EGYPT: THE SPLIT OF AN IDENTITY
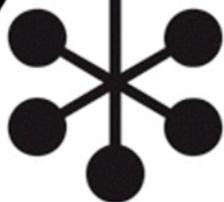
The Impact of the West's Liberal Ideas on the Evolution and Dichotomy of Egypt's National Identity During the Nineteenth Century

Shawki AbdelRehim

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Dedication

To my lovely granddaughters
Sara and Yosra

In ancient times, Herodotus, the Greek historian, said that Egypt was the gift of the Nile. Today we can say that Egypt is a country that made history and is made by history.

Shawki

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Prologue

The Culture Shock

The concept of national identity emerged and evolved with the resurgence and development of the nation-state in Europe during the eighteenth century. Related to the need to be unique or different from others, national identity creates a sense of belonging in an individual to a certain nation or an ethnic group.[1] On the other hand, national identity is the creation of nationalism, which Antony D. Smith defines as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation."[2] This growing collective consciousness of distinction rests on certain "symbolic markers (including cultural, biological, or territorial), and is rooted in bonds of a shared past and perceived ethnic interests."[3] There are many arguments about what drives communities to evolve self-awareness. Nearly all of them revolve about economic, social, cultural, and geographic factors. Joshua Fishman, for instance, asserts the role of ethnic similarity together with other factors,

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[1] Harold Isaac, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change*, New York, Harper & Row 1975, paraphrased in M. Elaine Burgess, *The Resurgence of Ethnicity: Myth or Reality?* Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 1, Number 3, July 1978, p. 366

[2] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 73

[3] M. Elaine Burgess, *The Resurgence of Ethnicity,* in *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 1, 1978, p. 270

such as wars and social economic development of communities.[4] Elaborating upon the economic factor, Antony Smith stresses that the "new forms of economic organization create a need for new social bonds and group identity, extending the existing, and more local ties."[5] J. L. Talmon, on the other hand, suggests that "the weakening of religious controls and influence and increasing acceptance of civil human rights are involved."[6] Simon Murden emphasizes the role of culture and geography in constituting and evolving national identity: "An awareness of a common language, ethnicity, history, religion, customs and institutions, and reference to landscape, represent the building blocks of culture and the totems of self-identity."[7]

Such factors, even geography, that operate in national identity are dynamic and in a state of continual flux.[8] This denotes that the national identity, in its turn, is by no means static; it changes over time by events and through mutual effects. Thus, we cannot say safely that the cultural specifics of a Victorian Englishman are similar to those of his descendants at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Fishman, on the other hand, points out that it is the elite, the intellectuals, the nobility, and the upper bourgeoisie who sense first and contribute to the change in the collective consciousness of national self-differentiation.[9] The members of the elite, as

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[4]   Joshua A. Fishman, *Language and Nationalism,* Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1972, p. 7

[5]   Smith, *op. cit.,* p. 78

[6]   J.L. Talmon, *The Unique and the Universal.* London: Secker and Warburg, p. 17

[7]   Simon Murden, *Cultural Conflict in International Relations: The West and Islam,* in John Baylis and Steve Smith (edits.) *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations.* Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 176

[8]   See Tarek Heggy, *Our Identity and Globalization,* Internet, December 17, 2000. http://www.arabworldbooks.com/articles11.htm

[9]   Fishman, *op. cit.,* p. 15

Smith illustrates, are not "power seekers," and they rarely become national leaders. Being the forerunners and influential members in their communities, they are usually preoccupied with the search for roots, "move further from traditional culture than the general population," and create with their values an "ideology" which "determines what characteristics the 'nation' will have." And this they consider their mission that they have to disseminate to the masses.[10]

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Given such definitions of nationalism and national identity, we can say that the Egyptian identity is characterized by certain unique traits. The first observed characteristic is that it is a complex, multilayered identity, rooted in history and geography on the one hand, and it is receptive and has a remarkable capacity that enables it to absorb and assimilate the other's cultures and identities on the other. Both time and space have played a paramount role in constituting Egypt's character. During its long history that continuously spanned over fifty centuries, and due to its unique position at the juncture of the three continents of the Old World and its effluent natural resources, Egypt had been subdued to a series of subsequent conquering colonization and settlement. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the Egyptians are absolute Arab or Southern Mediterranean, as in the overlapping multilayered identity we find elements of Persian, Greek, Roman, Arabic, and even mid- and southeastern-Asian culture, which the Egyptians accepted, absorbed, and assimilated.[11]

Another fact that has to be confirmed is that Egypt is part of the Mediterranean civilization, and undoubtedly has exerted

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[10] Smith, *op. cit.,* pp. 91-98

[11] For this point see Elizabeth J. Fox, *Egypt: the Search for Identity,* December 18, 2000. Internet, http//www.duke.edu/-cfox/Mals_ paper.html, and Heggy, *op. cit.*

influence on and has been influenced by the countries of the Mediterranean basin. In its ancient history Egypt had its impact on the Hellenic culture that later influenced the European civilization and contributed to Europe's Renaissance. Taha Hussein said,

> "The Greeks before and during their golden age used to consider themselves the pupils of the Egyptians in civilization, particularly the fine arts. History has neither denied this nor subtracted anything from it. On the contrary, the facts affirm an Egyptian influence not only on Greek architecture, sculpture, and painting but on the applied arts and sciences as well, not to mention the various aspects of daily life, including political conduct."[12]

Taha Husein adds that even after the surrender of Egypt to Roman power, Greek culture found refuge in Egypt throughout the Roman period, particularly after Greece had been subjected to Rome, which had destroyed her Hellenism. Surprisingly enough, Egypt managed to impress Hellenism on Romans.[13] The encounter between the Egyptian and Greek cultures had, in the ancient age, begot the Alexandrian philosophy that had a great effect on the course of civilization.[14]

On the other hand, Egypt's encounter with Islam in the seventh century, the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, and the West in modern history significantly influenced Egyptian national identity. When Egypt encountered Islam, which entered Egypt with the Arab conquerors, Egypt became a part of the Islamic civilization, flourishing when it flourished and declining when it declined. In the opinion of Elizabeth Fox, Islam "added

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[12] Taha Husein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt,* Trans. Sidney Glazer*, D.C.* Edward Brothers Inc., for American Council of Learned Societies, 1954, p.4

[13] *Ibid.* p.7

[14] See *ibid.* p.7

an outlook and a set of values that are still an absolutely vital part of its national identity."[15] This is quite true, but Islam had done more than adding an outlook and values. Islam mostly obliterated Egypt's Pharaonic identity and gave it its only new prevalent character that continued until the nineteenth century. As part of the Islamic world, Egypt, together with Damascus and Baghdad, has become an important seat of Islamic culture. It became, several times, a core country in a widely vast civilization. "After the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad," said A. H. Horani, "the center of gravity of Islamic thought and Arabic and Arabic culture moved to Cairo, and the Al-Azhar Mosque University became the home of the traditional science of religion and language."[16]

Under the Ottoman rule,[17] however, Egypt was degraded to the status of a dependency, governed from Istanbul, and remained for three centuries, as Elizabeth Fox said, "a sort of backwater."[18] It was exploited as a source of taxation for the benefit of an imperial government and served as a base for foreign expansion. In addition, the Ottomans drained it economically and culturally. After defeating the Mamluk army, the Ottoman Sultan Selim the Grim took with him to Istanbul many Egyptian scholars of religion and Arabic, as well as the master craftsmen of all sorts of trades. Thus, as Ibn Iyas (the Egyptian chronicler at the time) wrote, about fifty industries in Egypt were destroyed. And since then, Egypt entered a lethargic period that stretched for more than 300 years,[19] and the Egyptian identity "submerged under

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[15]   Fox *op. cit*.

[16]   A.H. Horani, Preface to Jamal Muhammad Ahmad, *The Intellectual Origin of Egyptian Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1960, p.vii

[17]   Egypt came under the Ottoman rule in 1517

[18]   Fox *op. cit*.

[19]   Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 and declared the end of the Ottoman rule of Egypt in 1914

that of the Turks." Turkish became the language and culture of "…the country, which suffered patiently while paying dues to the oppressor."[20] Yet whether Egypt's culture flourished or declined, and whether it was an independent country or dependency, it remained part of the Islamic State, where cosmopolitanism was the dominant trend and the nation-state was totally unknown. This occurred at the time when Europe was starting its Renaissance, experiencing religious reform, exploring new territories, getting rid of the cosmopolitanism attitude, and laying down the bases of the nation-state, building roads, developing communications, spreading education, and encouraging science and scientific method.[21]

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The third and most important encounter was with the West in the modern times. This does not mean that the contact between Europe and Egypt was, any time, interrupted. Yet when Napoleon Bonaparte led the French Expedition to Egypt in 1789 a new era began in the country. The germ of the Egyptian nationality was introduced, and the dichotomy of the Egyptian identity began to take shape. Nevertheless, historians are not in agreement about the importance of the French Occupation, which lasted for three years, in awakening the Egyptian mind. Some view it as the real start for developing Egypt's present identity while the others belittle the impact of the expedition and consider those who emphasize its role in arousing Egyptians' consciousness as exaggerating.

The advocates argue that three significant factors led to arousing the Egyptian awareness of themselves as a distinct nation — the invasion in itself, the policy that Napoleon pursued in

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[20] *Ibid.*

[21] See Ahmad A. Mustafa, *Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi in Misr al-Hadithah [The Evolution of Political Thought in Modern Egypt].* Cairo, 1973, p.5

governing Egypt, and the Egyptians' resistance to the French Occupation. The French invasion broke Egypt's isolation and revealed to the imperialist nations of Europe, especially Britain, the importance of Egypt's strategic location, and "revealed to Egypt the attractions of the West that would have such an enormous impact on its present identity."[22] Meanwhile, the body of savants who accompanied the French army set up the Institut de Égypte and the printing press of Cairo and "set about cataloguing and classifying Egypt, its flora and fauna, its art, its architecture, its monuments, and its inhabitants as if it were some newly discovered species."[23] Their findings were recorded in a remarkable twenty-one-volume work, *Description de l'Egypte,* which aroused Europe's interest in ancient Egypt. The savants' work, especially their chemical experiments, impressed Egyptian religious scholars in such a way that al-Jabarti, the Egyptian chronicler at the time, was "deeply impressed" and "jubilantly records his appreciation of the scholars work."[24] The culture shock, moreover, had driven some of Al-Azhar's sheikhs to learn European sciences. Among them was Sheikh Hassan al-Attar (later the rector of Al-Azhar), who always said, "Our country must change, and we must take from Europe all the sciences, which do not exist here."[25] Al-Attar was the first intelligent Egyptian who dedicated his life to awakening the mind of Egypt.

In his policy, Napoleon drew on Al-Azhar's sheikhs, using their influence among the people for the purposes of his regime. He gave them authority and praised them as the wisest, the best informed, and the most vigorous. He even declared that they should govern Egypt in place of the Mamluks, who were, after

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[22]   Fox, *op. cit.*

[23]   *Ibid.*

[24]   See Jamal Muhammad Ahmad, *The Intellectual Origin of Egyptian Nationalism.* Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1960, p. 4

[25]   See *ibíd.* p. 5

all, "only slaves from far away Georgia and Caucasus."[26] He also established *al-Diwan* (an advisory council) for them to exercise their authority. This, as advocates stress, created in Egypt what they call the constitutional awareness, and taught intelligent sheikhs the basics of governance. In addition, the Egyptian resistance to the French Occupation and the two revolts that erupted in Cairo against Napoleon's rule, as the advocates emphasize, had "awakened what may be called the political consciousness of modern Egypt."[27]

Contrarily, the opponents maintain that the short French rule (1798-1801) scarcely had any social and cultural impact on Egyptian society. This, as Ahmad Mustafa argues, is because the barriers of language, religion, and social values limited the interaction of the Egyptians with the Western influences, especially that ignorance and illiteracy were prevalent among them.[28] Arthur Goldschmidt has a similar viewpoint: "Although the work of the

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[26] Abdul Rahman Al-Jabarti, *Fil Trajem wa'a Akhbar,* Vol. 3, Cairo, 1879-80, p. 4.

The word *Mamluk* in Arabic means "an owned person." It refers to persons who were bought or kidnapped from their families in the Middle Ages and subjected to servitude. The sultans of the Ayyubid Dynasty that Saladin founded in Egypt in 1174 bought great numbers of such Mamluks, trained them militarily and annexed them to their armies. Thus, this word denoted later a military caste in medieval Egypt that rose from the ranks of slave soldiers, who were mainly of Turkish Circassian, and Georgian origins. The Mamluks' power in Egypt increased until at last they deposed the Ayyubid Dynasty and founded the Mamluk Sultanate in 1250. From that date on they ruled Egypt until the Turkish Sultan Slim the Grim conquered Egypt in 1517, where they stayed ruling Egypt beside the Ottoman viceroy. Napoleon defeated the Turco-Mamluk army in 1798 and they fled the country. When Muhammad Ali assumed power as a Turkish viceroy, he assassinated the Mamluks in what it is historically known as the Citadel Massacre.

[27] *Ibid*. p. 2

[28] Mustafa, *op. cit.,* p. 14

French scholars increased the West's knowledge of the country, it hardly influenced Egypt's intellectual elite. Napoleon's innovative governing council vanished once his army left." He argues with other historians that "France has claimed far too much credit for the awakening of modern Egypt." He dates back the Egyptian renaissance in modern history to the eighteenth century when a Circassian Mamluk called Ali Bey al-Kabir came to power in 1700 and tried to separate Egypt from the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Goldschmidt maintains that the French Occupation had only hastened the political and social changes that had begun under Aly Bey.[29]

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the effect of the French Expedition. Even the opponents acknowledge that it had "opened the Egyptians' eyes to horizons motivated by new ideas and dominated by forces of science and organization."[30] In my opinion, however, the French Expedition did more than open the eyes of the Egyptians; it aroused within them a collective self-consciousness. When the Turco-Mamluk political leaderships were defeated in their fight against Napoleon and fled the country, they lost their legitimacy as rulers of Egypt. The Egyptians were left alone to face the invaders; this new situation united them before the foreign threat and created within them the sense of belonging to this land. With the following developments, they felt that they had emerged as a new power on the political scene and that they should no longer be marginalized. Therefore, when the Turks and Mamluks tried to restore their pre–Napoleonic supremacy after the French army was forced to evacuate Egypt, the people of Cairo rejected both of them, marking all – the Turks, the Mamluks, and the French – as *ghuz* (invaders). Being unable to gain their independence because of the lack of power and means, however, they imposed

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[29]   See Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988, pp. 11 & 16

[30]   Mustafa, *op. cit.,* p. 14

their will on the Ottoman Sultan and forced him to endorse their nomination of Muhammad Ali as a viceroy of Egypt, instead of the Sultan's nominee. The impact of the French ideas appeared in the official ceremony and document of investing Muhammad Ali. The investiture took place in the courthouse, where both Al-Sayyed Umar Makram, head of religious nobility, and al-Sheikh Al-Sharqawi, rector of Al-Azhar, declared him Pasha of Egypt. On the other hand, a passage in the investiture document stated, "According to time-honored tradition and also according to Islamic law, every nation has the right to install rulers and depose them. Oppressive rulers deviate from the true path of the law, hence the right of nations to depose them."[31] Though it cannot be elevated to the level of nationhood, this collective consciousness, which the Egyptians felt in the face of the other powers contending to rule Egypt, was the germ that evolved later under the rule of Muhammad Ali's dynasty and the British Occupation to become Egyptian nationalism. This study traces such an evolution and underlines the circumstances that led to the dichotomy of the Egyptian identity as a result of the encounter with the West. Since she became part of the Islamic world, Egypt has acquired an Islamic character. However, she had been involved in world politics and became part of the balance of power game after the French invasion. A Westernization process began and a liberal movement was introduced during the reign of Muhammad Ali's dynasty, and intensified under the British Occupation, which started in 1882. The terms of "nation," "nation-state," "fatherland," and "people" acquired new interpretations imported from the Western thinking. The result is that a conflict began and continued between the Islamic tradition and the newly imported secular Western ideas.

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[31]   See Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8

Chapter One

Westernization from Above

Some observers believe that the political, social, and economic changes that Egypt had undergone as a result of the cumulative developments in the period from 1804-1882 "amounted to nothing less than complete transformation of the basic character of life and organization of Egyptian society."[1] In contrast, there are some writers arguing that "except for some superficial borrowing from the French, Egyptian society did not change at all under Muhammad Ali, Abbas, Said, and Ismail."[2] Though the latter opinion has some acceptability, it is undeniable that Egypt had, during this period, witnessed certain political and economic developments that led, even slowly, to changes in its societal structure. Such developments were the result of personal motives of Egypt's rulers (of them, Muhammad Ali and his grandson Ismail were the most important), coinciding with the impacts of foreign influences. The main stimulus behind Muhammad Ali's works was to maintain his position as a viceroy of the Ottoman sultan and to take the rule of Egypt for himself and for his descendants, while his grandson Ismail was driven by his personal desire to Europeanize Egypt.

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[1]   Nadav Safram, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 38

[2]   See Baer, Gabriel. "*Social Change in Egypt*," pages 135-61, in P.M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Those viceroys came to power in a time when the West was expanding its imperial movement worldwide; consequently, they became victims of the power game. For instance, we find that France had taken the side of Muhammad Ali in his war against the Ottoman Empire in Syria and his advance in Anatolia to occupy the seat of the empire. Britain, contrarily, rejected his imperial expansion, as his victory over the Ottoman Empire posed a threat to her interests. "An Egyptian Empire," said Arthur Goldschmidt, "could block British plans to develop a passage to India using the Euphrates River." Meanwhile, "if Muhammad Ali overthrew the Sultan Mahmud and took over the Ottoman Empire, he could upset the balance of power in Europe," as "his successes could strengthen France to the detriment of Britain, which had only recently gone to great lengths to defeat Napoleon."[3] For these reasons the European powers "but France, which still backed Muhammad Ali, issued an ultimatum to the Egyptian army to withdraw from Syria," and Palmerstone, the British foreign secretary, decided that Muhammad Ali should be confined to his "shell of Egypt."[4]

Impressed with Western civilization, Egypt's viceroys during this period imported from Europe those aspects of civilization that served their purposes. Hence, the transformation that took place in Egypt during this period was not organically stemming, nor was it accompanied by an intellectual movement. Contrarily, the latter came as an offshoot of the contact with the West. This contact with the West together with the imported aspects of European civilization disharmonized the relation between the inherited traditional thinking on the one hand and the new realities on the other. This resulted in weakening the traditional political and social structure,[5] and in the emergence of a new

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[3]   Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.,* p. 20

[4]   Deighton, H. "The Impact of Egypt on Britain. A Study of Public Opinion." *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt.* London, 1986, p. 232

[5]   Mustafa, Ahmad A. *op. cit.,* pp. 13–14

cultural trend characterized with secularism that began to conflict with the inherited traditional Islamic attitude. Certain factors had worked to intensify this conflict; among them were the policy of education that those rulers followed, the translation movement that flourished during this period, and the flow of the European communities in Egypt.[6]

To build a modern army and navy, Muhammad Ali needed money and educational institutes as well as staff, equipment, and armaments. For this purpose he opened a military academy. He then pursued a state-oriented economy where he imposed, for the first time in Egypt's modern history, the state monopoly of land and trade, and introduced cash crops to replace subsistence ones, such as indigo, tobacco, sugar, and especially long-staple cotton.[7] Meanwhile, during his reign, Egypt became the first non-European country that started an industrial revolution. He built "modern factories for the manufacture of soap, cotton textiles, warships, and armaments."[8]

Muhammad Ali's most important works were in the area of education. He started an educational policy that had a far-reaching effect on the Egyptian identity. Jamal Ahmad said, "His educational policy began as an offshoot of his attempt to create a modern army and navy, but he seems to have become interested in it for its own sake. He believed in the power of knowledge and sought it wherever he could."[9] Nevertheless, his educational policy was only concerned with and related to militarism. Therefore, we find that it was the war department in his government that administered education until 1837. Besides, various specialist institutes were created to instruct "artillery, cavalry, infantry, medical, and veterinary."[10] Government-sponsored students were

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[6]   *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17
[7]   Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 18
[8]   *Ibid.*, p. 18
[9]   Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 10
[10]   *Ibid.*, p. 10

also sent to Europe to study military subjects. According to Jamal Ahmad, "at the end of Muhammad Ali's reign eleven missions had been sent to England, Italy, and France."[11] Arthur Goldschmidt recounts an anecdote that points out his political and educational philosophy:

Muhammad Ali asked an exchange student, on his return from Europe, what he had studied in Europe. The student answered "civil administration."

"And what is that?" asked Muhammad Ali.

"It is the study of how to govern men's affair," the student replied.

"What!" exclaimed Muhammad Ali. "It is I who govern. Go to the citadel[12] and translate gunnery manuals."

Goldschmidt comments, "And so the student was locked up to render French textbooks into Turkish and Arabic, for military technology—not civil administration—was what the viceroy felt the West had to offer."[13]

Despite this military approach of education, Muhammad Ali could not prevent European ideas and culture from infiltrating into the minds and learning of such students. They knew Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu and became acquainted with the stormy events occurring in Europe during the nineteenth century,[14] and when they returned to Egypt they began a broad movement of translation. For this purpose a school of languages was opened in 1835, where all materials concerning the Western life—society, culture, and sciences—were translated into Arabic. The head of the school, Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawy, together with his pupils, translated "2,000 books and pamphlets on a variety of subjects. Many of them were published by the official printing

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[11]   *Ibid.*, p. 10

[12]   The citadel was the seat of Muhammad Ali's government, and where he lived.

[13]   See Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.,* p. 22, and Mustafa, *op. cit.,* p. 20

[14]   Mustafa, Ahmad A., *op. cit.*, p. 20

press established by Muhammad Ali."[15] These translations formed the political mind of Egypt. In addition, those students formed an intellectual movement that became the kernel of liberation in Egypt and created an atmosphere of thinking "which attracted orientalists whose devotion to the rediscovery of the legacy of Arab culture played a great role in awakening Egypt."[16]

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The thrust for Westernization nearly came to a halt at the end of Ali's reign. After the British intervention to clip his wings and confine him to "the shell of Egypt," Muhammad Ali lost interest in his schools and factories. And this is what makes Goldschmidt question Muhammad Ali's commitment to Egypt and whether he would deserve to be "hailed as the founder of modern Egypt." Goldschmidt maintains, "Clearly Muhammad Ali saw Egypt and its inhabitants as the means by which he could gain and keep power."[17] Yet, it is undeniable that Muhammad Ali founded the modern Egypt state. Egypt was now independent. "It had its own bureaucracy and army (although the size of the latter was limited)" and many of the bureaucrats and army officers "were committed to westernizing reform and to Egyptian autonomy."[18]

The thrust for Westernization was resumed, though reluctantly, during the reign of Muhammad Ali's successors, Abbas and Said. Abbas gave Britain the concession to build the first rail line in Egypt, linking Alexandria and Cairo, while Said gave permission to Ferdinand de Lesseps to set up a company for cutting the Suez Canal. But the thrust took its full force again during the reign of Ismail, the grandson of Muhammad Ali. For fifteen years (1863-1879), he continued a feverish activity to

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15 Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 10
16 For this point, see *ibid.,* p. 15
17 Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 22
18 *Ibid.,* p. 22

Europeanize Egypt, yet his prime motive was not the welfare of the people nor the development of the country, insomuch as it was to create an image of grandeur in Egypt, and consequently of himself.[19] Elizabeth Fox said, "When he attended the Paris Exhibition he was impressed by Haussmann's reconstruction of the city that he decided to do exactly the same thing in Cairo. He brought in architects and planners to create an instant Paris on the Nile."[20]

Egypt witnessed boom years at the beginning of Ismail's rule, encouraging him in his plans. Due to the American Civil War and the naval blockade imposed by the Union against the Confederacy, European textile mills were deprived of American cotton, finding a substitute in the Egyptian long-staple product. Thus, by "1863 any kind of cotton Egypt could grow was being sold in Europe at immense prices, and the country economy was thriving."[21] This drove European bankers and moneylenders to flock to Ismail, "trying to lure him into various public and private investments."[22] Ismail resumed the educational missions to Europe and opened public schools. He invested in "bridges, canals, railroads, cotton gins, sugar refineries, telegraph lines, and harbors." He financed the Egyptian army and navy, sent exploring expeditions to the Upper Nile, and conquered vast areas of East Africa.[23] He built the Egyptian Museum, the National Library, and the Opera House. To create downtown Cairo, he cut "through medieval parts of the city, destroyed whatever history was in the way of the desirable long straight boulevards, and building the elegant apartment houses, hotels *particuliers,* and gardens that still give the center of Cairo its European aspect."[24] Undoubtedly, these works had, as Jamal

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[19]   For this point see Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 15
[20]   Fox, Elizabeth J., *op. cit.*
[21]   Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 28
[22]   *Ibid.,* p. 28
[23]   *Ibid.,* p. 28
[24]   Fox, Elizabeth J., *op. cit.*

Ahmad said, "remade the Egyptian community."[25] Nevertheless, Ismail was accused of wild extravagance, particularly the private expenditure, which he spent to bribe the Ottoman sultan's court to obtain the title of khedive and to transfer the khedivedom to his son. Such extravagance caused Egypt to run into debts and laid the country wide open to the intervention of the European powers, ending in the British Occupation. Meanwhile, "Ismail's deliberate separation of Cairo into a modern European section and the old medieval section," said Elizabeth Fox, "symbolically began the separation of its identity into East and West, ancient and modern that has persisted ever since, and which accounts for a good deal of the problem of Egypt self-image."[26]

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The new educated class, created by Muhammad Ali, worked as a catalyst that helped to transfer liberal ideas from Western Europe to Egypt, and through their works liberalism expanded. Indeed, liberal ideas invaded Egypt with the French Expedition, and some Egyptians, who were trained in al–Diwan, echoed some of them, yet it was Rifa'ah R. al–Tahtawi who threw the seeds of liberalism in Egypt. Ahmad Mustafa maintains that al–Tahtawi "represents an essential turning point in the political thinking history of modern Egypt,"[27] while Jamal Ahmad said, "He will always remain the first of a line of reformers who have done so much to recreate the mind and society of Egypt."[28]

An Al–Azhar University graduate and teacher, Rifa'ah R. al–Tahtawi (1801-73) accompanied the first educational mission to France in 1826 as a prayer leader. His advent to Paris occurred at a time when "science" was adopted as the new religion and

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[25] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 15
[26] Fox, Elizabeth J., *op. cit.*
[27] Mustafa, Ahmad A., *op. cit.*, p. 23
[28] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p.11

"reason" as the new god. There he met "the French orientalists of the day—Jubert, Jonard, Sylvestre de Sacy, and Caussin de Perceval," who were interested in his Arabic learning. In return, they helped him read Greek philosophy and mythology as well as the history of ancient civilizations. In addition, he "studied mathematics, geometry, and geography, and tackled physics."[29] Nevertheless, it was his readings in the French intellectual trends of the eighteenth century that affected and shaped his thinking. He read the works of Voltaire and Racine, as well as Rousseau's *Social Contract* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws.* He was significantly influenced by the French Revolution's principles of egalitarianism, fraternity, and freedom. During his stay in Paris, he witnessed the dethronement of Charles X and the inauguration of July constitutional monarchy, and was greatly impressed with the French constitutional principles.[30] He also witnessed and lived the great celebration and interest in the ancient Egyptian history and civilization, which had emerged as a result of Champollion's decipherment of the Rosetta Stone. He was so greatly affected by the glories of the ancient Egyptians that he began to think of Egypt as a homeland different from other Arab and Islamic countries.[31]

Such influences of the Western liberal tributary of culture intermingled in his thinking with the Islamic cultural ones, which streamed from his study in Al-Azhar and from his living in an Islamic community. The outcome has appeared in his seventeen books as well as in his writings in the official journal *Informations Eygyptiennes* and the educational review *Rawdatul Madaris.* As a citizen who loved his homeland, al-Tahtawi was concerned with the problem of Egypt and her future, and considered it a duty of the educated class to seek the promotion of its country's interests. In his introduction to *al-Manahij,* he wrote, "Because it is the duty

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[29]   *Ibid.,* p. 12
[30]   For this point see Mustafa, Ahmad A., *op. cit.*, p. 25
[31]   See *ibid.,* p. 27

of every citizen to assist his community, and to do whatever he can for the furtherance of his country's interests… I have exerted my best and given what I have to give."[32] Al-Tahtawi gave so much that he was considered the founder of Enlightenment in Egypt. In *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz*—his first book, which was written in Paris—he wrote about the culture shock that he experienced once he arrived there; therefore, the book was an account of the cultural and social life of the French. "The French are much more prosperous, better educated, and more intelligent than the Egyptians, yet their beliefs are far from the orthodoxy of Islam. They are rationalists and do not believe in the supernatural, but in the operation of natural laws…They believe that civilization and progress in arts and sciences can replace religion, and political institutions can replace the Shariah. In their view, Religion has only one message: to teach men how to be good and how to avoid evil paths."[33]

In his other works, he discusses the relations between the individual, the state, and society, where the effects of the two Islamic and Western trends appear in his elaboration of these three concepts. In fact, as Ahmad Mustafa said, there is no conflict between the Islamic dogmas and the Western Enlightenment notions. Islam recognizes the individual as a member of society who should enjoy complete freedom of speech. On matters of religion, Islam admits that society should be guided by the principle of justice and acknowledges that government should seek the welfare and happiness of the governed.[34] Al-Tahtawi, however, adds that the dimensions of time, place, and circumstances should be observed when putting down legislations allowing people to participate in government. In his opinion, which he may draw from Montesquieu, he took in his consideration the circumstances

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[32]   Quoted in Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 13

[33]   Al-Tahtawi, Rifa'a R., *Takhlis al-Ibris, fi Talkhis Baris [Concise history of Paris].*Cairo, 1250 AH/1834-5, p. 57. See *ibid.,* p.12

[34]   Mustafa, Ahmad A., *op. cit.,* p. 24

of the Egyptian people on the one hand and avoided the conflict with Muhammad Ali and his successors on the other. Therefore, though he was familiar with Montesquieu's separation of powers, al-Tahtawi believed in the just despot, limited in his rule by norms of the Islamic Shariah, which should have the upper hand. However, he called for fostering public opinion to "use as an instrument of pressure against the excesses of rulers."[35] Generally speaking, when al-Tahtawi talked about the French constitution and political systems, he presented to his Egyptian readers the idea of temporal power and the notion of law as drawn from non-divine sources.[36]

Al-Tahtawi tackled the concept of homeland, which he conceived, perhaps for the first time, as an Egyptian country distinct from the general body of the Arab or Islamic worlds. Egypt, in his opinion, represented a unique, distinguished, historically continuous entity that had the key constituents of civilization in terms of social moralities and economic boom. He attributed the decay of Egypt to the series of foreign occupations that the country had suffered along her history since the collapse of the pharaohs' regime. Modern Egypt, he maintained, could regain her Pharaonic status and dignity, as the main characteristics of the successors resemble those of the ancestors.[37] Moreover, he called for the differentiation between "brotherhood of country" and "brotherhood of religion," and "the need for cultivating public spirit by teaching elements of good citizenship to schoolboys and girls."[38]

Undoubtedly, such new views presented at the early years of the nineteenth century to a people still in a state of 300-year lethargy represented an intellectual revolution. Al-Tahtawi's works and the trends stemmed from them—"the modernization of Arabic language, the idea of nationalism, and a new romantic

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[35] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 14

[36] *See* Mustafa, Ahmad A., *op. cit.,* pp. 26-7

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 27

[38] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 14

conception of Egypt"—had awakened the Egyptian mind and became the bases of the new intellectual movement in Egypt.[39]

<center>★★★</center>

The new cultural tributary, which flowed into Egypt as a result of the French Expedition, Westernization, and the accompanying liberal intellectual movement, intensified the national sense of the elite. Enlisting Egyptians for the first time in the army and recruiting them to bureaucratic government works also sharpened such a sense. In both the army and government offices Egyptians worked with foreigners—Turkish, Circassian, and European—and they felt how the others hated and despised them. In consequence, the sense of belonging and nativism was heightened and was echoed in the writings of the time. Salih Magdi, an Egyptian poet, versed these feelings:

> Oh! All Egyptians awake
> Defend your faith and your land
> Your wealth is looted and
> Your sons are nothing but slaves
> Your knowledge was the sun
> That illuminated the world
> Today you are in eclipse
> Had we had any of our Arab courage
> No foe of ours would have been here
> Are there not men among you?[40]

The influx of Europeans began with the advent of Muhammad Ali to power. In 1830, their number was about 4,886.[41] During

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[39]   *Ibid.,* p. 14

[40]   *Salih Magdi Diwan* [collection of poems]. Quoted in *ibid*. p. 18

[41]   Ahmad, Farouq, *Al-Salam wa Azmat al-Hawiyyah fi Misr [Peace and the Crisis of Identity in Egypt].* Cairo, 1982, p. 34

Said's reign they became a prominent element and were encouraged to settle in Alexandria and Cairo. They worked as engineers and entrepreneurs. However, there was among them, as Arthur Goldschmidt indicates, "a demimonde of stock speculators, swindlers and vice peddlers, who were protected by the Capitulations."[42] According to the Capitulations, foreigners, especially Westerners, were exempted from the "jurisdiction of the local laws or the obligation to pay any taxes unless their governments had agreed to them."[43] Fleeing poverty in their countries, Westerners took advantage of the Capitulations and managed to control Egypt's economy, and consequently to run politics in the direction that suited their own interests. Meanwhile, as a result of the financial crisis that appeared during the reign of Ismail, the intervention of European powers in Egypt increased. This was manifested in the creation of a debt commission and the appointment of two French and British ministers in the Egyptian cabinet. Discontent spread among Egyptian people. The Egyptian educated class, in particular, felt humiliated.

Arthur Goldschmidt said, "The rudimentary journals, schools, parliamentarians, and law courts combined to nurture a new class of educated Egyptians whose occupations demanded an articulate response to what was happening in their country."[44] However, such a class was nurtured with both al-Tahtawi's liberal ideas as well as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's Islamic teachings. Al-Afghani, a pan-Islamic reformer, stayed in Egypt during the period 1871–79 when Khedive Ismail expelled him out of Egypt because of his agitative ideas against his despotic rule and the European intervention. His arrival in Egypt in 1871 came at a time when the educated class was in need of a leader, and he was qualified to meet such a need. His main objective was to achieve an Islamic unity. Therefore, he targeted from his continuous travels throughout

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[42]   Goldschmidt, Arthur, *op. cit.*, p.27
[43]   *Ibid.*, p. 27
[44]   *Ibid.*, p. 30

the Islamic world to "arouse any Muslim country to strength and leadership, so that the Islamic community might catch up with civilized nations of the world, unite the East, and liberate its mind from the shackles of superstition."[45] He gathered the members of the educated class around him, inciting them to work against the autocracy of the khedive and his government. Jamal Ahmad said, "Soon after his arrival in Egypt the young patriots launched a campaign of nocturnal circulars against Riaz Pasha's government. On one occasion the streets of Cairo were littered with thousands of anonymous sheets attacking the Khedive and his foreign supporters."[46]

The other factor that contributed to the intensification of the national sense was the beginning of the popular press. As a result of the desire of Khedive Ismail to escape the pressure of both the sultan and the European power, he financed some of the daily papers, and al–Afghani incited some nationalists to establish opposition papers. At the end of Ismail's regime there were sixteen papers; ten of them were in Arabic.[47] Meanwhile, because of the financial crisis, Ismail's autocracy was curbed and a new atmosphere of limited freedom was allowed. The new atmosphere together with the flourish of journalism begot a number of gifted writers, who had their impact on the political scene during this period and whose influence continued to the next generation. Adib Isaac, a "Syrian who played an important part in the awakening of Egypt" and who was considered a "representative of the revolutionary writers," wrote a series of articles under a general title: "Political Life: Rights and Duties." In these articles he explained the meanings of such terms as "right," "duty," "patriotism," and "freedom." "*Al-Watan*[homeland]," he said, "is the country, and

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[45] Al-Makhzumi, Mahmud, *Khairat Jamal al-Din al-Afghani [Goodness of Jamal al-Din Al- Afghani in Egypt].*Cairo, 1931, p. 73, in Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 16

[46] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 16

[47] See *ibid.,* pp. 17–18

linguistically means man's place, his abode. Politically, it is the place where his rights are secure and towards which he has duties. There can be no *Watan* without freedom."[48] Abdullah al-Nadim was a true Egyptian *fellah* [peasant] who "understood his country and its mind much more than any writers at the time."[49] In his writings, he used a cynical and sarcastic style to attack the khedive.

Such ideas had their impact on the Chamber of Representatives, which Ismail had convoked in 1866 to help him raise more taxes. Instead of fulfilling the khedive's wishes, the representatives opposed his policy and asked to be entitled the right to review the finance of the country. This opposition was heightened when the two British and French ministers were appointed in the Egyptian cabinet to control the government's revenues and expenditure. In reply to the khedive's speech of 27 January 1879, the members' statement reads,

> We, the representatives of the Egyptian nation and defenders of its rights and interest, which are at the same time those of the government, thank H.E. the Khedive for his goodness in assembling this chamber of delegates, which is the foundation-stone of all progress and the turning point in the achievement of our liberty, without which no equality of rights is possible, equality, which is the essence of justice.[50]

Protesting against one of the government's decision, the Chamber replied,

> These matters affect the nation and must therefore, be put to it for perusal. We consider this a prerequisite of

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[48] Adib Isaac, *al-Durar [Jewels]*. Edited by Awni Issac, 2nd edition. See *ibid,* pp. 18-19

[49] Jamal Ahmad, *op. cit.,* p. 49

[50] Quoted in *ibid,* p. 23

carrying out any legislation…it is the bounden duty of the Government to submit all matters concerning the nation to us.[51]

Thus, the era of Ismail witnessed the growth of the national sense. Feeling their independence from the suzerain in Constantinople, the Egyptian people, who had once considered themselves a part of an Islamic empire, felt now their unity as a unique nation different from the other parts of this empire. This feeling came as a result of many factors and developments. Prominent amongst them were Westernization, the intellectual movement, journalism, and the European intervention. The national sense, in this era, was crowned by the issuance of the constitution of 1879.

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