attributes, which they associate with the European "advancement of the causes of reason, progress and emancipation", and some others with the use of science and technology to exercise three forms of sovereignty: sovereignty over nature, society, and the human self.[3]

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1 See: Interview - Walter D. Mignolo, in *E-International Relation* (June 1, 2017).

2 See: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

3 طه عبد الرحمن، **روح الحداثة: المدخل إلى تأسيس الحداثة الإسلامية** (الدار البيضاء: المركز الثقافي الدولي، 2006)، ص23.

In the light of these definitions, critical engagement with Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's intellectual legacy from a postcolonial and decolonial perspectives should urge us to reexamine history, redefine the scope of modernity, the historical threshold with which it is identified and the major attributes associated with it. "The Middle Ages was not simply some kind of dark hole out of which European modernity seems to have magically emerged."[4] At the dawn of the modern era, Islam was the most vital civilization in the world, and its historical imports and contributions to the making of Western civilization have been widely-documented and acknowledged. Against Eurocentric paradigms, which look at the West as the provenance of historical change and progress and the fulcrum of world history and development, this part of the article addresses some aspects of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's humanism in the renaissance of Islam. It highlights the missing connection between earlier forms of humanism and the European Renaissance in the contemporary study of humanism in the Western canon i.e., the Arab-Islamic contribution to the making of early modern Europe and how such a whole period marking the flowering age of Arab Islamic civilization is overlooked and much less presented as key to the (re)configuration of the Renaissance. The goal is not only to unthink Eurocentrism and redefine the epistemic scope of modernity but also to provincialize the mythical figure of Europe,[5] which has often been taken as the original site of modernity, drawing on previous epistemic legacies and Arabo-Islamic traditions of knowledge and canons of thought.

The term "humanism" (*humanismus*) was actually coined by a German educator, F. J. Niethammer in *Der Streit des Philanthropismus und des Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungsunterrichts unserer Zeit*, published in 1808, to encourage ancient classics in education against the anti-humanism of modern science and technology. The word "humanist" (*humanista*) referred to scholars engaged in the *studia humanitatis* in early modern Europe, those who revived interest in the liberal arts of Greco-Roman legacy without relying on myth, religion, or tradition.[6] The link between the European Renaissance and Greco-Roman tradition of thought, knowledge, and science is vitally important to understand how the classical vision of the world, laying emphasis on cultural refinement and veneration for human dignity, historically paved the way to the dominant modern version of humanism. The missing link, however, is the Arabo-Islamic model of humanism and "whether Islamic civilization belongs to the Kulturkreis of the European West, having a common heritage of ancient culture and similar educational and

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4   Peter Hulme, "Beyond the Straights: Postcolonial Allegories of the Globe", In: Ania Loomba et el. (eds.), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond (*Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 42.

5   See: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

6   Joe L. Kraemer, "Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: A Preliminary Study," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* Vol. 104, No. 1 (1984), pp. 135-136.

human ideals, or whether it belongs to another cultural orbit ('Oriental')."[7] While Kraemer divides historians and Islamicists on the question of Arabo-Islamic affiliation to Greco-Roman heritage into two camps, those who deny and those who affirm the Western affiliation, others believe that the Arab-Islamic legacy both helped preserve ancient sciences and knowledges, and generated new contributions which were wholly original.

The missing connection in the contemporary study of humanism in the Western canon is the Arab-Islamic contribution to the making of early modern Europe and how such a whole period is overlooked and much less presented as key to the (re)configuration of the Renaissance. Working backward, the question I seek to address is the extent to which we can talk about Arab humanism during the "Golden Age" of Islamic civilization. Some of the most interesting answers to the question come from a well-established Algerian scholar and thinker, Mohamed Arkoun, who concentrated some of his scholarship on Arab humanism in the fourth/tenth century. In "The Struggle for Humanism in Islamic Contexts, Arkoun states: "[w]e first need to reexamine history and reevaluate the philosophical contents of modernity and the forms in which it entered the places where it originated and was actually implemented. This means that it is necessary to deconstruct through philosophy the triumphalist, victorious, and experimental usages of modernity. For they are usages the Western thought monopolizes."[8] Analyzing *Al-Hawamil wa al-Shawamil* by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh, the foremost contributors to the remarkable flowering of the cultural and intellectual life of the Islamic world during the reign of the Buyid dynasty in the fourth/tenth century, Arkoun argues that it is legitimate to speak of Islamic humanism given the rationalism and intellectual audacity of oriental philosophers (falāsifa) such as Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh. He argues that "the most fruitful meaning of Muslim humanism must be sought in this irruption of rational values and foreign secular traditions in an emotional consciousness dominated by an eschatological vision."[9] Nestled in this tradition of thought and knowledge is Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, who, according to Arkoun, in his own ways and the epistemological means available at the time "applied the deconstructionist or revolutionary methodology that we support on the thought and political society of the fourth century AH (tenth century AD), and all this in the name of real-life humanism. Al-Tawḥīdī's endeavor, however, remained an exception that was not repeated in Islamic contexts."[10]

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7   Ibid, p. 140.

8   Mohamed Arkoun, "The Struggle for Humanism in Islamic Contexts," *Journal of Levantine Studies,* No. 1 (Summer 2011), p. 157.

9   Mohamed Arkoun, "L'Humanisme arabe au IVe/Xe siecle, d'apres le Kitab al-Hawamil wal- Sawamil," *Studia Islamica* No. 14 (1961), p. 74.

10 Mohamed Arkoun, "The Struggle for Humanism in Islamic Contexts," Journal *of Levantine Studies,* No. 1 (*Summer* 2011), pp. 157-158.

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī lived during the Buyid period (334-440/945-1048), marked by the vicissitudes and complexities of the political and socio-cultural landscape of Baghdad. The spirit of the time had a great impact on al-Tawḥīdī's philosophical and literary thought. Unlike many of his contemporaries who worked hand in hand with the centers of power and had strong religious allegiances, al-Tawḥīdī remained faithful to the cosmopolitan spirit of Islam, though he occupied the status of a "stranger" (al-gharib) in his own society. Being critical of the Shia theology during the reign of the Buyid dynasty, while he was a strict Sunni in thought and action,[11] al-Tawḥīdī worked passionately to promote the universal and humanistic spirit of Islam and its "progressive revelation of a single truth to mankind by a series of apostles", culminating with the last prophet, Mohamed peace be upon him. Dissatisfied with the existing moral practices of the people at the time, who abandoned the early example of the Muslim community,[12] al-Tawḥīdī expressed his conception of the common good and unity of mankind as a state of mystic and spiritual elevation. Unlike Kraemer's claim that al-Tawḥīdī's use of the term "gharib" suggests a feeling of estrangement in an anti-religious landscape, for al-Tawḥīdī it refers to a blessed Muslim both in thought and action: a "perfect man" the image of which he exemplifies through his individual experience of strangeness and Sufi philosophical belief in the power of the mind to "set into motion an interpretative awakening of human thought to overcome man's ignorance of the secrets of the universe, the mysteries of the soul, the reality of God, and the ways to reach Him."[13]

Once in 653/964, Nuha Alshaar states that al-Tawḥīdī asked Ibn al-Jala about the character of the gharīb in Islam, to which he responded by a famous *Hadīth* saying: "Islam began as a stranger and shall return to being a stranger just as it began, thus, blessed be the strangers from my community!."[14] This form of religious humanism, which al-Tawḥīdī embodied in the renaissance of Islam, is consistent with the spirit of Italian humanism as the boundaries between the "secular" and religious can hardly be demarcated. As Charles Trinkaus puts it, when the Italian humanists gently started to break away from the "confusing multiplicity and externality of late-medieval moral systems" they did not come up with a new structure of their own. They

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11 Alexander Key, "The Applicability of the Term 'Humanism' to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī," *Studia Islamica* Vol. 100, No. 101 (2005), p. 78.

12 Joe L. Kraemer, "Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: A Preliminary Study," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* Vol. 104, No. 1 (1984), p. 235.

13 Mohamed Abu Rumman, *Sufism Today: Contemporary Interpretations of the Sufi Community and Its Different Patterns* (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015), p. 59.

14 Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 73.

rather emphasized the internal and the spiritual, where each man carried within him a vestige of the Creator.[15] Petrarch so interestingly articulates this idea when he states: "[i]f to admire Cicero means to be a Ciceronian, I am a Ciceronian... However, when we come to think or speak of religion, that is, of supreme truth and happiness, and of eternal salvation, then I am certainly not a Ciceronian, or a Platonist, but a Christian. I even feel sure that Cicero himself would have been a Christian if he had been able to see Christ or to comprehend His doctrine."[16] Italian humanists accordingly stressed subjectivity and autonomy in man but did not break with the religious legacy of the Christian world.

These overlapping histories between "secular" and religious humanism had been greatly eclipsed by enlightenment modernity and the secular rupture it fostered through the displacement of traditional value-systems and religious orthodoxies with new epistemic sovereignties and cognitive paradigms. As Alexander Key argues, the term humanism, which was coined by the German pedagogue F. J. Niethammer in 1808, is mostly associated with the legacy of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment and Cartesian certainty. Missing in this paradigmatic shift in mainstream discourses about the historical content of modernity and how it originated are the entangled histories of the "secular" and religious in the Arabo-Islamic and early modern European traditions of humanism alike. In "The Applicability of the Term Humanism to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī", Key draws on two major legacies, al-Tawḥīdī and Petrarch, and makes two important observations on Renaissance historiography: the first is

> [...] that a parallel seems apparent between the Italian humanist stress on internal spirituality, and the Sufism of Abū Ḥayyān and his period, which can equally be described in terms of a desire to root faith and religion (Islam) in something less connected to the established religious structures. The second observation is to ask the question: why do Kraemer, Makdisi and Arkoun take secularism as a characteristic of humanism, if it is not borne out by the Italian sources.[17]

Key rigorously points out that when twentieth century scholars, intellectuals and thinkers use the term "humanism" that includes the concept of "secularism", they no longer draw links between Abū Ḥayyān's Baghdad and Petrarch's Italy, they rather use a post-Enlightenment

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15 Charles Edward, Trinkaus, "Italian Humanism", In *Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 459.

16 Petrarch, "Letter to the Shade of Cicero", In: *The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance: A Sourcebook*, Second Edition, Kenneth Bartlett (ed.) (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p.35

17 Key, Alexander "The Applicability of the Term 'Humanism' to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī", *Studia Islamica,* Vol. 100, No. 101 (2005), p. 84.

European concept for a "pre-Enlightenment European movement to describe a tenth-century Islamic reality."[18] Such terminological ambiguity is a major intellectual flaw in Renaissance historiography, an epistemic fact which urges us to reevaluate the historical beginnings of modernity and how it evolved and developed across different civilizations and cultures.

The connection Key makes between Abu Hayyān and Petrarch to highlight the impact of Islamic civilization on Europe's intellectual development is informed by a cross-civilizational perspective and works better by "integration than by comparison". Such a cross-civilizational approach is potentially able to confound the imperial episteme and redefine the historical context of modernity, being the product of humanity's richly-diverse traditions of wisdom rather than a distinct historical experience upon which the West claims historical agency, epistemological sovereignty, and chronological primacy. In the postcolonial context, Bill Ashcroft muses: like post-colonial literature, the most characteristic alternative modernities are those we might call hybridized, ones that appropriate and transform global cultural forms to local needs, beliefs, and conditions. This does not make them extensions of modernity but new culturally situated forms of modernization. Modernity is not so much adopted as adapted and re-created, and increasingly, modernities may adapt other alternative modernities.[19] While the notion of "alternative modernities" in the postcolonial context is focused on the global flow of ideas from the metropolis into the (post)-colony and how such flows are adapted and recreated to meet local needs and conditions, the decolonial perspective expands beyond the scope of colonial modernity, often identified with the violent histories of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' colonialism and imperialism and most recently with the discovery of the Americas,[20] inviting us to shift the geography of reasoning to local epistemes and self-knowledges building on non-Eurocentric trajectories of thought and allegories of universal knowledge.

In the "Golden Age" of Arab-Islamic civilization, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī represents an extremely important philosophical and literary legacy through which we can rethink the history of modernity, reevaluate the contribution of Arab-Islamic knowledge and science to the making of Western civilization and delink from Western allegories of universal knowledge, focusing on what Gloria Anzaldúa and Walter D. Mignolo called later "border-thinking" knowledges. Defined by epistemic difference, these alternative knowledges introduce other cosmologies into the hegemonic discourse of modernity, which are not unwittingly committed to or restrained to

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18 Ibid, p. 85.

19 Bill, Ashcroft "Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial*", Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2014), p. 84.

20 See: Loomba (eds.), Op. cit.

its frame.[21] I have drawn on the humanism of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, widely recognized by Arkoun, Kraemer, Key, Makdisi and Trinkaus and focused on the Sufi and cosmopolitan spirit of that philosophical legacy. Rediscovering the entangled histories of the religious with the "secular" in the renaissance of Islam and that of Christian Europe marks an important terrain of philosophical inquiry where the modern imperial episteme can be discursively confounded and politically subverted. I have opted for a cross-civilizational perspective, emphasizing the historical imports of al-Tawḥīdī's philosophy to Petrarch's humanism in early modern Europe.

3. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's Ethics, Love, and Friendship in Politics

In this section, I turn to al-Tawḥīdī's notion of ethics, love, and friendship in politics and how it both differs and cross-fertilizes with Greek philosophical tradition. Though modern political philosophy generally considers friendship to be a private matter, some studies have revitalized interest in the classical concept of friendship and its importance in politics. The interconnectedness of the private with the public and the personal with the political marks an interesting terrain of philosophical inquiry. Given the scarcity of studies on the relationship between friendship and politics, especially in the Arab-Islamic context of scholarly work in English, I shall focus on Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's political thought, ethics, and social idealism. Al-Tawḥīdī devoted a whole work, *Al-Sadaqa wa al-Sadiq*, to the concept of friendship in politics, though he had made references to it in several other books such as *Al-Baṣā'ir wa al-Dhakhā'ir, Al-Hawamil wa al-Shawamil, Al-Muqabasat and Risa-la fi -al-Hayā.*

Al-Sadāqa wa al-Sadiq was written in the form of a lengthy letter in which al-Tawḥīdī introduces friendship as an intellectual solution to the social, political, and cultural predicament of his time, the Buyid period. In his introduction, he proposes Sadāqa as a social form of intimacy (*ulfa*) to promote a different moral and political order. Al-Tawḥīdī opens the letter with the following prayer:

"Oh God, lift us up for we have stumbled, cover us for we are exposed, sustain us with the intimacy (*ulfa*) by which hearts are set right and chests are purified so that we may coexist in this world, agreed about what is goodness, preferring piety, adhering to the rules of religion, taking hold of virtue, disdaining involvement in anything which infringes on concord, readied for the next world which all must face, from the sudden appearance of which there is no escape. You grant to whomever you want whatever you want."[22]

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21 Walter D. Mignolo & M. V Tlostanova "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2006), p. 214.

22 Al-Tawḥīdī, Abu Hayyan, "Preface", *Al-Sadāqa wa al-Sadiq,* Trans. A. Nuha Alshaar, In: *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p.138 .

Sadāqa, which stands for social intimacy *(ulfa)*, is proposed as a way to reform the social order and the state of moral decline which people had come to experience under the Buyid rule. Al-Tawḥīdī appeals to religion as a way of bonding society. For him, *sadāqa* secures the synergic function of society; it is a virtue that restrains human nature, nurtures affection among people, purifies hearts, and fulfills godliness *(salāh)*, through moral refinement and religious praxis.

In the preface to *Al-Sadāqa wa al-Sadiq* al-Tawḥīdī mentions that he gave a course of lectures in the City of Peace *(Baghdad)* on "friendship, companionship *(ʻishra)*, brotherhood *(mu-ʼakh āt)*, intimacy *(ulfa)*, and related matters, such as caring *(al-riʻāya)* and protection *(hifāz.)*, sincerity *(wafāʼ)*, help *(al-musāʻada)*, advice *(al-nası-ha)*, benevolence *(al-badhl)*, munificence *(al-muʻasāt)*, generosity *(al-ju-d)*, magnanimity *(al-takarrum)*."[23] Under the Buyid rule, people had become morally corrupt, socially riven with conflicts, and ruthlessly subservient to self-interest. In *Al-Hawamil wa al-Shawamil*, al-Tawḥīdī asserts: "indeed, man has become a difficult problem for man *(inna al-insāna qad ashkala ʻalayhi al-insān)*."[24] Accordingly, Nuha Alshaar argues that al-Tawḥīdī "introduces sadāqa *(a synonym of mahabba)* as a virtue that would enable a person to achieve perfection with others, purify his or her soul, and refine his or her moral qualities by suppressing selfish inclinations incompatible with communal existence."[25] The moral cultivation and purification of the soul *(tazkiyyat al-nafs)* from the "impurity of its natural disposition" mark the foundation of al-Tawḥīdī's philosophical theory of communal love *(mahabba)* and social well-being.

Al-Tawḥīdī seems to define the moral qualities of the soul on Platonic grounds when he distinguishes between "the rational soul *(al-nafs al-natiqa)*, the irascible soul *(al-nafs al-ghadabiyya)*, and the appetitive soul *(al-nafs al-shahwaniyya)*."[26] Love/mahabba emanates from the rational/virtuous soul *(al-nafs al-natiqa)*, which supervises the other faculties of the soul and helps man achieve perfection and harmony with others. In *Lysis*, however, Plato's notion of philia (friendship) and *(eros)* love differs from that of al-Tawḥīdī's. In Plato's *Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis*, with a New Translation, David Bolotin affirms that Plato both asserts and denies that there is true friendship; first, he seems to subscribe to Homer's view that friendship exists between equals. Only those who are good could be friends in the true sense. Yet soon afterward, Socrates contests such a claim arguing that the good

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23 Ibid.

24 أبو حيان التوحيدي، **الهوامل والشوامل**، تحقيق أحمد أمين والسيد أحمد صقر (القاهرة: لجنة التأليف والترجمة، 1951)، ص176.

25 Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 197.

26 أبو حيان التوحيدي، **الإمتاع والمؤانسة**، تحقيق أحمد أمين وأحمد الزين (بيروت: المكتبة العصرية، 1953)، ص53.

are self-sufficient and in want of nothing. The denial of the possibility of friendship between the good prepares the ground for another suggestion, namely that those who are neither good nor bad become friends of the good. In other words, friendly love is the love of imperfect human beings, like us, those who are good and able to help and make us happier. Friendly love accordingly is associated with the desire to be happy and eradicate evil. Consequently, there is no reason to believe that the good will return the love which they receive.[27] This leaves us wonder in confusion about the meaning of a true/disinterested friendship, which is independent of needs and interests and an imperfect friendship, which is dependent on the need and desire to free ourselves and eliminate evil from the world.

In Plato's *Symposium*, which is considered a philosophical topos on the question of love, Aristophanes' speech comes in the form of a myth, where he explains that long ago, human beings were spherical bodies with four hands, four legs, two heads and two sets of genitals. They were very powerful and vigorous and made threatening attacks on the gods. The gods defeated them, and Zeus decided to cut each person into two parts. Because of that, each being longs for the part from which it had been separated. The quest for primordial wholeness is called love or *eros.*[28] In the Islamic context of the myth, Nuha Alshaar affirms through reference to the Brethren of Purity that "the inborn inclination and the longing for unity occurs only in the soul and not in the body; this makes it different from *eros* as the desire."[29] we have to find our other half, in order to become whole. This further confirms Plato's conclusion in Lysis that true friendship can exist only between equals. In fact, al-Tawḥīdī's division of the souls is similar to that of Plato's concerning the place the rational part is accorded in the hierarchy. Yet, while Plato's concept of the soul is predominantly political, al-Tawḥīdī's one is primarily ethical as the purification of the soul starts as an individual form of spiritual elevation before it transforms into social virtue. This comparative view displays one major difference between Western and Arab-Islamic traditions of thought: "one proceeds from knowledge to ethics and the other from ethics to knowledge.[30] Al-Jabri argues that "[i]f the concept of reason in Greek culture and modern and contemporary European culture is connected to 'awareness of causes',

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27 David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis, with a New Translation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 11.

28 Plato, "Symposium", *Great Dialogues of Plato,* Trans. W. H. D. Rouse (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), p. 85.

29 Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 20.

30 Mohammed Abed, Al-Jabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World,* Trans. Center for Arab Unity Studies (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2001), p. 26.

…namely to knowledge, the significance of the term 'reason– *al-ʿaql'* in the Arabic language, and consequently in Arab thought, is related mainly to conduct and ethics."[31]

The concept of philia (friendship) as the foundation of human association is also addressed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he distinguishes between three kinds of friendships: friendships of pleasure, utility, and virtue.[32] Al-Tawḥīdī draws on al-Sijistānī's astonishing interpretation, which both approves of the Aristotelian concept of "disinterested friendship" and denies the two others. Al-Sijistānī's remarks:

> A friend is not sought to acquire something from, nor to give something to, but to be relied upon, associate with, benefit from, consult with in adversity, encourage in matters of concern, be adorned with when present, and longed for when absent. Acquiring and giving in this matter is by way of beneficences and generosity, without envy, reluctance, temporizing, mutual incrimination, hinting at disapproval, and vexing ways and inconstancy.[33]

This kind of friendship nurtures harmony and unity between people. A real friend is taken to be someone who does good to his friend or wishes the friend to be and to live for the friend's own sake. On another occasion, al-Sijistānī reports that someone asked Aristotle: "what is a friend?" and he responded: "it is a man who is you, but in different person."[34] Al-Tawḥīdī explains al-Sijistānī's astonishing response to this, stating that Aristotle:

> … referred by this to the final stage of agreement in which friendship between two friends can exist. Do you not see that the harmony between them both has a beginning from which they start, even as it has an end which they reach? The beginning of this harmony is being united, and its end is unity. Just as a man is one thanks to what makes him a man, in the same way he becomes one with his friend through that which makes a friend. This is because the two habits [of the friends] transform into one, and the two wills [of the friends] become one. No wonder in this, for the poet has already referred to this saying:

> His soul is my soul, and my soul is his soul

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31 Ibid.

32 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Trans. Irwin (Batoche Books: Kitchener, 1999), p. 134.

33 أبو حيان التوحيدي، **الصداقة والصديق**، تحقيق إبراهيم الكيلاني (دمشق: دار الفكر، 1964)، ص22.

34 نفسه.

If he wishes, so do I, and if I wish, so does he.[35]

What is interesting about this passage, Nuha Alshaar comments, is "the spiritual definition and the concept of unity among friends added to the Aristotelian definition by al-Sijistānī from the poet. Aristotle's disinterested friendship suggests that friends love each other for themselves"[36] Therefore, in al-Sijistānī's conception, sadāqa brings perfection, harmony, and unity on a large scale. "Just as man is unified by all that makes him human, in a similar way once he has a real friend, the two merge into one through the bond of friendship."[37] Al-Sijistānī's reference to al-Hallāj is astonishing, knowing that he was unsympathetic with Sufism. The link between al-Tawḥīdī and al-Hallāj, the foremost advocate of Sufism, however, has been reported by a number of sources, especially by Zayd b. Rifa'a. Al-Tawḥīdī's Sufi concept of friendship seems to be compatible with the notion of "self-annihilation" as a form of unity with God, which al-Hallāj exemplified. Unity with God which al-Hallāj expressed in his famous statement "*ana al-haq, ana al-haq*, I am the truth" is replaced by unity and harmony among people.

Al-Tawḥīdī's concept of *sadāqa* as a form of social intimacy (*ulfa*) is impregnated with instances of Islamic humanism. Stressing the paramount importance of unity and harmony, al-Tawḥīdī affirms:

> […] this nobility, I mean harmony and unity, would bring in a friend and a friend, then a second and a third, then the young and the old, the obeying and obeyed, governor and governed, one neighbor after another, quarter after quarter, and country after country, until it reaches the valleys and the highlands, and spreads wide over the nearest or farthest [place]. Only then will you perceive the magnificent Word of God and the highest way to obey Him.[38]

Clearly, then, al-Tawḥīdī's *sadāqa* serves a pedagogical and didactic end as it envisions a new social, political, and moral order, where people do not simply live with each other but rather cooperate with one another through alternative forms of human conduct. Al-Tawḥīdī draws on *sadāqa* as both a divine and civil form of governance when he states that "*sharı-'a* is God's siyāsa in his creation of man, while rulership is the siyāsa of people over other people. Whenever *sharī'a* is stripped of siyāsa it is incomplete, and when siyāsa is stripped of *sharī'a* it is also

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35 نفسه، ص22-23.

36 Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 164.

37 Ibid, pp. 22-23.

38 أبو حيان التوحيدي، الإمتاع والمؤانسة، ص53.

incomplete."[39] This intellectual attempt to bring religion and philosophy together speaks in full volume to the humanist/secular tradition of eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries' European modernity. Not only is religion entangled with the history of humanism as I have illustrated earlier through such European renaissance figures like Petrarch but also with the Arab-Islamic humanist tradition of thought and knowledge as I have articulated through Abu Hayyan al-Tawḥīdī's philosophical legacy.

4. Conclusion

Muslim heritage of the "Golden Age" represents one of the richest resources through which we can forge a close bond with Global South Epistemologies. In the current article, I have addressed al-Tawḥīdī's humanism from the perspective of postcolonial and decolonial studies, the visions of which seek not only to reread history from the perspective of its "subjectified others", but also to subvert Western categories of thought, by focusing on "subaltern" knowledges and critical epistemologies as alternative paths to the future. The need to shift the geography of reasoning towards other epistemic traditions is greater than any time before in history. In today's globalized world, the uneven modes of knowledge production, circulation, and reception characteristic of the digital age do not only urge us to question the current forms of structural inequalities and hierarchies attendant with the development of the capitalist world system, but to foster stronger epistemic solidarities, whereby Global South knowledges both in the past and the present could offer alternative imaginaries and sovereignties in the world. None of this is possibly feasible without postcolonial hope and decolonial praxis, both in politics and in the academy.

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39 Ibid.

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