



Insights 006

The Intellectual Roots of Egypt's Regional Role

Mohamed Soffar

March 2010

© **Middle East Institute, Singapore**

© 2010 Middle East Institute, Singapore. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Middle East Institute, Singapore.

The Middle East Institute, Singapore does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute, its staff, or its board members.

For electronic copies of this report, please visit www.mei.nus.edu.sg.

Middle East Institute, Singapore
National University of Singapore
469A Bukit Timah Road, Tower Block, Level 2, Singapore 259770
Phone +65-6516 2380
Fax +65-6467 8714
Email contact.mei@nus.edu.sg

ISBN 978-981-08-5276-4

About the Middle East Institute

The Middle East Institute (MEI), Singapore is an autonomous research institute within the National University of Singapore (NUS).

It conducts research and organises activities like conferences, seminars and talks in pursuit of its mission to promote a deeper understanding in Singapore of the Middle East.

The Institute publishes commentaries and analytical pieces on contemporary or developing issues in the Middle East under its “**Middle East Institute Perspectives**” and insightful background papers on broader issues under its “**Middle East Institute Insights**” series.

To access the Institute’s publications for more information on the Institute, please visit www.mei.nus.edu.sg.

For more information on the National University of Singapore (NUS), please visit www.nus.edu.sg.

MEI Publications

- **Iran: Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in a Wider Regional Context**
Prof Anoushiravan Ehteshami
December 2009
- **Arab World Economies - Weathering the Storm**
Dr Salem Ben Nasser Al Ismaily
December 2009
- **China's Interests in the Gulf - Beyond Economic Relations?**
Dr Zhang Mei
November 2009
- **Refining the Saudi "Will to Power"**
Dr Joseph A. Kéchichian
June 2009
- **The Friendship With Israel: India Squares The Circle**
Dr P R Kumaraswamy
June 2009
- **The United States and Political Islam: The Dialectic of Hegemony and Resistance**
Dr Mohammed Ayoob
June 2009
- **The GCC Economies and the Crash: Short-term Weaknesses, Long-term Strengths**
Dr Steffen Hertog
April 2009
- **Social Change in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges of Migration and "Emiratisation"**
Dr Habibul Haque Khondker
February 2009

-
- **The Dynamics of Middle Eastern Political Language**
Dr Matthew Gray
February 2009
 - **Islamisation Trends in Middle East and Beyond**
HE Amb Hussein Haridy
February 2009

About the Author

Mohamed Soffar is an assistant professor of political science at Cairo University. He has written in Arabic and English on several topics:

- The Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb
- New Trends in Orientalism: A Comparison between Foucault and Rusdhi
- Cultural Particularism in The Thought of Secular Arab Intellectuals
- The Crisis of Political Change in Egypt: A Study of Kifaya Movement
- Foreign Policy under Occupation: Does Iraq Need a Foreign Policy?
- The Concept of Dialogue in The Thought of Fethullah Gulen and Sayyid Qutb
- US Public Diplomacy Towards The Arab World in Obama's Cairo University Speech

In this paper on 'The Intellectual Roots of Egypt's Regional Role', Soffar traces the current uncertainty enshrouding Egypt's regional role all the way back in the writings of early modern Egyptian thinkers from the end of the 19th century till the beginning of the 20th century.

Contents

Introduction	1
Egypt and the 'Drang nach Osten'	2
Egyptian Political Thought and the East Orientation	5
Jamal Eldin Al-Afghani	5
Muhammad Abduh	8
Abdallah Al-Nadim	10
Mustafa Kamil	13
Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid	16
Taha Hussein	19
Hassan Al-Banna	22
Conclusion	25

“The world is my representation –this is the truth that applies to every living and knowing being...that the world surrounding it exists only as a representation i.e. it exists only via another that represents, which is none but itself”

Arthur Schopenhauer.

Introduction

In his 2004 commentary, ‘Inheriting Egypt’, Hassan Hanafi argued that at this historical moment, when Egypt was covered all over with wounds, the two wings of the Arab world, the Gulf and the Maghreb, were more than willing to inherit Egypt’s leadership of the Arab world.¹ Another prominent Egyptian intellectual, Anwar Abdel Malek, sheds light on the absence of Egypt in the minds of Arab intellectuals and politicians;² emphasizing the existence of a strategy to marginalize Egypt by means of destroying the economic, social, and cultural foundations of Egyptian life.³

Hanafi and Abdel Malek spared no effort to depict, each from his own special angle, that the present stands in a striking contrast to the historical movement of the Egyptian civilization, described by the famous Egyptian geographer Jamal Hamdan, on the basis of his philosophy of the dialectic relationship between site and situation. He called such historical movement the ‘Cycle of Geographic Orientation’. In the Classical, Hellenistic, and Christian eras, Egypt headed towards the North, but with the advent of Islam its orientation shifted to the East. This shift continued throughout the Middle Ages. In the modern era the country took upon itself to re-formulate the North and East orientations.

Another orientation developed slowly, the South or African orientation of Egypt’s foreign relations, as Nasser’s Egypt became involved in supporting national liberation movements in Africa.

¹ Hanafi, Hassan, *Juthur al-tasalaut wa afaq al-huriya*, Cairo: Al-Shouruk International, 1995, 1st ed., p. 18.

² Abdel Malek, Anwar, *Ma hiya al-wataniya?* Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 2009, 1st ed., p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Hamdan sums up the cycle as follows: The geographic orientation turned clockwise 180 degrees, meanwhile Egypt was the “circle’s center and pivotal axis”. These orientations joined together in harmony to form the civilizational personality of Egypt.⁴

The contrast between Jamal Hamdan’s geographical cycle and the civilizational disorientation of Anwar Abdel Malek renders it appropriate for this study to take Hamdan’s question as a guide: “How and by which compass does Egypt seek guidance between the pushes and pulls of her different aspects and orientations...? What is the gyroscope that keeps the balance of the Egyptian ship in these stormy seas... and preserves to Egypt’s body the essence of its solid personality?”⁵”

This study will start off from the questions: Did Egyptian political thought play its role as compass or as gyroscope? Did it devise foreign policy alternatives that can theoretically define the orientation of Egypt’s geographic situation? And did it practically develop tools or methods to invest such orientation for the benefit of Egypt’s geographic site?

Within the contours of these questions, I will deal with the intellectual roots of Egypt’s regional role on leadership, as formulated by the founding fathers of Egyptian political thought at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Egypt and the ‘Drang nach Osten’

It is quite essential to highlight the East orientation of the Egyptian civilization complex, as it developed throughout history in the context of Hamdan’s geographical orientation cycle. Hamdan bases his philosophy of space on the dialectic relationship between site (defined as a region’s natural environment with its characteristics, size, and resources) and situation (defined as the relative distribution of land, population, and production around a certain region). Egypt’s geographic personality is conditioned by the relationship between site and situation, while the site pulls the

⁴ Hamdan, Jamal, *Shakhsiyat misr : Dirasa fi abqariyat al-makan*, vol. 4 Cairo: Alam Al-kutub, 1984, 1st ed., pp. 466-8.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 468-9.

country in the direction of closure and isolation, the situation pushes towards opening and intervention.⁶

However, site and situation are not immutable natural givens, but constitute a function of human civilization and creativity. There is a ceaseless relationship of “mutual fertilization, influencing-influenced, and obedience-molding” between both of them and the Egyptian. Thanks to the High Dam, the historical equation was totally reversed. Herodotus’ famous saying ‘Egypt is the gift of the Nile’ can be valid only to the old natural Nile, since the new artificial one, engineered by the Dam, is the gift of Egypt.⁷ Once again, the Egyptian performed a surgery to the face of the country by cutting open the Suez Canal, in order to “renew the youthfulness of Egypt’s geographic position” and to reactivate “the blood and life cycles of the sick body”.⁸ Resembling the High Dam in its embodiment of the human impact on the natural environment - the Suez Canal more importantly represented an investment of the geographic situation for the benefit of the geographic site.⁹

By this token, four interrelated orientations make up Egypt’s personality and civilizational entity, and bestow up on the country a middle-position among the regions and areas, continents and oceans, ethnicities and races, civilizations and cultures. These are: the African or South Orientation that provided Egypt with water resources and human stock; the Asian or East orientation that gave the country its culture, language, and religion; the Nile orientation; and finally the North or Mediterranean orientation. Attention is due to the Asian or East orientation, since it represents “the central factor in shaping the countries foreign relations, and... it constitutes a give and take relationship characterized by stability and continuity”.¹⁰

Since time immemorial, Egypt enjoyed closer foreign relations with the East than with the North. Geography gives us a

⁶ Hamdan, Jamal, *Shakhsiyat misr : Dirasa fi abqariyat al-makan*, Cairo, Dar al-Hilal, 1993, pp. 14-15.

⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

⁸ Ibid., p. 226.

⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁰ Hamdan, Jamal, *Shakhsiyat misr*, vol. 4, op. cit, pp. 476-7.

key for understanding such historical fact, for the Nile River does not run in the middle of the Egyptian desert, but clearly leans more to the East.¹¹ Moreover, the valley widens as it heads towards the North, so that the thrust of the country and the distribution of populations, production, and wealth tilts to the North.¹² Such geographic leaning to the East was projected in the country's intensive historical and cultural interactions with the East. It became a prominent part in the 'Happy Ring', the ring of fertile lands that surrounds the Arabian Peninsula and channels currents of history, culture, and trade like an electric circuit.¹³ However, history illustrated visible limits to Egypt's 'Drang nach Osten' or its East orientation. Although most of the country's foreign relations and historical battles took place on Asian ground, Egypt's march eastwards never reached the heart of Iraq or even Iran. But the others reached Egypt's heart more than once, and even occupied Egypt and ruled it for long years. This could be attributed, not to some structural failure inherent in Egypt's policy action, but to the existence of other aspects of the Egyptian civilization complex. These constitutive aspects that consume the country's resources and energy needed to further the borders of its march to the East, like the African and Mediterranean orientations for instance.¹⁴

Finally, Egypt's East orientation is inseparable from the cultural or religious factor. Starting with Islam, the country derived its language, religion, and civilization from the East. But even before Islam, Egypt was a principal element in the geography of the three monotheistic religions, whose sacred books never failed to refer to Egypt, with its river, cities, and kings. Egypt also played a crucial role in the formative phase of the three religions: as a base and vantage point for Moses; shelter for Jesus; and as a gift and familial affinity to the Prophet of Islam.¹⁵ Eventually, Islam will not just redress imbalances in the country's relations with Eastern regions, like the Levant, Arabia, and Mesopotamia, or

¹¹ Ibid., p. 401.

¹² Ibid., p. 404.

¹³ Ibid., p. 406.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 408.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 409.

even bequeath on Egypt its language and religion, but most importantly it will be Egypt's crossing-bridge to the East.

Egyptian Political Thought and the East Orientation

The question that deserves to be asked at the moment is: Was the Egyptian political thought capable of projecting a regional role based on a formula of the civilization complex that harmoniously combined the four orientations, and protected Egypt from the danger of losing direction and going around in a vicious circle? Related to this is another question: To what extent was the Egyptian political thought capable of assimilating the East orientation, which anchors Egypt's regional role, and of providing viable foreign policy alternatives? Or was the vitality of such intellectual effort sapped by the other three orientations in Egypt's civilization complex?

In this context, Jamal Hamdan presents an argument that shall be utilized as litmus paper for examining the notion of the East in the milieu of late 19th century and early 20th century Egyptian political thought. This argument is that the East did not emerge in Egypt political thought against the background of conformation with Western colonialism; and that it developed in reverse from wider to narrower, so it shrank from the East in general (in the concept of Eastern bond) to the Islamic East (in the concept of Pan-Islamic unity), to the Arab East (in the concept of Arab nation), and –one could also add to what Hamdan mentioned– to the Middle East (in the concept of New Middle East).

Jamal Eldin Al-Afghani

It might seem unconventional to place Al-Afghani in the first line of thinkers to be dealt with by this study for the simple reason that he is not an Egyptian. Yet Al-Afghani, as Albert Hourani noted, had a life wrapped in mystery, and his origin continues to be a riddle. His opponents claim that he was not even an Afghani, but an Iranian Shiite, who concealed his origin.¹⁶

¹⁶ Hourani, Albert, Arabic thought in the liberal Age: 1798-1939, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 19th ed., p. 108.

However, Al-Afghani's leading position in Egypt political thought can be justified on two counts. First, he incited Egyptian nationalist sentiments in meetings with his disciples and followers; "you, the people of Egypt, were born in slavery and brought up in despotism... you were passed over between the hands of the Nomads, the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Arabs, the Kurds, and the Mamluks... Rise from your unconsciousness and live free and happy like other nations".¹⁷ Second, his life and journeys in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, India, France, and England were nothing but a *solo* performance of what we call nowadays 'public diplomacy' to propagate the East orientation.

The interrelation between the East orientation and religion is quite obvious in Al-Afghani's thought. But although he reserves a special place for Islam in his world-view, he lays the intellectual foundations of the East orientation upon an extended notion of religion. For Al-Afghani confirms that at the core, the three monotheistic religions share purpose, direction, rituals, and regulations. He also uses the Quranic term *al-din al-haq* (the true religion) in a very wide sense, to integrate Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as components of such true religion. Such basis, in his opinion, paves the way for cooperation among nations, because the essential unity of the three religions will lead to the unity of believers, what he considers a huge leap taken by humanity towards world peace.¹⁸

Anti-colonial sentiments constitute the emotional foundation of Al-Afghani's East orientation, especially that Western colonialism, in his opinion, propagates ideas that seek to dissolve the religion's bond in Muslim countries, so as to be easily conquered, ruled, and colonized. Al-Afghani mentions British encouragement of the materialist doctrine, known in India as 'Naturism', as a case at hand. Meanwhile, Westerners, Al-Afghani notes, spare no effort to consolidate religious ties amongst themselves. To him, the words of the British Prime Minister

¹⁷ Amin, Ahmeed, *Zuama al-islah fi al-asr al-hadith*, Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 2009, p. 74.

¹⁸ Al-Afghani, Jamal Eldin, *Al-amal al-kamila li Jamal Eldin Al-Afghani*, Cairo: Dar Al-Katib Al-Arabi, ND, pp. 291-5.

Gladstone disclose the same Crusaderist spirit that animated European mobs to launch the Crusades in the Middle Ages.¹⁹

The notion of Islamic unity or Pan-Islamism, which shapes for Al-Afghani the East orientation, consists of four main elements: a) The basis of Islamic unity: as the locus of Islamic beliefs, the Quran is the basis of Islamic unity. Its call for rational proof of beliefs and for moral virtues makes its followers “more rationally enlightened, wittier, and more prepared to pursue human perfection”.²⁰ No wonder, such Quranic basis won the Muslims in their days of glory a world civilization with marvelous cities radiating science, arts, and crafts.²¹ b) The obstacles of Islamic unity: the seeds of division sowed in the Muslim Umma were none other than the corrupt Muslim rulers, whose lust for power and luxury and whose conflicts divided Muslim countries and blocked their path to reform. If the Muslims were to be left on their own, they would attain their unity by virtue of the bond of their faith and the effort of their Ulemma. A Renaissance, like the one taking place in 19th century Russia, would not be then out of their reach.²² c) The essence of Islamic unity: it does not mean that “one person would be the bearer of authority for all [Muslim countries]...but I hope that the Quran would be the authority for all [Muslim countries], and that religion would orient their unity, and each sovereign would reign in his land and strive to assist the other [Muslim sovereigns] as much as he could”.²³ This means that Al-Afghani’s maximum aspirations were to attain cooperation and coordination of means and objectives among Muslim countries. Islamic unity never meant to him the unification of Muslim countries under the rule of one man, whether king, president, or caliph. d) The limits of Islamic unity: Al-Afghani’s definition of the East contains a demarcation of its borders. To him, The East includes Afghanistan, India, Iran, Arabia, Yemen, Najd, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 308-9.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 342.

²¹ Ibid., p. 341.

²² Ibid., pp. 343-4.

²³ Ibid., p. 345.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 295-6.

The following quote highlights the centrality of the East in Al-Afghani's thought:

"The East! The East? I have devoted my brain to diagnose its diseases and prescribe a treatment. I found that the deadliest of its diseases, and what blocks its unity, is the disease of division... disagreement of opinions"²⁵

Muhammad Abduh

"I was among those who invited the Egyptian Nation to know her rights against the ruler; it is that Nation, which this thought never crossed her mind for a period more than 20 centuries."²⁶

These words express plainly Abduh's point of agreement and disagreement with his mentor, Al-Afghani. To Abduh the connotation of the Arabic word (*Watan*) changed from its direct meaning of residence or shelter, and became synonymous with the French word *Patrie* meaning the geographic territory where one's destiny (the degree of "human honor, real happiness, and permanent fortune" that one acquires) is linked to the condition of one's national community (defined as the exchange of rights and duties, the pursuit of public interest, and unity for bringing benefits and fending off harms). Such connection renders the deterioration of homeland conditions a cause of the corruption of individual circumstances, as when the community makes one member block the way of the other, hence the predomination of purely previous interests.²⁷

Abduh lends the national sentiments (loyalty and love to homeland) a pragmatic basis. Sons of the homeland should, in his opinion, strive hard to bring about all real benefits to their homeland, like refining ideas, refining morals, strengthening health, and gaining independence.²⁸ In return, the homeland would provide the satisfaction of material and economic needs, as well as

²⁵ Ibid., p. 296.

²⁶ Abduh, Muhammed, *Al-amal al-kamila lil imam al-shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. 2, Cairo: Dar Al-Shouruk, 1st ed, 1993, p. 311.

²⁷ Abduh, Muhammed, *Al-amal al-kamila lil imam al-shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. 1, op. cit, p. 314.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 318-9.

the enjoyment of rights and liberties. For Abduh, freedom is itself the basis of the notion of the homeland. He therefore attributes the lack or absence of national loyalty to the unavailability of the minimum level of freedoms rights.²⁹

Since late 19th century Egyptian political thought inherited the Islamic attire for the East orientation from Al-Afghani, and due to legal status of Egypt as an Ottoman province under British occupation, one can trace the effect of such orientation on Abduh's attitude towards the Ottoman Empire. Such was a confused and fluctuating attitude under the weight, as much of political reality as of structural factors in his thought. In a letter to his British friend Wilfred Blunt, Abduh wrote: "Every Egyptian...hates the Turks and despises their memory.... The Turks are unjust...[and] we shall seize the opportunity to gain our full independence".³⁰ However, in a conversation with his disciple Rashid Reda, he stressed that "no Muslim does wish the [Ottoman] State any harm, for in all it is a fence, and if it fell we will be like the Jews [Abduh means stateless], even worse –we do not have the wealth of the Jews".³¹

Abduh's hate-inspired pragmatic attitude towards the Ottomans indicates what I call 'the blockage of the East orientation' in his thought. His difference from or retreat away from Al-Afghani's position was expressed in his opinion on Islamic unity. "The pursuit of uniting the Muslims, as they are, never crossed the mind of any of us, and if a person calls for it, he should better be sent to a mental asylum." Relations between Muslims therefore amount to no more than cooperation and consultation about the problems they undergo, since their common culture makes their problems of the same nature.³² Abduh's opinion presented here is no less than a total break with Al-Afghani's notion of Islamic unity, for he presented his opinion

²⁹ Haim, Sylvia G., *Islam and the Theory of Arab Nationalism, Welt des Islam*, vol. 4, 1956, p. 132 and p. 134.

³⁰ Abduh, Muhammed, *Al-amal al-kamila lil imam al-shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. 1, op. cit, p. 128.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 864.

³² Abduh, Muhammed, *Al-amal al-kamila lil imam al-shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. 3, op. cit, p. 249.

about this issue with reference, though indirect, to Al-Afghani and his followers.³³

Blocking the East orientation and discarding Al-Afghani's notion of Islamic unity could be explained in the light of Abduh's advocacy of biological, not just historical, continuity as the salient trait of the Egyptian people.³⁴ Abduh lays Egyptian nationalism on the basis of a biological theory that explains the Egyptian people's endurance of long ages of mismanagement, despotism, and foreign domination. The Egyptian people, according to Abduh, neither melt nor integrate in the victor, due to its biological power and high reproductive rates and hence, the survival of its national character. Thus, "Egypt will remain for the Egyptians, because they continue to reproduce, even though they are ruled by despotism and burdened by humiliation and discrimination".³⁵

Abdallah Al-Nadim

He is no political thinker in the conventional sense of a person devoting his intellectual effort to analyze, diagnose, and prescribe treatment to political realities he faces. Rather, Al-Nadim studied linguistics and literature that suited his taste more than the classical religious fields of knowledge of the time. However, putting him on par with political thinkers can be justified on two grounds. First, there was the crucial political role he played in the Urabi movement, to the extent that for the public he was the mouthpiece of the revolution. Second, his literary writings dealt extensively with political problems of the day, like identity crisis, social consequences of foreign existence, the miserable conditions of Egyptian peasants, and the moral decadence of the wealthy class in Egypt.

His distinguished political line is often noted by historians in their study of the prevailing political journalism attitudes in 19th century Egypt. In his newspaper, "*Al-Ustath*" (The Teacher), he

³³ Ibid., p. 241 & p. 242.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁵ Abduh, Muhammed, *Al-amal al-kamila lil imam al-shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, vol. 1, op. cit, p. 832.

propagated the doctrine ‘Egypt for the Egyptians’ –originally formulated by Al-Afghani – which meant Egypt’s independence of both Turkey and Europe.³⁶ No wonder, he supported the nationalist movement as well as the Khedive, whom he considered the representative of the country’s legitimate authority.

The political nature of Al-Nadim’s writings rises to significance in the light of Benedict Anderson’s definition of Nation as an imagined political community. Anderson explains the imagined nature of the Nation by the fact that the members of even the least populous nation can never recognize or meet one another. But “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”, such image that represents the nation is composed of profound brotherly relations, regardless of any sort of exploitative relations or forms of inequality in the actual reality of such community.³⁷ Anderson gives credit to newspapers, as an “extreme form” of books, which were no other than the first modern-produced commodities for mass-consumption. It is the newspapers, for Anderson, that create a clear image of the imagined community, and through their regular consumption, as a substitute to the morning prayers in a secular society like Hegel noticed, the reader is assured that his imagined world rests anchored in everyday life.³⁸

By this token, the newspaper language, with its vocabulary, syntax, metaphors, and connotations, will serve as a vehicle for the creation and circulation of the image of the imagined community i.e. the Nation. Al-Nadim opens the first edition of his newspaper “*Al-Tankeet wa Al-Tabkeet*” (Sarcasm and Criticism) with an appeal to the “sons of the Arabic language” and the “brothers of nationalism”. He also informs his readers that he is fulfilling a great national obligation by issuing a newspaper with a facile language everybody can read without a teacher or a dictionary. It is “like a friend,” Al-Nadim writes, “that tells you what you can

³⁶ Amin, Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

³⁷ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, NY: Verso, 2000, 10th ed., pp. 6-7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-6.

understand”.³⁹ Al-Nadim’s profession as a telegrapher in the royal palace to earn his living must undoubtedly have shaped his literary style as much as the content of his journalistic articles. As such, he liberated the newspaper language from the complicated sentence constructions, archaic vocabulary, vague meanings, and widely circulating artificial clichés. And he introduced a telegraphic language of short sentences and simple words, a language everybody understands and can therefore be the basis for establishing a language community or the Egyptian nation as an imagined community à la Anderson.

Al-Nadim’s language theory, the basis of his conception of nationalism, offers us a window on his understanding of the Egyptian civilization complex, and especially the East orientation. Al-Nadim integrated the East orientation in the core of the Egyptian civilization complex, in order to dye Egyptian nationalism with the colors of the Arabic language. Yet, he does not allow the East orientation to become an extension of Egypt’s historical entity to the outside world. Al-Nadim’s theory of language is based on the French nationalist Lamarck’s principle that the function forms the organ. In the linguistic domain, this suggests to an ex-telegrapher and man of letters that in order for the Arabic language to be fully formed it needs usage and training. Only then can Arabic become capable of expressing feelings and emotions (the psychological function) and of establishing the social links that make up the Egyptian nation’s social fabric (the social function). Al-Nadim even goes a step further to equate language, identity, and homeland; “it [the language] is you, if you are not aware of who you are. It is your homeland, if you do not know what is homeland”. As a consequence, giving up one’s language amounts to nothing less than losing one’s own identity, nationality, and hence independence. A foreign language is inseparably tied up with sensations and sentiments of the person who adopts it instead of his mother tongue. Eventually, one’s own personality and identity melts away. By this logic, Al-Nadim warns that if an independent nation were to change her language, it would certainly lose her independence. Against this background, he dedicated his efforts in journalism and education to the only

³⁹ Al-Nadim, Abdallah, *Sulafat al-nadim muntakhabat al-sayyid Abdallah Al-Nadim*, Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 2008, pp. 95-6.

valid solution, in his opinion, which is the consolidation of the national language and the spread of moral conduct.⁴⁰

‘Egypt for the Egyptians’ constituted the cornerstone of Al-Nadim’s thought, and thus the cultural aspects (Arabic and Islam) related to the East orientation became no more than pillars of his version of Egyptian nationalism. Such cultural aspects abandoned their role as a bridge Egypt marches upon in her Drang nach Osten. In a word, Al-Nadim turned the East orientation outside in, separating the cultural from any outward-oriented political action.

Mustafa Kamil

From the angle of political activism, Mustafa Kamil was honored as the founder of modern Egyptian nationalism, though he was no political thinker of high caliber. Rather, he was a cunning politician, a gifted journalist, and a charming orator.⁴¹ His speeches and writings were dotted with vague expression, half-backed concepts, and paradoxical ideas that he was even himself unaware of their inconsistency and ambiguity. Safran explains this by the fact that Kamil set himself the goal of “fostering and glorifying the sentiment of nationalism”, which actually led him away from any attempt to articulate the intellectual basis of his version of nationalism.⁴²

Egypt occupies the place of the heart in Kamil’s world of ideas; to him, Egypt is the homeland. He applies the terms Nation, Volk, and people, interchangeably and without any clarification, to designate the community tied with bonds of loyalty and belonging to the homeland.⁴³ But he states unambiguously that the geographic environment defines both nation and homeland. From the geographic environment, the individual obtains the elements of existence, such as water, soil, and nourishment. His own body and his fathers’ as well dissolve in the homeland and mix with its soil.

⁴⁰ For more details, *ibid.*, pp. 111-9.

⁴¹ Safran Nadav, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴³ For more details, view Steppart, Fritz, *Nationalismus und Islam bei Mustafa Kamil*, *Die Welt des Islam*, vol 4., 1956, pp. 251-5.

Kamil's organic conception of the relationship between nation and homeland enforces the assimilative nature of his version of Egyptian nationalism to include all inhabitants in Egypt. To Kamil, they are all to be considered Egyptians, whether they descended from the Pharaohs or not, and this encompasses the Turkish-Circassian element that settled for Egypt as a homeland. Kamil even awaited the day when the Europeans inhabiting Egypt would embrace the Egyptian nationality and not consider it inferior to other nationalities.⁴⁴

Common language enjoys no central place in Kamil's definition of nation or homeland. So, despite the common language he feels no affinity to the Syrians, the inhabitants of Arabia, or the Moroccans. In fact, he even describes with emotional distance the Syrians he met on a voyage, as "money greedy, wine-addicted, and stupid".⁴⁵ Little wonder, Kamil feels himself always in permanent struggle with the intruders i.e. the Syrians dwelling in Egypt, whom he considers a second occupation force. The numerous attacks against the Syrians by Kamil speaks of the fact that distrust of foreigners sits much deeper than the theory of homeland's geographic assimilation in his version of nationalism.⁴⁶

The intensity of Kamil's patriotic sentiments soars to the level of some religious mysticism, as Steppart commented. A patriot, therefore, has to love his country more than his own parents, and such love will have to be translated in deeds that contribute to the progress and independence of his homeland. Dying for the sake of the homeland is to Kamil the highest stage of patriotism. Steppart even observed that *Tafany* (devotion) the term Kamil uses to denote one's relation to homeland is a derivative of the Sufi expression *Fanaa* (dissolution). All this lends Kamil's version of nationalism a quasi-spiritual basis, since his Egypt is God's paradise on earth and the Kabaa, the mother of all wonder. In short, Egypt is an entity Kamil is deeply in love with.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 256-7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp
258-60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 264.

Mustafa Kamil was never accurate about the concepts he applied to the extent that some scholars hold the opinion that he even does not notice the difference or contradiction between the Islamic notion of Umma and the modern concept of nation.⁴⁸ Such conceptual inaccuracy explains his juxtaposition of national loyalty to religious loyalty. So, double loyalty became a pillar of his thought. Kamil thus assumes that the human being can belong to a religious entity and a national entity at the same time. Since patriotism is to him “a fruit of observing religions and one of its consequences”, every living nation has two duties: one to her religion and the other to her homeland. As such, he found no contradiction between building national unity between Muslims and Copts in Egypt, on one side, and serving Islam and striving for the unity of Muslims in the whole world, on the other side.⁴⁹

In spite of the criticism of its logical inconsistency, the idea of double loyalty enabled Kamil to perceive the East orientation as an extension of Egypt to the outside, perhaps to an unprecedented extent in modern Egyptian thought. Kamil noted that religion is the basis of civilization and national strength, and therefore observing the teachings of Islam shall lay the foundations of true civilization in Egypt. The country’s backwardness is similarly explained by the dismissal of the principles of Islam or their corrupt interpretation.⁵⁰ Western colonial domination and the denigration of Islam by colonial agents will inflame Kamil’s Islamic sentiments. Feelings of Islamic solidarity can only give Kamil the perception that Egypt is an integral part of a greater entity that surmounts narrow nationalistic sentiments and boundaries. As a result, he will find common cause and direction with the Ottoman-promoted movement of Pan-Islamism, which he considered as the road to liberate Egypt from British occupation. Furthermore, he will not let events in the Muslim world out of his sight, but will propose convening an Islamic conference, where delegates from all Muslim countries investigate their countries’ declining situation and the ways to remedy it. Kamil’s feelings of Islamic solidarity will constitute a bridge to the far East (beyond the Islamic world) to the

⁴⁸ Safran, Nadav, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ Steppart, Fritz, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

extent that he felt unbounded enthusiasm for Japan's victory over Russia in the 1904-1905 war. Japan, as the first Eastern nation to defeat a European power, gave Kamil hope for Egypt's victory in her struggle for independence against another European power i.e. the British.⁵¹

Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid

“I was brought up by a true Egyptian family that recognizes nothing except the Egyptian nationality, and belongs to nothing but Egypt, that honored country where civilization emerged in time immemorial.”⁵²

This very first paragraph of Lutfi Al-Sayyid's autobiography sums up the main core of his thought, whose significance in modern Egyptian thought can only be highlighted through comparison with Mustafa Kamil. For Lutfi discussed on the page of his newspaper “*Al-Jarida*” (The Journal) the main cultural, social, and political issues of the day. He laid the intellectual foundations for Egyptian nationalism, as his newspaper became a school of thought for the younger generation of Egyptian intellectuals,⁵³ who were later to become leading figures in the world of thought and literature, like Taha Hussein and Muhammad Hussein Heikal.

Lutfi Al-Sayyid set the task for Egyptian political thought at that stage of its development - that it should put forward to the nation the question of independence, in order to make visible the distance between the hopes for and reality of independence. “Are we now moving forward on the way to independence? Or are we taking wide strides but in the opposite direction?”⁵⁴ The way to independence starts for Lutfi with the search for a new basis for the political community in Egypt, hence his translation of Aristotle's seminal works ‘Politics’ and ‘Ethics’. He hoped that the spread of

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 282-3.

⁵² Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Qisat Hayati*, Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 1998, p. 11.

⁵³ Safra, Nadav, op. cit, p. 91.

⁵⁴ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Safahat matweya min tarikh al-haraka al-istiqlaliya fi misr*, Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 2008, p. 157.

Aristotelian political principles through his translations would trigger an Eastern Renaissance similar to the Western Renaissance produced by these same principles.⁵⁵

Central to Lutfi's thought is a concept of liberty that stands oddly enough on ideal and utilitarian bases at the same time. He emphasized the concept of natural rights that no legislator can touch, because they are inalienable from the individual, even before his joining the community, according to social contract theorists. Meanwhile, he grounds all social bonds, emotions, and rights on the notion of utility. Thus, the individual will leave the community, Lutfi warns us, when his losses outweigh his gains, the matter that puts a burden on any legislator to leave a number of rights to individual freedom.⁵⁶ Against this background, it was quite logical for Lutfi to stress the politics of interest rather than the politics of emotions during the Turkish-Italian war (1911-1912), sending shudders through the nerves of the Egyptian public filled with a heightened sense of Islamic solidarity with the Ottoman state. He even criticized the then Egyptian Prime minister, Hussein Rushdie Pasha for siding with the allies for nothing in the First World War. Instead, Lutfi suggested an alternative policy, a tradeoff between Britain and Egypt: British recognition of Egypt's independence in return for Egyptian support of the allied military effort.⁵⁷

Due to the pragmatic nature of his thought, Lutfi does not recognize religion as a basis for politics or nationalism. Religious feelings arouse an awareness of the differences between sons of the same homeland, and the exaggeration of such differences can only lead to disrupting national unity. Lutfi admitted that common beliefs might create similarities between individuals, yet he denied that they could be a valid basis for the nation's political actions. Politics are to be instituted only upon rational interests.⁵⁸ However, it was the Lutfi's conviction that the "Pharaonic essence" produced by three thousand years of ancient Egyptian history represents the ethnic basis of Egyptian nationality. Such Pharaonic core resulted

⁵⁵ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Qisat Hayati*, op. cit, pp. 169-70.

⁵⁶ Safran, Nadav, op. cit, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Qisat Hayati*, op. cit, pp. 163-4.

⁵⁸ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Safahat matweya...*, op. cit, pp. 45-6.

in a biological continuity that enabled Egypt to produce a unique cultural character and even to assimilate all foreign influences at the same time.⁵⁹

The Pharaonic core of Egyptian nationalism as well as the utilitarian basis of politics represent the two pillars of Lutfi's selective method of dealing with the Eastern cultural heritage of Egypt. He can therefore make a distinction between useful elements to be assimilated and harmful elements to be amputated and buried in the graveyard of history. On the one hand, Lutfi ferociously attacked the notion of Islamic unity as a naïve idea fabricated by European politicians seeking to extend their protection rights to Christian regions of the Ottoman state. As such, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Lord Cromer, exaggerated such notion to spread fear among European politicians, under the pretext of Islamic fanaticism as the sole product of Islamic unity. According to Lutfi, Cromer's covert goal was to abolish Egyptian nationality by drowning it in the oceanic notion of Islamic unity.⁶⁰ Moreover, the notion of Islamic unity is premised on a principle (the lands of Islam is the homeland of every Muslim), which Lutfi considers to be a colonial principle. Such principle can only be of use to colonial powers seeking to expand their territory and to usurp the natural rights of the occupied nations. It also denies these nations the right and even the aspiration for independence. As to the political conditions of the European-occupied Muslim countries, Lutfi regards this principle as quite irrelevant. Against this, Lutfi suggests that these occupied countries, with no hope for expansion or domination, should adopt another principle that matches their political conditions and expresses their national interests. To Lutfi, that is none other than the principle of nationalism. Along this line, he also pushes away the notion of Arab unity that he learnt about for the first time in 1911. It is not in the interest of Egypt, Lutfi thinks, that the Egyptian would not consider Egypt his sole homeland, and to take another one as a surrogate.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Safran, Nadav, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Qisat Hayati*, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9.

On the other hand, Lutfi assimilated other components of the East orientation's cultural content which were beneficial. The first was Islam's spiritual essence that he confines to the private relationship between the human being and his Creator. Lutfi revealed such attitude in the words he used to describe his pilgrimage journey, for example "the dawning of the noble principles' light", "trembling before the elevated presence", "submission to the master of all creatures", and "true love that sweeps aside every intellectual capacity".⁶² Another component was Islamic moral and customs that Lutfi defends by assigning the blame for the corrupt conditions of the Egyptians on despotism and social failure, rather than on the teachings of Islam that constitute the core of such morals.⁶³

Taha Hussein

"The Egyptian should not think that what the Orient Kipling meant in his famous poem (East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet) applies to him or his dear homeland...nor should he think...the word said by Ismail [Khedive of Egypt]...is a sort of bragging, but Egypt was always part of Europe, in everything related to the cultural and mental life".⁶⁴

This statement of Taha Hussein highlights the qualitative shift he instigated in dealing with the aspects of the Egyptian civilization complex. He does not only assimilate Lutfi's distinct external orientation of 'Egypt's withdrawal from the East' and 'her opening up to the West' – which is the North or Mediterranean orientation in Hamdan's terms. But he also redefines the essence of the Egyptian civilization complex, according to the North orientation. However, unlike his mentor, Lutfi Al-Sayyid, he does not disestablish Egypt's regional role in the Arab East, but just reverses the historical direction of the cultural movement between East and West across Egypt.

⁶² For more details, *ibid.*, pp. 124-6.

⁶³ Lutfi Al-Sayyid, Ahmad, *Safahat matweya...*, op. cit, p. 142.

⁶⁴ Hussein, Taha, *Mustaqbal al-thaqafa fi misr*, Cairo: Al-Haaya al-Amaa al-Misriya lil kitab, 1993, p. 26.

The pillars of Egypt's national character are quite clear to Hussein: geographic territory that calls for its protection by a re-organized national defense force in the style of modern European armies; religion that should be preserved by adaptation to modern life requirements, like the *Salaf* (the first generations of Muslims) adapted it to the requirements of their own times; Arabic with its literary and artistic legacy that should be reformed and made flexible enough to express modern science and arts, like European languages do; and the long and ancient history that is to be preserved and elevated to a standard for judging present and future pursuits of progress by assimilation of modern achievements.⁶⁵ To back such redefinition of the country's national character that made her essence in identity with the North orientation, Taha Hussein presents a famous historical theory, namely the unity of the Mediterranean basin.

At the start, Hussein lays down a distinction between the Near East and the Far East, stressing that while the Egyptian mind was not in any significant contact with the latter, but was historically in disharmony and conflict with it since its invasion by the Persians, the country enjoyed direct and regular contacts with the countries of the Near East. An exchange of interests in art, politics, and trade was the cornerstone of Egypt's contact with the Near East.⁶⁶ "It is therefore beyond absurdity," Hussein argues, "to consider Egypt part of the [Far] East, and to think of the Egyptian mind as an Eastern mind like that of India and China". Since the Egyptian mind was never exposed to Far Eastern influences, when proponents of Easternism are asked about its meaning, they are unable to understand it nor to explain it.⁶⁷ Hussein also adds that even such presumably spiritual Far East (India, China, or Japan) was itself extensively borrowing all the achievements of the modern Western civilization, as illustrated by the conditions of Japan and China.⁶⁸

By contrast, Hussein affirms that the Near East enjoyed stable connections with the Egyptian mind and the Greek culture.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 54-5.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 58-9.

The influence of Pharaonic Egypt on Greece of antiquity was never denied by Greek poets and historians, and during the era of Alexander the Great, Egypt was annexed to the empire and became Hellenized. The philosophical school of Alexandria embodied the intensive and regular contacts between the Egyptian and Greek minds. Nothing changed with the rise of Islam, which only helped extend the influence of Greek culture worldwide, and even Islam made Greek philosophy an indispensable component of the Egyptian mind. Thus, Egypt belongs culturally to the same family of nations living around the Roman/Byzantine Sea. Based on such historical facts, Hussein takes the three components of the European mindset which Paul Valéry identified (Greek philosophy, Roman legislation, and Christian ethics) to argue that they constitute the pillars of Egypt's Muslim mind. For Islamic culture was permeated by Greek philosophy, just as Islamic *fiqh* was influenced by Roman legislation, and Islamic faith came to complete the Christian religion.⁶⁹

Consequently, Egypt has no other option, for Taha Hussein, but “to follow the Europeans along their path in order to be their equals and partners in civilization, for good and for worse, in pleasant and unpleasant matters”.⁷⁰ Hussein himself realizes that he offers nothing new, for Egypt had been striding along this path since the beginning of the 19th century. Westernization, he notes, not only affected the moral and material fields of life, but also most surprisingly penetrated the traditional institutions of *Al-Azhar*, *Al-Awqad*, and *Shariah* courts. The matter is, Hussein calls for “something psychological”, which is matching words and deeds, and doing away with the distasteful “hypocrisy” of those denying Westernization while being to their necks in it.⁷¹

Hussein's parting ways with his mentor Lutfi Al-Sayyid might be understandable in the light of the different historical phases overshadowing both of them. Whereas Lutfi bore the psychological burden of living under occupation, Hussein wrote his seminal work ‘The Future of Culture in Egypt’ after the conclusion of the 1936 treaty (the first contractual relationship

⁶⁹ For more details, *ibid.*, pp.14-28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41 & p. 51.

with Britain since the occupation in 1882 that granted Egypt a measure of independence. The difference between both men centered on the country's regional role or the way of dealing with the East orientation. If Hussein's argument were to be logically reconstructed, it should read as follows - Egypt is out of touch with the Far East, but enjoys regular contacts with the Near East in the context of the unity of the Mediterranean. Therefore, the country's independence clears away all obstacles that previously blocked the East orientation or severed political action from the cultural heritage (whose components Lutfi assimilated on a pragmatic basis.)

In fact, Taha Hussein's Egypt in the era of independence should re-open the East orientation and regain its regional role in the Arab East, inheriting Islam's role of propagating the Hellenic culture. Such reclaimed role will reverse the historical direction of cultural movement on the land of Egypt; instead of being a passage from the East to the West, it will become the West's road to the East. Egypt was "a beacon of culture and science"⁷² in the Arab East in the Islamic era, and therefore she will have to resume the same role by spreading 'modern' culture in Arab countries. This can be done through the distribution of Egyptian publications in Arab countries, the admission of Eastern students to Egyptian schools and colleges, and the establishment of Egyptian educational institutions in Arab countries.⁷³ This regional role will be in Hussein's opinion the basis of a global one, in which Egyptians will be "messengers of science, culture, security, peace, and reconciliation between East and West".⁷⁴

Hassan Al-Banna

Al-Banna represents the mirror image of Taha Hussein; he redefines the Egyptian civilization complex on the basis of one of its orientations (like Hussein), though it is the exact opposite of the North orientation (in contrast to Hussein). With Al-Banna, this orientation, namely the East orientation, reaches its utmost limits

⁷² Ibid., P. 380.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 377-9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

and turns into a nucleus of an empire-like entity and a global civilization.

On the basis of Islam, Al-Banna reformulates the notion of homeland, so that its borders overlap with religion. He argues that Islam engulfs nationalism, or more accurately, the positive elements of nationalism. These are according to Al-Banna: “emotional nationalism” that Islam sanctions by ordering the believers to love their home-country; “nationalism of dignity and freedom” that Islam promotes by urging the Muslims to spare no effort for liberating their country and attaining independence; “communal nationalism” that Islam stress by obligating the Muslims to strengthen their ties with other inhabitants of their country; and “nationalism of glory” for Islam directs its followers to the “best expansion and the most blessed domination”. As a result, the Islamic homeland is not defined by geographic borders, but encompasses every place on earth where people confess the faith of Islam.⁷⁵

From Al-Banna’s point of view, Islam’s assimilation of nationalism will render Muslims “the most devoted patriots of all people and the most useful to their compatriots”. Although Al-Banna’s homeland extends far beyond the borders of Egypt, he stresses the Muslim Brotherhood’s concern for the dignity and progress of Egypt, on whose burdens the burden of “leadership of Muslim nations” had fallen.⁷⁶ As such, Al-Banna’s expansion of the homeland’s borders did not result in dissolving the Egyptian entity. Rather, opening up of the country to the Muslim world could only consolidate her leadership or her “dignified status⁷⁷” in Al-Banna’s terms.

What Al-Banna calls “the [Muslim] brotherhood’s method of limited phases and clear steps” could be easily dubbed ‘the gradual method of an empirical project’. The first step in such project starts for Al-Banna with the individual, so a true “Muslim man” can be created. The second step is reforming the family to

⁷⁵ Al-Banna, Hassan, *Majmuat rasaail al-imam al-shahid Hassan Al-Banna*, Alexandria: Dar Al-Dawa, 1990, pp. 25-6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 195-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

constitute a true “Muslim house”, which in its turn leads to the reconstitution of the community in villages, towns, and cities – what will actually regenerate a “Muslim people”. The fourth step will be the reorganization of a “Muslim government” by erecting a political system that is novel in its values, practices, and symbols. Only then could the “Muslim homeland” be founded through the reunification of Muslim countries divided by Western colonialism. The following step is the formation of the “Muslim empire” by re-annexing the previous “Muslim colonies” of Andalusia, Sicily, the Balkans, and Southern Italy. The highest and final step in Al-Banna’s project is the struggle of this imperial entity for remaking the world order on the basis of the Muslim call.⁷⁸

Reopening the East orientation of the Egyptian civilization complex will make it the basis for an imperial political project, in which Egypt plays a central role. Furthermore, the gradual method of Al-Banna will enable his project to integrate all the political forms of the East orientation (Arab unity, Islamic unity, and Eastern unity). Such forms will be not only spheres of actions for the Egyptian civilization complex, but also firm steps on the road to a Renaissance.

By this token, Egyptian nationalism will be the first signpost Al-Banna assigns on such road, because Egypt’s advocacy of the Islamic ideal removes any contradiction between belief in Egyptian nationalism and the Islamic call. “When we work for Egypt we work [at the same time] for Arabism, the East, and Islam”.⁷⁹ The second signpost is Arabism or “Arab unity” in Al-Banna’s terms, for the Arabs represented Islam’s first nation, and every inch of Arab lands is a part of the Arab homeland that surmounts the geographic borders and colonial divisions between Arab countries. Since the Arabs share language and faith, “when we work for Arabism we work for Islam and the good of the whole world”. Despite Al-Banna’s firm belief that the call for Eastern unity is but a reaction to the West’s extra-glorification of its own civilization and race, he makes room for Easternism as a third signpost. It is a temporary unity, he argues, that will itself get

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-2.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 129.

assimilated in the universal cooperation of all peoples, neither East nor West, under the banner of Islam.⁸⁰

Al-Banna even pushes the East orientation to its farthest limits, when it becomes the center for a new universalism, “the last ring in the chain of reform”, when relations among nations will not be based on the “idea of *Shuubiya*” (racial identity) but on “Islamic unity”.⁸¹ For belonging to God, the pivot of the Islamic social bond, lets such unity lead to “fraternity among nations and solidarity between communities”.⁸²

Conclusion

The major statement of Jamal Hamdan about the East orientation, which this study tried to investigate, has two sides. On one side, Hamdan held the opinion that the notion of the East developed in Egyptian political thought against the background of confrontation with colonialism. This side was confirmed by the study, though the different historical positions, occupied by the thinkers under study within the arena of confrontation with colonialism, will lead to variations in their reactions. Al-Afghani, for instance, who was leading a public diplomacy campaign on the eve of British occupation, differed from Abdu and Lutfi, whose shoulders bore the full burden of British occupation. And both differed from Taha Hussein and Hassan Al-Banna, who, with the 1936 treaty, lived under a contractual relationship with the occupation force and a limited measure of sovereignty.

On the other side, the reverse evolution of the notion of the East, from the wider to the narrower, suggested by Hamdan does not match the findings of this study, or at least does not fit to the historical period under study. For the chosen sample of Egyptian thinkers shows that the idea of the East or the East orientation follows a pendulum-like pattern. Under the influence of every thinker’s background and the nature of the historical period he faced, the East idea was swinging between opposite positions: relative isolations vs. relative involvement. It started with opening

⁸⁰ Ibid., 130.

⁸¹ Ibid., 131.

⁸² Ibid., 132.

the East orientation and went through its blockage and amputation to end up with its re-opening, but such repetition does not illustrate the circularity of Egyptian thought. Rather, it only underlines the pendulum-like pattern of movement, whereby positions resemble one another, without being the same.