

THE JOURNEY OF LIBERALISM IN EGYPT IN THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY: FROM AHMAD AMIN  
TO HUSAYN AHMAD AMIN

by

Makoto Mizutani

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
The University of Utah  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Middle East Studies/History

Department of Languages and Literature

The University of Utah

December 2010

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## ABSTRACT

Ahmad Amin (1886-1954) was a well established historian and a liberal thinker on the issue of cultural reform. His son, Husayn (1932-), is also widely known for his argument against the Islamic radicalism, particularly from the angle of a historian and a judiciary. Their roles and contributions could be assessed in their respective societies, just as they could be evaluated together as in a journey of liberalism.

The manner in which various discussions were carried out by the two differs on each topic; the father elaborated a lot on the concept of religious belief, whereas the son seemed to have relied upon it. The son was critical about a historical role played by Sufism but he also appreciated highly its contribution before the tenth century, thus avoiding a clash with the father. Both the father and the son tend to take a position of the middle way on various questions, including that of the application of the Shari'a, stressing a vital importance of the personal interpretation or *ijtihad*.

As viewed from a broader spectrum, the son reflects the legacy from the father as a liberal, though its connotation is somewhat different from the Western context. Also both are students of history in their zeal to maintain an objective stand toward historical events. At the same time, they reflect the change of their respective times, thus composing a paradigm shift: the father's Arab-Islamic perspective and the son's one nation perspective, after all Arab states are sovereign and independent by the end of the twentieth century.

On the international arena, however, a much wider Islamic reformation seems to be taking place, involving all the Arab and non-Arab Muslims and all those in Islamic lands or in diasporas. Liberalism in Egypt ought to be seen in this broader context as well, which might provide us with some clue to the future of the contemporary Islamic thoughts.

For the sake of this study, abundant Arabic sources are employed including nearly one thousand essays and short articles written by both writers as well as many other critics about them. These articles were and still are a very useful means of presenting views and opinions to the public who found it more accessible than bulky books in the modern Arab world.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	vii
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Aim and Approach of this Study .....	1
Outline of the Two Writers .....	7
Review of the Literature .....	16
<b>II. AHMAD AMIN AND HIS TIME</b> .....	28
An Era of National Uprisings .....	28
The Egyptian “Renaissance” and its Aftermath .....	33
A Rapid Shift Since the 1930s .....	44
<b>III. HUSAYN AHMAD AMIN AND HIS TIME</b> .....	51
From Nasser to Sadat .....	51
The Era of Mubarak .....	54
Husayn Ahmad Amin’s Milieu among Liberals .....	57
<b>IV. THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE THOUGHT OF AHMAD AND HUSAYN AMIN</b> .....	78

Paradigm Shift.....	78
Fragile Optimism vs. Deep Sorrow .....	86
Family as a Network.....	90
<b>V. DISCUSSIONS OF ISLAM.....</b>	<b>97</b>
Religious Belief.....	97
Islamic Studies.....	105
Application of the Shari'a.....	119
<b>VI. DISCUSSIONS OF CIVILIZATION.....</b>	<b>128</b>
Western Civilization as a Challenge .....	128
Easternism .....	151
<b>VII. DISCUSSIONS OF POLITICS .....</b>	<b>156</b>
Ahmad and Public Enlightenment.....	156
Husayn and Islamic Radicalism.....	173
A Shift in Balance.....	182
<b>VIII. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>184</b>
From Father to Son: Microlevel and Macrolevel .....	184
The Currents of Liberalism, Secularism and Democracy.....	189
<b>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>196</b>



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Peter Sluglett, for his warm guidance as well as to all the other members of the Supervisory Committee who offered me kind advices. Many thanks also go to those who helped me always generously, including Ms. June Marvel of the Middle East Center, and Dr. Leonard Chiarelli of the Marriott Library. Without their assistance, the work would not have been as it is now.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Aim and Approach of this Study**

Ahmad Amin (1886-1954) is widely known as one of the leading intellectuals in modern Egypt. His thoughts were unique and innovative, extending to various areas including Islam, politics and civilizations.<sup>1</sup> Some thirty years after his death, his son, Husayn Ahmad Amin (b. 1932), has taken over some of the tasks his father left unfinished. Husayn himself is now a very popular writer, particularly on Islamic subjects.

This study aims, first, to look into some of the main features of Ahmad Amin's thought in historical context, with special emphasis on questions relating to Islam, politics and civilization. Secondly, attention will be drawn to some of the arguments advanced by Husayn Ahmad Amin, centering on the issues of Islamic law and national development. His father was a member of the first generation of post-WW I liberals and Husayn is marching under much the same banner. On major issues, the discussion will follow thematic arrangements as well. How are these two individuals' thoughts associated, and to what

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<sup>1</sup> That Ahmad Amin was 'unique and innovative' will be amply shown through a close reading of his work, although he is often regarded as a mild thinker.

extent has the son developed his father's ideas? How can we assess the contributions of the two ideologues in the swift currents of Egyptian society?

In spite of the strength of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Islamic world today, it is important not to lose sight of the ongoing intellectual endeavor on the part of many Muslim writers to uphold the torch of liberalism. Through this study, it will be apparent that these principles have been handed down from one generation to another. For Faraj Fuda, an active Egyptian liberal assassinated by radicals in Cairo in 1992, the achievement of Egyptian liberalism during the first half of the twentieth century served as a source of inspiration as well as a standard by which to measure the status of the trend in the second half of the century.<sup>2</sup> The significance of this point is also evident when one sees that Husayn Amin's characteristic viewpoint of historical relativism, as taken over from his father, seems to be shared by most liberals today.

Furthermore, it is almost superfluous to reiterate that the real issue before us is a part of a prolonged history of how Muslims can cope with Western culture and civilization, and how to revive the pride and glory that were once within their grasp. It is a macro scaled issue and not a micro question confined to a relation within a family.

The term 'liberalism' has become quite familiar in the context of discussions of contemporary political trends in the Middle East. It seems, however, that no decisive definition has yet been fixed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> In discussing liberalism in Egypt during the 1930s, this difficulty is reflected in an

There are mainly three types: the first is liberalism as it has been defined throughout European history. Some common features of the thought of European liberals may be, for example, limitations on the role of the state, and an emphasis on individualism and the sanctity of property. While expecting that the growth of a Muslim bourgeoisie will create a basis for liberalism, Binder approaches the question from a postmodernist stance and includes some non-Muslims or non-Middle Easterners in his arguments. He says, “Islam and liberalism appear to be in contradiction.”<sup>4</sup> The same can be found when Lewis candidly says, “The fight for political freedom has been fought and lost---though as an old-fashioned liberal, I find it hard to believe that such a defeat can ever be final.”<sup>5</sup>

The next type sees liberalism in Egypt more in its local context. Hourani’s classical work says, “it is to such ideas [new ideas expressed in facing with Europe] that I refer rather loosely when I use the word of ‘liberal’ in the title.”<sup>6</sup> Safran says that liberalism in

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expression such as: “What ever our definition of ‘liberalism’ is – de Tocqueville’s, Mill’s, Bentham’s, I. Berlin’s, or the social democrats’ – in the historical context of the 1930s, to be a ‘liberal’ meant taking a clear stand against fascism and Nazism.” Israel Gershoni, “Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of ‘Crisis of Orientation’: al-Risala’ s Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933-39,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31. no.4 (1999): pp. 570-76.

Likewise, the definition of liberalism in general seems to trouble many political scientists. “This is perhaps the most ambiguous word in the political vocabulary.” in Nigel Ashford and Stephen Davies (eds.), *A Dictionary of Conservative and Libertarian Thought* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 159-163. “Liberalism is historically a collection of ideas and attitudes, not a coherent body of theory.” in M.A. Riff (ed.), *Dictionary of Modern Political Ideologies* (N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), pp. 141-152.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (Indiana U.P., 1964), pp. 69. Cf. Ibid. “Islam and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* (7.2, 1996): pp. 52-63.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (London: Oxford

the European sense could hardly have a place in Egypt, and defines it as follows. “We use the term to refer to a general commitment to the ideal of remolding society on the basis of an essentially secular conception of the state and rational – humanitarian values.”<sup>7</sup>

Kurzman, who faces the subject of liberal Islam squarely and emphasizes its Islamic context, says, “Yet liberal Islam calls upon the past in the name of modernity, while [Islamic] revivalists might be said to call upon modernity (for example, electronic technologies) in the name of the past.”<sup>8</sup> One may say that in spite of a long and rich history of liberalism in Europe, ‘liberalism’ in Egypt is understood as *Egyptian* liberalism.

Lastly there are quite a few researchers who do not go into defining or even explaining the term of liberalism used in their argument, as if its semantics is already widely known and accepted. These are, for example, Ayubi, Eposito, Sagiv, Maghraoui, and Meijer in their respective works cited in the bibliography of this study. Though they do not make any attempt to define it, it can be understood from their argument that they also mean Egyptian liberalism in its local version.

Most Egyptian writers seem to have joined this last group, and do not venture into strict definitions of liberalism. They even use an Arabized term of *al-libiraliyya* for liberalism. To them, liberals are basically those who support the political system based upon constitution, parliament, and political parties, while they are mostly secularists and

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University Press, 1962). In 2007, it is in the 17<sup>th</sup> printing. Preface. p.iv.

<sup>7</sup> Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), note 1. to Chapter 6. p. 275.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 5-6.

promote an innovative stance over the interpretation of the shari‘a.<sup>9</sup>

After the survey above, ‘liberals’, in this study, refers to those who accept positive aspects of the West and admit to employing innovative thinking on Islam, albeit with varying degrees. Naturally, they share some of the main features of Western liberal thoughts such as the principles of primacy of individual, the distinction between civil society and state polity, limited government power, and recognition of natural law, natural rights, and private property. To them, Islam is or ought to be consonant with modernity, i.e., industrialization, urbanization, the technological revolution, the rise of a mass society, the development of political ideologies, and the establishment of the nation-state. In short, it is to say, as Shamir summarily says, “Muslim liberal thinker but not liberal Islamic thinker.”<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Ahmad the father, the weight might have been more on the former of accepting positive aspects of the West, whereas in the case of Husayn the son, it may be more on the latter of employing innovative thinking to Islam, since he is surrounded by Islamic fundamentalists.

Here a short review of the history of studies of ideas is relevant. During the 1960s, it was generally assumed that liberalism in the Middle East would be vanquished by

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*al-Ahzab al-siyasiyya wa qadiyyat al-tatarruf (Political parties and the issue of extremism)*,” *Rose al-Youssef* (April 6, 1990): pp. 46-7.p. 65. The father Ahmad himself used the term of ‘liberal’ in his autobiography, in referring to his friend in Alexandria, meaning “an open minded fellow without a belief in superstition or delusions.” Ahmad Amin, *My Life*, tr. by Issa J. Boullata (Leiden: Brill, 1978), p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Shimon Shamir, “Liberalism: from Monarchy to Post—Revolution,” in idem. (ed.), *Egypt from Monarch to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 196-7.

autocracy, and this shift had begun somewhere around 1936 to 1939. Later, during the 1970s and 1980s, a socio-economic analysis was much emphasized, mainly under the influence of Marxism. But this came to its turning point in the 1990s, due to the decline of the Socialist states as well as the very fact that the socio-economic factors are not always definitive in the world of ideas. The study of Arab Muslim intellectuals and their ideas had found a new footing during the 1980s, owing to numerous researchers who had undertaken anew the subject from a much more in-depth stance.<sup>11</sup>

One may tend to take “in-depth” as the depth of analysis and understanding of the issue. However, what impresses the readers in the first instance is the depth and width of the coverage of source materials as a basis of research. If the previous research was carried out based on published books, it was, as it were, the tip of iceberg, indicating major trends and some salient points. Now with so many studies included, the picture began to look somewhat different, and, more importantly, appear in an original shape and balance, as we will see later in this study.<sup>12</sup>

This is the approach adopted in this study as well. In fact, Ahmad Amin expressed his thoughts in a number of books and in some seven hundred articles in various journals, to

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity, Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt, 1945-1958* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 3-5. He cites, in particular, the names of Israel Gershoni and James Jankowsky, though he does not agree with their disregard for the relations between ideas and power. p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Hourani also regrets that, “I should have written a book of a different kind.--- it would have been possible to write about them (*the first and second generations*) in a way which emphasized continuity rather than a break with the past.” Op.cit. “Preface to the 1983 Reissue,” pp. viii-ix.

which I will have frequent recourse. He published around sixty articles each on aspects of human life, civilization and politics, with these individual categories representing about nine percent of the total number. As for the rest of his five hundred articles, about one hundred are on literature and four hundred are on Islam. It took me over ten years to collect these articles, now scattered in Cairo.

I also have access to about three hundred and fifty articles in Arabic by Ahmad Amin's friends and readers in response to his arguments, written mainly between 1920 and 1950. Of these articles, twenty-five deal with his thoughts on human life, fifteen address politics and society, and only ten discuss civilization. One hundred twenty-five of the remaining articles are on literature and one hundred seventy-five are on Islam. These articles are an excellent means of tracing how Ahmad Amin's contemporaries and critics regarded his thoughts, the responses to his writings, thus shedding light upon a mutual exchange with a wide segment of the population.<sup>13</sup>

### **Outline of the Two Writers**

Ahmad Amin was an al-Azhar graduate and did not have the chance to study in Europe. But he did not much enjoy the way al-Azhar was organized, and it was only with the establishment of the new School of Islamic Jurisprudence that he finally felt that he found a place to learn. There he acquired a method of study based on reason and logic

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that in Ahmad Amin's time many literati were passionately engaged in short article writing. On the role of article writing in developing modern Egyptian prose, see Pierre Cachia, *Taha Husayn, His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (London: Luzac, 1956), p. 33.



rather than emotion and imitation. Later he was appointed professor at King Fuad University (now Cairo University) and worked through his life to broaden the vision of intellectuals and enlighten the people at large by writing, lecturing and broadcasting. As the Director of the Cultural Department of the Arab League, he convened two conferences, one on Arab Historical Monuments and the other on Arab Cultural Heritage. He was renowned for his encyclopedic knowledge as well as for his high moral and ethical stature. In addition, he was born into a lower middle class family as the son of a petty shaykh, which probably left him quite free from any concern to defend social privileges such as those enjoyed by large landowners.

In addition to this brief summary, some more details are given here with a view to the significance of his life experience for his thought. His life developed in three stages. During the first, ending when he was about twenty, he successfully acquired the bulk of traditional Islamic learning. The key person who influenced him was his father, Ibrahim al-Tabbakh, a devout Muslim who served as an occasional preacher in a mosque and kept a good library of classics in his house. Living in an old quarter not far from al-Azhar, he sent his son to a Qur'an school at the age of five, but the schools' filth left an unpleasant impression on the boy. After the Qur'an school, he attended a clean and modern elementary school where he received a nonreligious Western education. During these years, however, his father prepared a program of Islamic subjects at home for him and kept him occupied with reading and praying every morning and evening. After the elementary school, his father decided to send him to al-Azhar. There he had the luck to attend lectures by the well-known Muslim reformer and thinker, Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), on two occasions.

The second stage of Ahmad's life extends from 1907, when he entered the newly established School of Islamic Jurisprudence, until 1921, when he left the School after having taken a teaching post there in 1911 after his graduation. The principal of the School was 'Atif Barakat, and Ahmad was to learn a lot from him, including basic attitudes toward academic work and the traits of sincerity and straightforwardness. In this period, he created a solid foundation for encounters between traditional Islamic learning and modern European science through exchanges with returnees from Europe and by mastering English. Returnees from overseas often gathered in town cafés and debated freely on such questions as reform in Egypt and other Arab countries. They formed several committees to promote reform in various fields; however, only the Committee of Authorship, Writing, Translation and Publication survived over the ensuing decades. Ahmad assumed its chairmanship for approximately forty years and many of his works were published under the name of this Committee.

Meanwhile in 1908, the Egyptian People's University was established and a number of teaching faculty members were invited from Europe.<sup>14</sup> Ahmad attended many lectures there and was impressed by their academic methodology; he was particularly impressed by Ignazio Guidi on Arab history, Carlo Nallino on Arab literature and David Santillana on

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<sup>14</sup> The Egyptian People's University established in 1908 became nationalized and was called the University of Egypt in 1925. Later in 1938 it was renamed as King Fuad University, and King Faruq University was established in Alexandria. After Nasser's Revolution in 1952, however, they were renamed the University of Cairo and the University of Alexandria.

Arab and Greek philosophy, to name but a few.<sup>15</sup> In his autobiography he records the extent to which he absorbed new views with delight and swiftness.

The third stage of his life started in 1921 when he became a judge. After five years, he took a teaching post at the University of Egypt and was able to devote himself to full-scale activities in writing and education. He soon published that controversial book, *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)*, Cairo, 1928. Between 1939 and 1941, Amin was the head of the Faculty of Literature of the University and he then took up other posts such as a member of the Academy of Arabic Language and a board member of both the National Library (1936-52) and a higher learning institute, *Dar al-'Ulum* (1942-52). He was also the director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Education (1945) and of the Cultural Department at the Arab League between 1947 and 1952. He worked toward establishing the Archives Library of the Arab League and holding the Arab Culture Conference in Lebanon in 1947 to call for the standardization of the textbooks of Arab countries, the standardization of educational terms, and so on. In the same year, he also organized the Conference on Historical Monuments held in Damascus, Syria.

From 1939 to 1953, he was editor in chief of a weekly journal, *al-Thaqafa (Culture)*, to which he himself made weekly contributions together with the celebrated Taha Husayn (1889-1973), and the young Najib Mahfuz (1912-2006) who went on to be the first Arab to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. In 1948, Ahmad was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University and the commendation of (the then demised) King

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<sup>15</sup> D. Malcolm Reid, "Cairo University and the Orientalists," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.19, no.1 (Feb., 1987): pp. 51-75. especially pp. 57-59.

Fuad, which he took as a great honor and a source of joy. With all of these achievements, he was referred to by the honorific title *al-ustadh al-jalil* or the Venerable Professor.

As for Ahmad's relations with the West at large, he started to learn English when he was twenty-six years old and became proficient enough to translate the book, *A Primer of Philosophy*, into Arabic after only four years.<sup>16</sup> He traveled to Europe for the first time when he was forty-five, and later had two more opportunities to travel there for short periods of time. Ahmad's major resources for learning Western culture and modern methods of academic research were books in both Arabic and English, lectures by European scholars at the University of Egypt, conversations with returnees from Europe, and, last but not least, exchanges with Egyptian intellectuals who owed much to the West, such as 'Atif Barakat, principal of the School of Islamic Jurisprudence.

These aspects of his background explain why Ahmad did not carry with him an outright inclination toward the West and essentially entertained reservations toward it. But his keen zeal for maintaining intellectual sincerity in his studies and his thought led him to adopt some of the important elements of modern Western culture, such as an emphasis on reasoning and a sense of progress. He often appealed to evolutionary ideas derived from Darwinism, and applied them to many facets of human endeavors.

We now turn to Husayn Ahmad Amin, one of the six sons of Ahmad. He graduated from the Department of Law, Cairo University, in 1953. After studying law and English literature at London University, he worked for some time both as a lawyer and a

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<sup>16</sup> A. S. Rappoport, *A Primer of Philosophy* (London: John Murray, 1904). The Arabic translation was published later as, *Mabadi al-Falsafa* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif, 1918).

broadcaster for BBC and the Egyptian Radio. Then he joined the Egyptian Foreign Service and, thanks to his postings overseas, became conversant in English, French, Russian, German and Portuguese. He retired in 1992 after his last posting as ambassador to Algeria. Since then, he has turned out to be a prolific writer like his father. The main subject of his discussions has always been Islamic affairs, and issues on politics and civilizations, although he is currently working on an Arabic translation of Shakespeare. With the rise in the activities of the Islamic fundamentalists through the 1980s, he has been seen in interviews on CNN and other Western media.

The above résumé of Husayn does not seem to include anything unusual or exceptional as a member of the intelligentsia of the time; however, one point not to be missed is the source of his Islamic learning. Where did he acquire his basic knowledge of Islam and how did he come to establish his conviction about how Islam should be interpreted and put into action? A story is told about his writing on the life of the second Rightly Guided Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, when he was only ten years old. For this work, he received a letter of appreciation from Mustafa ‘Abd al-Raziq, then a minister ranking in the cabinet and a brother of the excommunicated writer, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq. Husayn further mentions many casual encounters with great writers of the time: Tawfiq al-Hakim, Taha Husayn, ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri and Najib Mahfuz. This milieu was probably the source of his Islamic background, in addition to his father’s influence. His father, Husayn wrote, used to give a questionnaire to his children

about their studies at school and he used to check all the answers himself.<sup>17</sup>

What then was the relationship between Husayn and his father, Ahmad? Three aspects seem to merit a special note.

Firstly the relationship between father and son has been the subject of particular attention in various fields: a novel by Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* (1861), a case study of John Stuart Mill and his father, James,<sup>18</sup> and a psychological analysis of the “Oedipus complex” by Sigmund Freud.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the Greek mythology of Oedipus, in the case of the Persian national epic of *Shah-name*, the father Rostam happens to kill his son, Sohrab.<sup>20</sup> Recently it has been studied from an anthropological standpoint as well.<sup>21</sup> In most of these cases, fathers appear as those of authority and power. Husayn does not talk about his father, Ahmad, as someone he had to fear all the time, nor did he feel great pressure from him in his family life. The only occasion when he raised his voice strongly against the father was when he refused to ride to school in a big black Chrysler, because of the jealousy of his schoolmates. Apart from this incident, he finds his father very fair and sincere in his work all the time. But he also says that he found something like “a strong division” (*hajiz qawi*)

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<sup>17</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Fi Bayt Ahmad Amin* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1985), pp. 20-23, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (N.Y.: Chelsea House Publishers, 1899).

<sup>20</sup> *Rostam, Tales of Love and War from Persia's Book of Kings*, by Abolqasem Ferdawsi, tr. and intro. by Dick Davis (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> John Borneman, *Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

between him and the father.<sup>22</sup>

Husayn does not say any more about what this “strong division” really was. This is the second aspect to be focused on. Given the general social context of the 1930s and 1940s, however, one may note the following as a probable “strong division” between the two Amins: the fundamental transformation that Egyptian society was undergoing at the time, the so-called the process of modernization. Modernity in European history, as mentioned above, is usually associated with industrialization, urbanization, the rise of a mass society, and the establishment of the nation-state. This process entails by necessity the question of identity because of the erosion of traditional values and concepts of solidarity. The values of the past, place, proximity, primordial solidarity and the central role of the family - all will diminish, while fragmentation, alienation and distance will be the order of the day where old forms of patronage and paternalism will be lost.<sup>23</sup> At large, this change may well be considered as the one from *Gemeinschaft* or community to *Gesellschaft* or society.<sup>24</sup>

This type of social transformation has been experienced in many other countries, and it is only intended here to remind us of the phenomenon in Egypt. Going further beyond, the population of Egypt was fourteen million in the 1920s, forty-four million in the 1980s and sixty-one and a half million in 1996. The population of Cairo in 1930 was just 3% of

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<sup>22</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Amin, *Fi Bayt ---*, pp. 31, 83-87.

<sup>23</sup> Op.cit., Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity ---*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, (London: Routledge, 1955).

the total, but it was 25 % in 1980. The rate of illiteracy was 92% in 1917, 82% in 1939, 50% in the 1980s, and 38% in 1996. Between the 1920s and 1990s, one will find many other vital qualitative differences as well, such as the development of media, the furtherance of the politicization of society and the diversification of types of Muslims, etc.<sup>25</sup> University students, who had been involved in politics in one way or the other since the early twentieth century, were recruited increasingly not just from Cairo itself but from distant towns and villages.<sup>26</sup> Hence for many students also, “a strong division” (*hajiz qawi*) must have been felt in their new environment in a large city, Cairo.

The last aspect to be mentioned about the relationship between the two Amins is a sense of disappointment on the son’s part and a strong feeling of yearning for his father’s time. These disappointment and disillusionment are based on the past one hundred years of failure in Egypt: liberalism and military dictatorship, a multiparty system and one-party rule, capitalism and socialism, an alliance with the West followed by an alliance with the East, and Egyptian nationalism and pan-Arabism. He expresses a strong yearning for his father’s time and says:

*(The age of my father was)* the most cherished period in our history  
– What is this Alexandria of today with its polluted sea, with rust  
and decay everywhere, when compared to the Alexandria of  
yesterday with its clean beaches and its Greek restaurants?

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<sup>25</sup> Ami Ayalon, “Egypt’s Quest for Cultural Orientation,” *The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, Tel Aviv Uni., Online version, 2004.  
<http://www.dayan.org/D&A-Egypt-ami.htm> pp.1-34.(accessed on March 5, 2010)

<sup>26</sup> Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), p. 98. The number of college students increased from three thousand to thirty thousand c.a. between 1925 and 1951.



Everyone is convinced that we have no writers of the stature of Taha Hussein and Ahmad Amin, that even the sky of Cairo was clearer and more blue than it is today.<sup>27</sup>

### Review of the Literature

Ahmad Amin's works and studies of him by others are the subject of a very comprehensive bibliography, Hamdi al-Sakkut and Marsden Jones, *A'lam al-Adab al-Mu'asir fi Misr (Great Men of Contemporary Literature in Egypt)*, Ahmad Amin, published in Cairo in 1981.<sup>28</sup> It contains most of Ahmad's principal works: eighteen books (quite a few are in multi volumes), nine edited editions of classical manuscripts, eighteen co-authored books (including twelve school textbooks), two translations, two edited and compiled books, nine books with his foreword, one book of poetry, six hundred and sixty seven articles,<sup>29</sup> and seven published interviews. His major works are as follows.

The first work for review is his series on Islamic history. *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)*, Cairo, 1928, traces developments up to the end of the Umayyad period. *Duha al-Islam (The Morning of Islam)*, Cairo, 1933-36. 3 vols., deals with the first century of the 'Abbasid period. *Zuhr al-Islam (The Noon of Islam)*, Cairo, 1945-55. 4 vols., covers up to the end of the fourth Islamic century. *Yawm al-Islam (The Day of Islam)*, Cairo, 1952, deals with the decline of the Islamic world and the rise of the West. Apparently he initially

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<sup>27</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs, A Generation's Odyssey* (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1998), p. 229. It is quoted from an article by Husayn Ahmad Amin, *al-Hayat*, 6, 20, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Hereunder referred to as *A'lam*.

<sup>29</sup> Since some articles are missing in this publication, the actual total will be around seven hundred.

intended to conclude the series of Islamic history with an account of the sunset hours, something like, *'Asr al-Islam (The Evening of Islam)*, but he was unable to complete it due to his health problems and other matters. Instead he finished it off rather quickly by having this last publication in one volume to cover one full day, that is, the rise and decline of Islamic civilization. Naturally, this work became more polemical than strictly historical.

With the exception of the last work, these were among the first academic works in Arabic to meet Western scholarly standards. While relying heavily on European studies of Islam and Islamic history, he emphasized that Islam developed under the influence of other religions and practices. By showing that important contributions were made by Persian and Indian culture and Greek philosophy, he successfully transformed the traditionally held vision of Islam's ontogeny: that Islam, since its origin through the present, had never been affected by other influences and that it enjoyed an unbroken flow in its legacy for all times. One can say that he brought about an almost Copernican transformation to the self-image of Muslims and their attitude toward their religion.

Furthermore, he challenged the traditional concept of the unified Islamic nation, *umma*, by accepting as a historical fact that Islamic states had been divided over and over again. He also emphasized that the rule of the caliphate had not been derived from Islam. Over these views, both Sunnis and Shi'is were much agitated and were quick to work on rebuttal. Whether or not one went along with Ahmad's view, it became widely recognized that his method could not be disregarded any more. In *Duha al-Islam*, he dealt with the schism in Islam. On this question, too, he moves beyond the traditional line of simply describing various schools or attacking and criticizing opposing factions to a new level of

more objective criticism and evaluation, thus shedding new light on, for example, the rationalist group of the Mu‘tazilis in the early period of Islam, a school once shunned and declared heretical.

Regarding Ahmad Amin, Nadav Safran says,

His work was essentially eclectic, incorporating not only judgments and opinions of his fellow intellectuals, but also those of Western historians of Islam and Islamists. Nevertheless, he documented anew many of the theses he adopted and thus came out in the end with a product that was unmistakably his own.<sup>30</sup>

The next work to be mentioned is a compilation of his essays, *Fayd al-Khatir (The Overflow of Thought)*, Cairo, 1938-56. 10 vols. This collection contains approximately three hundred and eighty articles (there are no references to dates or sources), most of which were published in the weekly journal *al-Thaqafa*. In those articles, he dealt with a wide range of issues including literature, ethics and morals, education, history and so on, and, in fact, the compilation reads like a treasure trove of thoughts by a modern Muslim rethinking his way of life. These articles are mostly short, extending to only a few pages. Though sometimes a few articles are grouped in a series under one title, Ahmad obviously did not intend to build a coherent structure of thought through these articles. It will, however, suffice to say that he himself attached great importance to these articles — indeed, as much as to his more academic works — and though they were not intended to form a coherent whole since they grew in a more natural style, none raised any real contradictions whereby Ahmad was forced to do any patching work.

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<sup>30</sup> Op.cit., Safran, *Egypt in Search* ---, p. 162.

*Kitab al-Akhlaq (The Book of Ethics)*, Cairo, 1920, revised and expanded in 1921, argues political rights and duties based on moral and ethical values. *Ila Waladi (To my Child)*, Cairo, 1951, is a book of lessons and admonitions, many of which were addressed to his son Husayn when he went to study in London. In *al-Mahdi wa al-Mahdawiyya (Mahdi and Mahdism)*, Cairo, 1950, Ahmad addressed the messianic movement, or Mahdism, as a cause of the weakening of Islam, since the concept of a savior is not an authentic part of genuine Islamic teaching.

*al-Sharq wa al-Gharb (The East and the West)*, Cairo, 1955, represents the culmination of his comparative thinking on civilization. *Zu'ama al-Islah fi al-'Asr al-Hadith (Leaders of Reform in the Modern Era)*, Cairo, 1948, is a collection of Ahmad's essays on various leaders, but they may be viewed as an expression of his reliance on leadership in the reform movement, suggesting to some extent his more limited expectations of the initiative of the public.

Ahmad also worked on editing a number of important manuscripts such as *Diwan al-Hamasa (Collected Poems of Passion)*, Cairo, 1951-53, of Abu Tammam (d. 843 or 845/6); *al-'Iqd al-Farid (A Precious Knot)*, Cairo, 1940-53, of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi (d.940); *al-'Imta wa al-Muanasa (Enjoyment and Intimacy)*, Cairo, 1939-44, of Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 1000); and *al-Hawamil wa al-Shawamil (Neglected and United)*, Cairo, 1951, of Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi and Abu 'Ali Miskawayhi (d.1033). The last piece is a set of questions and answers between the two on ethics, language, and society.

As to the works on Ahmad Amin, It is interesting to see that, in spite of the fame and popularity which he enjoyed, there have been relatively few major discussions of his work

in Arabic or in other languages. Major works in Arabic are as follows.

*Ahmad Amin bi-Qalamihi wa bi-Qalami Asdiqaihi (Ahmad Amin by the Pen of Himself and his Friends)*, Cairo, 1955. Just after his death in 1954, sixteen of Amin's colleagues contributed to this book to cover many aspects of his life and work.

al-Mahasini, Zaki, *Muhadarat 'an Ahmad Amin (Lectures on Ahmad Amin)*, Cairo 1963. This is a series of lectures by the author on Amin, but is more a survey than an in-depth analysis.

al-'Aqqad, Amir, *Ahmad Amin – Hayatuhu wa Adabuhu (Ahmad Amin – His Life and Writing)*, Beirut, 1971. The author wrote this book so that Ahmad's achievements would not fade into obscurity, although again, it is not a work of analytical research work.

These early writings were naturally types of obituaries written soon after Ahmad's death. Later, people turned to writing surveys of Ahmad's works to give the public a good perspective on them.

Amin, Hafiz Ahmad, *Ahmad Amin, Mufakkir sabaqa 'Asrahu (Ahmad Amin, A Thinker before his Time)*, Cairo, 1987. This is a publication by the Ministry of Culture of Egypt, written by Ahmad's third son.

Amin, Husayn Ahmad, *Fi Bayt Ahmad Amin (In the House of Ahmad Amin)*, Cairo, 1989. As has been mentioned above, the fifth son, Husayn, wrote about his memories of family life with his father.

*Ahmad Amin – Arba 'un 'Amman 'ala al-Rahil (Ahmad Amin – Forty Years since his Demise)*, ed. by Yusuf Zaydan, Cairo, 1994. This is a booklet published by the Ministry of Culture of Egypt to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Ahmad's death. Seven authors

contributed pieces on such topics as Ahmad's writing style, his historiography of culture, his argument of schism, Arab literature, literary criticism, Ahmad's ethics, and his summary of reform leaders, followed by a review of those seven articles by the editor himself.

Amin, Jalal Ahmad, *Madha 'Allamatni al-Haya (What the Life Has Taught Me)*, Cairo, 2008. This was written by Ahmad's sixth and last son, a retired professor of economics at the American University of Cairo. The fact that its first printing sold out within a few months suggests a continuing popularity and interest in Ahmad Amin among the public.

The following two books are serious analytical works.

al-Danasuri, Fahim Hafiz, *Ahmad Amin wa Atharuhu fi al-Lugha wa al-Naqd al-Adabi (Ahmad Amin and his Influence on Language and Literary Critics)*, Makka, 1986. This is a useful contribution, particularly on questions of language reform, because Ahmad did not leave any comprehensive writing on the issue. This work is unfortunately little known to Arab as well as non-Arab researchers, probably because it was published in Makka.

al-Imam, 'Umar, *Ahmad Amin wa al-Fikr al-Islahi al-'Arabi al-Hadith fi <Fayd al-Khatir> (Ahmad Amin and the Modern Arab Reform Thought in <The Overflow of Thought> )*, Tunis, 2001. This is also a good analytical work. Its scope of coverage, however, is limited to the three hundred and eighty articles included in the ten volume *Fayd al-Khatir*. It should be noted that it is difficult to evaluate all these articles since the author, Ahmad Amin, does not provide references to dates and or sources.

The following are the major works on Ahmad in other languages:

Mazyad, A.M.H., *Ahmad Amin (1886-1954), Advocate of Social and Literary Reform in Egypt*, Leiden, 1963. This work offers a good summary of Ahmad's life, work, and thought and calls for bringing Ahmad's work to the forefront of scholarly attention. The chapter on literature and language is particularly strong but the one on social reform is quite brief, and does not take up other big areas of discussion, Islam and civilization.

Shepard, William, *The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual, The Religious Aspects and Implications of the Writings of Ahmad Amin*, New Delhi, 1982. The author argues that ethics clearly provide the central symbols of Ahmad's faith as well as the basic continuity of his life. The author's aim is to find what it means to be a Muslim in the twentieth century and the substance of the book is based on his Harvard doctoral dissertation. This is probably the only truly analytical study of Ahmad Amin with a clearly set aim of research and a systematic coverage of the material, though avowedly from one specific angle.

Mizutani, Amin Makoto, *An Intellectual Struggle of a Moderate Muslim: Ahmad Amin*, Ministry of Culture of Egypt, Cairo, 2007. In this work I tried to give a comprehensive presentation of Ahmad's thought, in the belief that only a truly comprehensive approach would produce a fair assessment of such an encyclopedic intellectual as Ahmad Amin. It seems that this objective was met. In the conclusion, his world conspectus is set out, whereby he values genuine religious belief over and above the other three human values of truth, beauty and goodness. It might seem to be just a conceptual construct only to be entertained by some elites in a society, although by presenting this lofty goal to the public at large, he probably saw himself as a torch-bearer in tempestuous times, which goes some way to explaining his great popularity.

As was already mentioned, approximately three hundred and fifty articles are listed in *A'lam*, which discuss, argue against, praise and criticize his work. They are all valuable as expressions of the thinking of the time and thus are precious source materials, hence quite a few of them are cited in the bibliography of this study. However, only a few of them are products of serious academic research.

Anis, Ibrahim, "*Hawla bahth al-marhum al-ustadh Ahmad Amin bi b'ad al-Islah fi al-lugha*" (Research on language reform by the late professor Ahmad Amin), *Majallat Majma' al- Lugha al- 'Arabiyya*, vol. 18, 1964. This is a report made on April 28, 1949, regarding Amin's language reform proposal.

Isma'il, 'Izz al- Din, "*al-Mushkila allatti tuwajih al- majalla al-adabiyya fi Misr*," (Problems facing the literary journal in Egypt), *al-Adab*, 12. 1974. This work evaluates the role that the journal, *al-Thaqafa*, has played in promulgating culture among readers.

I must add one more work which Ahmad's son, Husayn, has written to present an overall picture of his father's character and thought in a masterly manner:

Amin, Husayn Ahmad, "*Surat al-masri Ahmad Amin, adiban wa muarrikhan islamiyyan barizan*" (The image of an Egyptian, Ahmad Amin, as a litterateur and an outstanding historian of Islam), *al-Hayat*, 8.10, 1994.

Some articles in other languages to be mentioned follow:

Perlmann, M., "The Autobiography of Ahmad Amin," *Middle Eastern Affairs*, 5, 1954, pp. 17-24.

Cragg, K., "Then and Now in Egypt, The Reflections of Ahmad Amin, 1886-1954," *Middle East Journal* , 9, 1955, pp. 28-40.



Khalid, Detlev, "Ahmad Amin –A Modern Interpretation of Muslim Universalism," *Islamic Studies*, 8, 1969, pp. 47-93.

Boullata, Issa, "The Early Schooling of Ahmad Amin and Marun 'Abbud," *The Muslim World*, 65, 1975, pp. 93-106.

Khalid, Detlev, "Iqbal and Ahmad Amin, a Comparative Study," *Islam and the Modern Age*, 7, 1976, pp. 10-34. The author claims similarities between Iqbal, Amin, and Muhammad 'Abduh.

Shepard, W., "The Dilemma of a Liberal: Some Political Implications in the Writings of the Egyptian Scholar, Ahmad Amin (1886-1954)," *Middle East Studies*, 16, 1980, pp. 84-94. The author says that there were some illiberal elements in the words of Ahmad, in particular, his reliance on leaders.

More recently, we have the following:

Mizutani, Makoto, "Ahmad Amin on Civilization," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, (March, 1994), pp. 67-92.

Idem., "Political and Social Thoughts of Ahmad Amin," *J. of Islamic University*, Int. College of Islamic Studies, London, (July, 1995), pp. 25-52.

Barak, Efraim, "Ahmad Amin and Nationalism," *Middle East Studies*, vol.43, no.2, (March, 2007), pp. 295-310. Barak says that it is hard to bring out a clear picture of Ahmad's shift in nationalisms – Egyptian, Islamic or Arab.

Turning now to Husayn, the son, the following are his major works.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a more complete list of Husayn's works, see the bibliography in this study.

The first is *Fi Bayt Ahmad Amin (In the House of Ahmad Amin)*, Cairo, 1985. Husayn wrote about his memories of family life with his father. This is a valuable source of information for the study in this dissertation, since it depicts intimately and accurately the way the father's thoughts were developing and were influencing his son.

The next are *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin (Guide for a Sad Muslim)*, Cairo, 1983, and *Hawla al-Da'wa ila Tatbiq al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya (On the Call for the Application of Islamic Law)*, Cairo, 1985. He maintains in them that while the religious core must be maintained, Islamic law should be reinterpreted to adjust to changes both in society and historical circumstances. He emphasizes the importance of adopting an objective stance as supported by the study of history since, as he says, everything ought to be viewed through the lens of history, i.e., historicism. The first book, *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin*, received the Best Book Prize at the Cairo International Book Fair in 1984.

His arguments about civilization are found in two other books: *al-Islam fi 'Alam Mutaghayyir (Islam in a Changing World)*, Cairo, 1988, and *al-Mawqif al-Hadari fi al-Naz'at al-Diniyya (A Civilized Position on Religious Trends)*, Cairo, 1993. Although he does not fully accept the notion of East vs. West as advanced by his father, Husayn's views on the decline of Islamic civilization are very similar to those of his father.

Having presented Husayn's major works above, it is noted that they are in the main composed of articles most of which were previously published in a popular biweekly magazine, *al-Musawwar*. In the case of Husayn, unlike his father, these articles are very substantial studies rather than short essays written sometimes with an impressionistic touch. In fact, the five major books mentioned above are anthologies of those longer articles, with

the exception of *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin*.

This study will look into article literature as closely as possible, as has been explained above. But, in the case of Husayn, he seems to prefer to write longer articles and compile them later to come up with a more bulky book. Hence if one follows his argument in these authentic books, they could cover most of his vital thoughts.<sup>32</sup> This trend, as it seems, is all the more clear in the area of our strong interest of Islam, civilization, and politics, since they may well be the area of immediate interest for Egyptian and Arab readers as well. In spite of all this, however, when we come across articles and other publicly available materials which have not been included in any books, they should equally merit our attention. Good examples may be his remarks in an interview by the BBC,<sup>33</sup> and a series of three articles in *al-Musawwar* which have not been republished in a book form.<sup>34</sup>

There have been no books published on Husayn, and the following is the only academic article about him in any language so far.

Abu Zahra, Nadia, "Islamic History, Islamic Identity and the Reform of Islamic Law: The Thought of Husayn Ahmad Amin," in Cooper, John, Ronald L. Nettler and Mohamed

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<sup>32</sup> Some newspaper articles of Husayn, though sporadic, are also among the items in the bibliography. But they are naturally shorter, dealing with mostly more current issues. He does not include them in any books.

<sup>33</sup> "*al-Shura al-islamiyya wa al-dimuqratiyya al-gharybiyya*," *BBC Arabic.com*, 9 (9, 2003). (accessed on February 10, 2010)

<sup>34</sup> "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: hadir a-umma al-islamiyya*," "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: masuliyat al-muslimin*," "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: muntalaqat al-islam*," (3 articles in a series), *al-Musawwar* (10. 28, 1983): pp. 58-63, (11. 4, 1983): pp. 56 -58, (12. 2, 1983) pp. 32-33.

Mahmoud (eds.), *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, London and New York, 1998. pp.82-104. Though this is a good summary of Husayn's argument, the viewpoint of the author tends to be prescriptive.

From this review it is clear that the relationship between Ahmad Amin and his son Husayn has not been the object of scholarly study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **AHMAD AMIN AND HIS TIME**

In this chapter, the main background and the context in which Ahmad Amin found himself, rather than his overall situation and development, will be presented. With this in mind, I shall highlight the three main aspects involved: an era of national uprisings, the Egyptian “Renaissance,” and then the shift in the general social and cultural atmosphere during the 1930s and the 1940s.

#### **An Era of National Uprisings**

Ahmad Amin lived through an age of great turbulence. A clash of civilizations was taking place not only in Egypt but throughout the Middle East region and the less developed world, and a proactive role was being played by Europe and the West. Metaphorically speaking, the Arab-Islamic world was like an impressive edifice struck by a major earthquake, being shaken from the bottom in spite of its centuries-old grand design.

This phase of global history can be viewed as a period of decisive European impact on more traditional and as yet not industrialized peoples and societies. In the East, for example, one would find similar patterns from India to China and Japan.

The first calls for reform had been voiced in the remoter parts of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century. These early appeals were not greatly (if at all) influenced by Western encroachment, but were the products of genuinely indigenous endeavors. They were bound to relate to the question of how to interpret Islamic law, since it was commonly understood in those days that the door of interpretation or *Bab al-Ijtihad* was closed and that no innovations could be advanced. Particular reference should be made to the Sufi Naqshbandis in India and the Wahhabis in the Arabian Peninsula. Both were extremely keen on rooting out all the innovations or *bid'a* that they considered Islam to have accumulated through the course of eleven centuries since the original revelation in the seventh century. These, one may say, were calls for renewal from inside Islam itself.

On top of these, there was a different kind of impact from the other side of the globe, that is, Europe or the West at large. In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans reacted to this by introducing a series of political and administrative reforms called the *Tanzimat*. Later in the nineteenth century, the process of Islamic reform was deeply affected by an imposing orator called Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi (al-Afghani), who left his imprint throughout the Middle East and even in Europe. He made a particularly profound impression in Egypt, where a prominent nationalist, Rifa'at Rafi' al-Tahtawi, was already speaking in very similar terms, and where a national uprising took place in 1882, led by Ahmad 'Urabi, an army officer.

In 1882, the British forces quelled 'Urabi's rebellion in Alexandria, which led to Britain's long-term political involvement and military occupation. At the time Egypt was regarded as both an important strategic base with regard to India as well as a further

economic prop for the United Kingdom. The occupation period did see some measures towards reform and modernization: some efforts were made to promote constitutionalism, there were several agrarian reforms, and the Aswan Dam was reinforced. Furthermore, al-Azhar, that centuries-old bastion of Islamic learning, started to adopt an examination system like the West and in the larger cities a number of schools with modern European subjects flourished besides the traditional Qur'an schools.

In spite of these new social trends, anti-British sentiments were expressed on numerous occasions, such as in a rural revolt in 1906 after the events at Dinshawa'i , and a much wider urban-centered rebellion in 1919, in protest at Egypt's treatment after the First World War. The protectorate, as imposed by the British when the First World War broke out in 1914, came to an end in 1922 when Britain granted a limited form of independence.

What ensued, however, was a confused political maneuvering and petty catering to personal interests between the court and a number of political activists and opportunists, with the newly born parliament acting only as a façade of quasi- democracy. The Wafd Party, headed by Sa'd Zaghlul, who represented a growing generation and a new political hope, was not sufficiently strongly-based to establish a stable *modus vivendi* in this rugged environment. Also the party and its leader mostly reflected the interests of the large landowners, although they professed to be struggling in the best interests of the nation and working toward the enlightenment of the people.

The economy also stumbled. Relying heavily on the export of cotton as in many other monocultural economies, the Egyptian economy was at the mercy of price fluctuations in the world market as well as of the whims of the occupying power. Large

landownership provided a classic case of social inequality, which led, among other things, to the social stresses of disease, poverty and high rates of illiteracy. This was also a time of unprecedented cultural and social turmoil. Over the previous centuries, Muslim societies had faced problems when divided into separate states, such as the Fatimids and the Abbasids. However, in Ahmad Amin's time they faced something entirely new: the problem of secularism.

Under Kemal Ataturk, Turkey had already begun its march toward secularization. Tradition-bound Egypt and other Arab Muslim societies were faced with issues such as the emancipation of women, the theory of evolution, the debate over the caliphate, attempts to reform and rationalize al-Azhar, a new trend recognizing Egyptian uniqueness or Egyptianity as compared to other Arabs, and lastly, early calls for socialism. Such appeals resounded from every corner of society. All of these issues largely reflected an awareness of being behind the West and the sense that something had to be done rather hastily to catch up.

There was still some room for hope and relaxation during the early part of the twentieth century, but the storm clouds began to gather over Egypt, after fascism came to power in Europe. Dismay at the unfolding events and the loss of direction among Egyptian elites in every field grew daily. In addition, the Arabs' defeat in the 1948 Palestine War was another shameful blow to their self-confidence building process. As witnessed at the time, the 1952 Revolution led by the young Free Officers under Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir (Nasser) was the doomed outcome of generations of high hopes and dark disappointment.

What particularly attracts my attention here is a close affinity with Japan, which also



had to make a sudden leap to become a modern state. One obvious resemblance on the surface is that both societies were shaken by a military onslaught, one by Napoleon in 1798, and the other by Commodore Perry of the U.S. Navy in 1853. Both were classic cases of gunboat diplomacy, and both societies were awakened by a single blow because they were ripe enough, as it were, to face such a major crisis and to conjure sufficient national energy to stand up. In other words, they were both prepared to some extent to respond to such an abrupt challenge because the Western powers had been in some sense familiar and known to them in one way or another for a long time before the onslaught took place. In spite of these superficial similarities, attention should be drawn to one salient point of difference which would affect their respective developments later.

The Japanese undertook every possible effort to modernize under the banner of “Western skill with Japanese spirit,” though the real intent was rather, “Do not forget our Japanese spirit.” This expression might suggest how far they were resolved to lean towards the side of “Western skill.”

The obvious difference between Egypt and Japan is reflected in this conventional motto; in Egypt it was a case of ‘reform and renewal.’ Japan was fully resolved to make major changes, whereas Egypt and the Arab Muslims exhibited a solid confidence in their own way of life principally because of the various conquests and glories of the past. The comparison above is only intended to highlight the basic attitude of the Arabs and the upper limit they imposed upon themselves when they considered the issues of their reform movement.

In this brief review of modern Egypt, I have presented an outline of the major trends

within the society, in which Ahmad Amin had to struggle. His efforts were mostly in the area of intellectual production as he found this to be the most congenial to his temperament and talent, though his contributions in other areas, such as his position as head of the Faculty of Literature at the University of Egypt, were also considerable.

### **The Egyptian “Renaissance” and its Aftermath**

In spite of all the troubles and hardships just described, the 1920s were the years that would later be deemed the Egyptian “Renaissance.” We may regard it metaphorically as a beautiful white lotus flower blossoming in a dark colored muddy pond, since the “Renaissance” at that time was surrounded by so many adversaries.

In Arabic, the word ‘renaissance’ is translated as *nahda*, a word that in more literal circumstances means ‘rising.’ Although the word ‘renaissance’ refers to something reborn or revived, its Arabic counterpart *nahda* does not contain any suggestion of redoing something. However, it is a well established term in Egyptian usage then and now, and it is commonly understood as meaning ‘renaissance.’ Did the Egyptians in the 1920s have the sense that their culture was prospering again and the civilization would flourish once again? They certainly did, since they referred back to the Pharaonic time as well as various other glorious times in Islamic history.

The spirit of the age could best be found in many cases in artistic expression.<sup>35</sup> The sculptor Mahmud Mukhtar produced a highly symbolic statue, “the Egyptian Renaissance,”

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<sup>35</sup> Robin Ostle, “Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol.57, no.1 (1994): pp. 184-192.

which now stands in front of Cairo University. It is composed of a small sphinx on the left while in the center a woman is standing in peasant dress, but she lifts her veil to show her face, as if she can see a bright future as she looks up into the sky. This work was displayed at the Paris Exhibition in 1920, then in 1928 it was placed in front of the Ramses Central Station in Cairo, and in 1955 it was moved to its present location. Another of Mahmud Mukhtar's major works, similarly awe-inspiring, is the statue of Sa'd Zaghlul, standing at the Lions' Bridge in Zamalek. Zaghlul was undoubtedly the major figure in the independence process and stands out in history as he does now in this piece.

A painter called Muhammad Nagi is also worth mentioning here. One of his major works, "The Renaissance of Egypt," was completed in 1922 and is exhibited in the Parliament Building in Cairo. As in Mukhtar's sculpture, the main figure in the painting is a woman wearing peasant clothes, standing in the center of the canvas looking straight up without a veil covering her face. Another grand work of Muhammad Nagi is "The School of Alexandria," now in the Alexandria Municipality. The picture includes the Pharaonic scene, the figure of Alexander the Great, Egyptian farmers, Islamic figures with mosques and some modern personalities such as Sa'd Zaghlul and Taha Husayn. Taha Husayn published *The Future of Culture in Egypt* in 1938, the same year as Nagi's work was presented publicly. In this book, Taha Husayn claimed the Mediterranean cultural heritage as one of the principal sources of Egyptian culture.

These few examples give an immediate sense of the ethos of the age. It is important to consider then why these developments became possible in spite of the many hardships which the country had to undergo. Here I would refer to three main factors.

The first factor to be reckoned with was the structure of political power at the time; that is, the lack of a strong central political institution with sufficient respect and authority to impose its will effectively upon society. Having been awarded independence unilaterally by the British in 1922, and having introduced the Constitution in 1923 rather smoothly compared to some other neighboring Islamic countries, Egypt's political structure was based on three major power centers: the King, the British and the Wafd, the leading political party which aspired to represent the nation vis-à-vis Europe. Its leader, Sa'ad Zaghlul, a disciple of the Muslim activist Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, was a great orator. By achieving the main political targets, the whole nation was rather suddenly given a relaxed political hiatus for the moment, where the young and ambitious talents were allowed to find a broader arena to express themselves. Furthermore, the continuing reform movement in Turkey was also a stimulus to the young reformers in Egypt.

The next major factor to give birth to the Egyptian "Renaissance" would have an implication for contemporary Egypt: that is to say, the steady growth of civil society. This factor warrants a little closer examination. First, there grew up numerous civil institutions such as private and public schools, clubs and various organizations such as teachers' associations, labor unions and military officers. Sometimes those were based on membership, others were more informal meetings of groups in salons and cafés.<sup>36</sup> Others

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<sup>36</sup> There were many salons and cafés near the 'Abdin palace where people of culture used to get together to discuss literature, politics and other topics . Cf. Ahmad Amin, *Qamus al-'Adat wa al-Taqalid wa al-Ta'abir al-Misriyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1953), pp. 259-60.

included universities, numerous cooperatives, syndicates, and welfare societies such as the Young Men's Muslim Association or YMMA, chambers of commerce, the federation of industries and the like. One source counts the total number of such civic organizations and cooperatives, reaching five hundred and thirty-eight in 1931.<sup>37</sup>

As centers for communication and exchanging views, there were salons and cafés in many corners of the city. Intimate gatherings in such facilities as mosques and colleagues' houses, called 'circles' or *al-halqa*, were very common, in addition to the age old Egyptian custom among friends and relatives of hosting a *sahra* or 'evening gathering'. One good example is the Association of the Eastern League established in 1922. The idea was to promote the role of the East in creating a new civilization in place of Western civilization since the latter was full of flaws and was particularly lacking in spirituality. The project itself did not go very far because it lacked concrete plans for the future, other than sending delegates to various inter-Arab conferences, but the point here is not its activities. Rather, it should be emphasized that the Association club was set up as early as 1925 and its journal, *Majallat al-Rabita al-Sharqiyya (Magazine of the Eastern League)*, began being published in 1928. In fact, this pattern was popular and many other newspaper companies, for example, also managed their own clubs and associations.<sup>38</sup>

Mushrooming newspapers and magazines were other important elements of civil

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<sup>37</sup> Op.cit., Meijer, *The Quest* ----, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> James Jankowski, "The Eastern Idea and the Eastern Union in Interwar Egypt," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol.14, no.4 (1981): pp. 643-666. Israel Gershoni, "The Evolution of National Culture in Modern Egypt: Intellectual Formation and Social Diffusion, 1892-1945," *Poetics Today*, vol.13, no.2 (Summer, 1992): pp. 325-350.

society. Some active papers were : neutral, *al-Ahram* (started in 1876) and *al-Muqattam* (1889); Pan-Islamist, *al-Muayyad* (1889) and *al-Liwa* (1900); the popular scientific *al-Muqtataf* (1884) and the Coptic *al-Watan* (1877) and *Misr* (1895).

Magazines also flourished.<sup>39</sup> Let us list some of the more prominent ones; among political magazines were *Weekly Politics* (*al-Siyasa al-Usubu'iyya*, organ of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party which appeared first in 1926, and its monthly edition, called *Politics*, *al-Siyasa*) and *The Weekly Noticia* (*al-Balagh al-Usubu'iyy*, published by the Wafd Party, and its monthly edition called *The Noticia*, *al-Balagh*). Nonpolitical reviews included *The Dawn*, *al-Fajr* (1925-27, ed. by Mahmud Taymur), *The Epochs*, *al-'Usur* (1927-30, ed. by Isma'il Matar) and *The New Magazine*, *al-Majalla al-Jadida* (1929-31, ed. by the socialist Salama Musa). Those with a Pan-Arabist bent were *The Message*, *al-Risala* (1933-, ed. by Ahmad Hassan al-Zayyat), biweekly were *Culture*, *al-Thaqafa* (1936-53 ed. by Ahmad Amin) and *The Arab Message* or *al-Risala al-'Arabiyya* (1936-, ed. by Amin Sa'idi). al-Azhar also started a monthly magazine called *The Light of Islam*, *Nur al-Islam* (1931-33), which later became *Majallat al-Azhar*, *The Azhar Magazine* and *Shaykhat al-Islam*, *Shaykhs of al-Azhar*.

The aim of enumerating all these papers and journals here, though many other prominent ones have been left out, is to show how each party and faction felt it useful to publish them as a big advertisement balloon, good for catching the eye of the nation. This

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<sup>39</sup> Israel Gershoni, "The Role of Periodicals in Shaping the Intellectual and Cultural Life in Egypt between the Two World Wars," *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo*, 8 (1987). (unpaginated)

certainly constituted a key factor in the entire achievement of the “Renaissance.”

On the other hand, these organizations and activities were still politically rudimentary in the sense that most of them had to rely on some patronage, reaching up to the royal family itself. Nonetheless they provided opportunities to exchange views of all sorts and to absorb new ideas and European civilization.<sup>40</sup>

The political party generally supporting the royal family was the Liberal Constitutional Party, headed by a powerful liberal named Muhammad Husayn Haykal. Their motto was then none other than liberalism, notwithstanding the conservative nature of the party and of their vision. If civility is to “imply tolerance, the willingness of individuals to accept disparate political views and social attitudes; sometimes to accept the profoundly important idea that there is no right answer,”<sup>41</sup> one may well say that civility was vibrant in Egyptian society at the time. All the various civil instruments of institutions and organizations, the magazines and the papers served as a buffer between state power and the citizenry. Moreover what is stressed here is the legacy of these achievements well into the post-Nasser time in the 1970s and 1980s, serving as fertile ground for liberalism for the generation of Husayn Ahmad Amin.

A third factor determining why the Egyptian “Renaissance” flourished at this juncture of history was that the royal family and the top echelons of the government

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<sup>40</sup> Abundant literature is found on this golden age. Cf. Op.cit., Meijer, *The Quest* ---, p. 15-19.

<sup>41</sup> August Richard Norton, “The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East,” *Middle East Journal*, vol.47, no.2 (1993): pp. 214.

supported the general trend of the “Renaissance” and accepted some of the positive sides of Western civilization. King Fuad had grown up and had been educated in Italy, and that he had a preference for anything Italian was well known.

This general trend is emphasized since it would constitute a sharp contrast to the situation surrounding Ahmad’s son, Husayn and the second generation. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Nasserists and the leftists were close to the regime but after the assassination of Sadat, particularly in the 1980s and onwards, the regime was mainly on the side of the Islamists, though with caution and reservation. In other words, since Nasser’s time the liberal trend has largely been marginalized.

“The Neo-Liberals” as they have been dubbed since the early 1980s often look back to the first generation of liberalism as advanced by their predecessors. For Faraj Fuda, an active Egyptian liberal assassinated by Islamic radicals in Cairo in 1992, the achievement of Egyptian liberalism during the first half of the twentieth century served as a source of inspiration as well as a standard by which trends in the second half of the century could be measured.<sup>42</sup> For Husayn Ahmad Amin (1932-), the son of Ahmad Amin, it became a source of lament. ‘[The age of my father was] the most cherished period in our history --- Everyone is convinced that we have no writers of the stature of Taha Husayn and Ahmad Amin.’<sup>43</sup>

Next it is necessary to look at the literary production of the time, to give social and

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<sup>42</sup> Op.cit., Hatina, *Identity Politics* -----, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Op.cit., Ajami, *The Dream Palace* ---, p. 229. It is quoted from an article by Husayn Ahmad Amin, *al-Hayat* (6, 20, 1996).



cultural context to Ahmad's works. His generation was crowned by many epoch-making writers and scholars, from whose works he greatly profited. Around the turn of the nineteenth century and particularly after the First World War, Egypt emerged as something of a concert hall for the grand orchestra these writers comprised. What was striking was not just the large number of these liberal writers, journalists, scholars and administrators, but also unprecedented standard of their production. Let me name a few.

Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872-1963) was a great admirer of John Stuart Mill; he was one of the founders of the Egyptian University in 1908, helped to draft the 1923 Constitution, and was called the "Professor of the Generation" (*Ustadh al-Jil*). Ahmad Amin (1886-1954) reformed the self-image of Muslims with his book *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)* in 1927 and was called the "Venerated Professor" (*al-Ustadh al-Jalil*). Salama Musa (c.1887-1958) was a social critic and a socialist; Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1964) was known both as a writer and as the leader of the party mentioned above. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri (1895-1971), the best friend of Ahmad Amin, was a jurist who greatly contributed to the codification of Egyptian civil law, while Taha Husayn (1889-1973), the most renowned writer of the age, promoted the idea of Egypt as a Mediterranean country, and his disciple, Tawfiq al-Hakim (1902-1987) advocated the idea that Egypt as an Eastern country should construct a new civilization, and was called by his epithet, the "Bird of the East" (*'Asfur al-Sharq*).

Other prominent figures that deserve mention: George Zaydan (1861-1941), Ahmad Husayn al-Zayyat (1885-1968), 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad (1889-1964), Ibrahim 'Abdu al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890-1949), Mahmud Tahir Lashin (1894-1954), Mahmud Taymur

(1894-1973) and Muhammad Mandur (1907-1965).<sup>44</sup> The closeness of their birth years might even indicate the closeness of their relations. Ahmad was surrounded by these renowned figures on a daily basis as his son, Husayn, writes of his home life, saying that he used to answer telephone calls from all the great writers of the day before his father would come to the phone.<sup>45</sup>

These people all carried out the enormous project of redirecting Egyptian literature and language, which naturally entailed unavoidable and often quite harsh arguments, counterarguments, and even occasional bickering. Ahmad was not, of course, immune from these exchanges. In a way, criticism of his arguments was just another way of recognizing his impact and value.

Sometimes this phenomenon of mutual influence and effect resulted from choosing to publish books on similar themes during the period in question. When one author wrote on the life of the Prophet Muhammad, several others also published on the subject: thus Haykal's *Hayat Muhammad (The Life of Muhammad)*, 1935) was followed by al-Hakim's drama, *Muhammad* (1936) and al-'Aqqad's *'Abqariyyat Muhammad (The Ingenuity of Muhammad)*, 1942). Taha Husayn, for example, wrote a critical review about the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry in *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahili (On the Poetry of the Jahiliya)* (1926) and his fine autobiography in three volumes, *al-Ayyam (The Days)* (1929, 1940 and 1972), and presented the argument that Egyptian culture was basically Mediterranean in

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1984).

<sup>45</sup> Op.cit., Amin, *Fi Bayt* --- pp. 20-23.

nature in *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr (The Future of Culture in Egypt, 1938)*. Ahmad Amin, likewise, published his long article about the crime of pre-Islamic literature in *Jinayat al-Shi'r al-Jahili 'ala al-'Adab al-'Arabi (The Crime of the Jahiliyya Poem against Arab Literature, 1939)*; then his autobiography, *Hayati (My Life, 1952)*; and finally his argument on the civilizations of the East and the West, *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb (The East and the West, 1955)*.

We should also consider the socio-economic background of these leading figures. They can generally be divided into three groups: the sons of large landowners, the sons of ulama and the sons of various other backgrounds. The first one, for example, was the background of the politician-writer, Haykal, who had to act to protect the built-in interests of the landowner class through his life. Sons of ulama tended to study abroad, whereas newcomer ulama were recruited more from rural areas, as in other Islamic states in the region.<sup>46</sup> Take for example, Iran in the first half of the twentieth century when the country was undergoing the modernization process promoted by the Shah. Ahmad Amin could be regarded as belonging to this group, since his father sent him to al-Azhar, but eventually Ahmad ended up in the School of Islamic Jurisprudence where he fully enjoyed and picked up Western academic manners of research and study. In his case he did not have the chance to study abroad.

The social background of the writers mentioned above in terms of their fathers' profession are as follows: Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (the son of a local mayor, *'umda*, and a

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<sup>46</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, "Intellectuals in the Modern Middle East: A Brief Historical Consideration," *Daedalus*, vol.101, no.3 (Summer, 1972): pp. 39-57.

big land owner); Ahmad Amin (self-made, the son of a petty shaykh in Cairo); Muhammad Husayn Haykal (the son of a large land owner in a small town); Taha Husayn (self-made, the son of a small farmer), Tawfiq al-Hakim (from a rich family in Alexandria); Jurji Zaydan (self-made, the son of a restaurant owner in Beirut); Salama Musa (from a rich Coptic family in the Delta); Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat (self-made, from a peasant family); ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad (self-made, the son of a city archive-clerk in Aswan); Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (the son of a distinguished lawyer who included the King among his clients); Mahmud Tahir Lashin (self-made, the son of an officer of Turko-Circassian origin); Mahmud Taymur (the son of a famous man of letters); Muhammad Mandur (self-made, from a village in the Delta).

From the above, one may see that the major actors of the “Renaissance” were not necessarily sons of upper class families. Nearly half of them were self-made, and also nearly half of them were born in a rural environment, whether into the large landowner class or the peasant class. This proves that a high rate of social mobility was achieved in the early part of the twentieth century. Lively as it was, however, the rate of illiteracy was 92% in 1917 and 82% in 1939,<sup>47</sup> which shows the limited extent of the direct influence which the Renaissance had upon the country.

Thus was the milieu of Ahmad Amin during the “Renaissance” period. However, the atmosphere would change rather suddenly, due to changes in the situation inside and outside the country. This ushered in the next phase, which would help set the stage for

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<sup>47</sup> Op.cit., Ayalon, “Egypt’s Quest ---,” pp.1-34.

Ahmad Amin and his circle.

### **A Rapid Shift Since the 1930s**

The 1930s and 1940s turned out to be a period of rapid change both in the socio-economic conditions of Egyptian society and, reflecting this, in the religious and ideological ethos of the time. The shift was swift and evident, though it did not necessarily mean a total and clear-cut transformation. The economic crisis caused by the Great Depression in the United States and the rising tide of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany were covering many countries with dark clouds, including Egypt. Particularly threatening to Egypt was the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, though Egypt had already been stirred during the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911. In the eyes of many in Egypt, these developments were symptomatic of the failure of Western democracy and the parliamentary system, or even of the downfall of Western civilization.

The Egyptian economy was hit hard by the collapse of the international cotton market at the same time as an even more chaotic phase was emerging in the political arena: many radical movements appeared, seeking direct action. Early in 1928, Hasan al-Banna had quietly founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailia, and an activist group supporting the King called Young Egypt was formed in 1933. Members were known as 'Green Shirts,' from the group's uniform, while members of the League of Wafdist Youth were called 'Blue Shirts' for the same reason.

During this time, students were gaining a political voice and carried out major

riots in November, 1935, in protest against the King's abolition of the 1923 Constitution. Between 1925 and 1951 the number of university students increased ten times, from three thousand to thirty thousand; the government hoped that the increase in numbers might act as a counterweight against the Wafd.<sup>48</sup> However, the riots brought about the restoration of the 1923 Constitution within a month, in December 1935, which made possible a landslide victory for the Wafd in the 1936 election. This electoral success had two sharp edges, however, since the Wafd Party accepted a new treaty with Britain in 1936, which stripped it of much of its political *raison-d'être*, its staunch anti-British stance. Further, the Treaty included articles fatally painful for any nationalist, such as the recognition of Sudan's right to self-determination and of Britain's right to station forces to defend the Suez Canal, which would later be codified in a new military agreement.

The Wafd was undergoing a qualitative shift which would culminate in a serious split when as a group of energetic industrialists formed an independent party in 1938, the Sa'adist Party. A state of political disarray was evident which reached almost chaotic proportions by around 1945.<sup>49</sup>

Underlying all these upheavals was the gradual qualitative transformation of

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<sup>48</sup> Op.cit., Erlich, *Students and the University* ---, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> The nonaction on the part of the ulama contributed to the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their *raison-d'être* was almost simply the "obstructionism of every means." Cf. Daniel Crecelius, "Nonideological Responses of the Egyptian Ulama to Modernization," in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis, Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 167-209.

Egyptian society: from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society). During the 1920s, factors such as place, past, proximity, solidarity and the central role of the family continued to be vibrant, i.e., the main elements of *Gemeinschaft*. However, by the 1930s, factors such as fragmentation, alienation, and distance grew and the old relations of patronage and paternalism had faded and sometimes dissolved, indicating the emergence of forms of *Gesellschaft*.<sup>50</sup> For example, university students were thrown into a meritocratic system in a new institution far away from their hometowns and villages, while having to navigate unfamiliar urban surroundings. Hence they started to form their own *Gemeinschaften* in their universities.

Who were the archetypal players in this new *Gesellschaft* as it emerged from the transformation? They were basically young school teachers, journalists, editorialists, organizational spokesmen, technicians, industrialists and various civil servants, who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s. They had to find their own way through this new urban environment, relying on their own talents and skills. They were called, en masse, *effendi* or gentlemen. They wore Western clothes and Turkish hats, *tarboosh*, forming a typical urban middle class and a petty bourgeoisie of the time. They also shared another important component, an Arab-Muslim orientation as part of their more traditional heritage. The mode of the last decade, Egyptianism, as they found it coming into the

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<sup>50</sup> The dream for *Gemeinschaft* was shared by political leaders such as Muhammad Husayn Haykal, the leader of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party. That his basic flaw was that he tried to modernize Egyptian society based on the model of *Gemeinschaft*, instead of *Gesellschaft*, is discussed by Charles D. Smith, "The Intellectual and Modernization: Definitions and Reconsiderations: The Egyptian Experience," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 No.4 (1980): pp. 513-533.

cities, did not resonate with their background and was already somewhat tarnished with the bitter memories of their experiences under colonialism. Cairo was packed with these *effendis*; its population increased from 790,000 in 1917 to 1,310,000 in 1937 and to 2,100,000 in 1947.<sup>51</sup>

We now turn to the second aspect: the shift in the religious and cultural ethos during the 1930s. One such indication might be found in the fact that the European professors of oriental studies at the Egyptian University used to wield considerable influence on many sectors of Egyptian society but their presence was gradually being reduced. The chairs to be occupied by European scholars had been the objects of heated rivalry among Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Britain, each sending some of their top academics. In particular, France used to offer them higher salaries than they would have received at home, as well as assuring them academic posts when they returned home. Massignon and Wiet were particularly prominent. Britain did not offer such government protection; however, prominent figures such as Creswell, who had no knowledge of Arabic, Gibb and Arberry were involved in one way or another. Italy had enjoyed the early participation of Guidi, Nallino and Santillana, due to the preference of the then prince Fuad, the first rector of the University, who had trained in Italy as an artillery officer. They were gradually replaced by native Egyptian scholars<sup>52</sup> and in this

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<sup>51</sup> On discussion of *effendis*, see Israel Gershoni, and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), pp. 7-22.

<sup>52</sup> On Cairo University, see D. Malcolm Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002). Idem., op.cit., "Cairo University and the Orientalists," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.19, no.1 (Feb., 1987): pp.



way the light of one particularly large and intrusive torch was extinguished by the 1930s.

Another clear change was the orientation of the print culture of the day. Those who used to write about positivism, modernism, Pharaonism and elitism now shifted *en masse* to Arab-Islamic themes. Safran considered the publication of *Fi Manzil al-Wahy (In the Falling-Spot of the Revelation)* in 1937 by Muhammad Husayn Haykal to form the turning point.<sup>53</sup> The book is his memoir of the pilgrimage to Makka and al-Madina, and is filled with his passionate empathy for Islam and its heritage. On the other hand, as the point of the inception of this change, Smith prefers the publication of *'Ala Hamish al-Sira (On the Margin of the Prophet's Biography)* by Taha Husayn in 1933, and the publication of similar books as mentioned earlier, including Haykal's *Hayat Muhammad (The Life of Muhammad, 1935)*, al-Hakim's drama, *Muhammad (1936)* and al-'Aqqad's *'Abqariyyat Muhammad (The Ingenuity of Muhammad, 1942)*.

Many researchers had interpreted this shift as a failure and the end of liberalism in Egypt, but Gershoni disagrees, arguing that the purpose of writing on Islamic subjects was to present Islam in a new light based on rational criteria, and thus to help create a new basis for modernization. Hence, it was not crisis, disorientation or confusion but an expression of progressive harmony and an authentic collective identity, as adapted to a new age and society.<sup>54</sup> Quite a few major books on Islam were meant to discuss Islam and

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. op.cit., Safran, *Egypt in Search ...*, p.174.

<sup>54</sup> See, Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Intellectual History and Egyptian Intellectuals in the

not liberalism, as he says, and Egyptian liberalism, trying to oppose the influence of fascism and Nazism, was still extremely vibrant as can be seen from many of the articles that appeared in magazines and journals. These writers included Haykal, Taha Husayn, al-‘Aqqad, al-Mazini, and Ahmad Amin. To these should be added many other *effendis*, from the newly born class of intellectuals. They were lesser in status but were playing an important role in disseminating and interpreting new ideas and have thus been dubbed ‘secondary intellectuals’ by Gershoni and Jankowski.<sup>55</sup>

I am inclined to support Gershoni, particularly with reference to Ahmad Amin, who had no hesitation or reservation in keeping up his stance as a liberal and presenting a number of such claims in writing. At the same time, this does not negate the phenomena of some other writers bewilderingly and openly switching their stances. Take for example, Hasan al-Zayyat, who started to publish his journal, *al-Risala (The Message)*, in 1933, to advance the cause of Arab-oriented liberal views, and expressed his support for Hitler at the beginning of the Nazi movement. Also, Mirit Butrus Ghali, a Coptic political scientist,

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Interwar Period,” *Asian and African Studies*, vol.19, no.3 (Nov. 1985): pp. 333-364. Idem., “The Reader – Another Production: The Reception of Haykal’s Biography of Muhammad and the Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930’s,” *Poetics Today*, vol.15, no.2 (1994): pp. 241-277. Those criticized by the author are, inter alia: C.D. Smith, Vatikiotis, Safran, al-Sayyid-Marsot, Chejne, Berque Botman, Shamir and an Egyptian historian, ‘Abd ‘Azim Ramadan.

Smith criticized Gershoni’s book, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), in his book review, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (4, Oct. 1997): pp. 606-22, but he rebutted again in “Print Culture, Social Change, and the Process of Redefining Imagined Communities in Egypt, Response to the Review by Charles D. Smith of *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.31, no.1 (Feb. 1999): pp. 81-94.

<sup>55</sup> Op.cit., *Redefining* --- , pp. 7-22.

published his innovative book titled *Siyasat al-Ghadd (The Policy of Tomorrow)* in 1938, praising efficient dictatorship. However, he changed his mind, refuted it and gave his support to democracy in the book's second edition in 1944.<sup>56</sup> There was an exchange between Ahmad Amin, who criticized Haykal and Taha Husayn for abandoning intellectual and literary principles, and Taha Husayn himself, who admitted that he had shifted his sight from his previous secularism and scientific criticism in the 1920s.<sup>57</sup> Gershoni concludes: The claim that the shift to Islamic writing attests to a sweeping retreat from a Western liberal, rational, and progressive worldview, is only partially sound, if at all.<sup>58</sup> The age of turbulence was by no means over by that time and occasional meanderings were inevitable, accompanying as they did serious endeavors for progress and reform.

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<sup>56</sup> Hesham al-Awadi, "Egyptian Intellectuals versus Fascism and Nazism in the 1930's," in Uriel Dann, *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919-1939* (N.Y.: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 391-404.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmad Amin, "*al-Naqd aidan (Also the Criticism)*," *al-Risala* (6.1.1936): p. 881., Taha Husayn, "*Fi al-Naqd ila Sadiqi Ahmad Amin (On the Criticism of my Friend Ahmad Amin)*," *al-Risala* (6.8.1936): pp. 921-924.

<sup>58</sup> Op.cit., Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism ---," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.31, no.4 (1999): p. 570.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **HUSAYN AHMAD AMIN AND HIS TIME**

In this chapter, I will discuss Husayn Ahmad Amin's background and context in much the same manner as my discussion of the career of his father, Ahmad Amin, rather than describing his overall situation and development. With this in mind, I shall highlight the three main aspects involved: the epoch of Nasser, then of Sadat and of Mubarak up to the 1990s. A concise overview of liberal thinkers is also presented to try to define the place of Husayn Ahmad Amin.

#### **From Nasser to Sadat**

Initially, Nasser's revolution in 1952 appeared to promise a panacea for all the stagnant problems of the past: political disarray, economic distress and social chaos. He promoted Arabism instead of Egyptianism and Islamism as they had surfaced in the interwar period. Internally, his reform measures were swiftly put into action with a call for Arab Socialism. The nationalization of the Suez Canal and the building of the Aswan High Dam were almost symbolic, epitomizing Nasser's achievement and acting as a presentiment of a positive future. In the international arena, his fame echoed around the world, as one of

the major leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (Bandung Conference in 1955) and as a driving force of Arab unification (the unification with Syria in 1958).

Egyptian society was undergoing drastic change because most of the larger landowners had been deprived of their estates, which were to be divided and granted to peasants and tenants under the terms of the agrarian reform. The centuries-long institution of *waqf* was eventually abolished and the efficient use of land resources was envisaged as a natural outcome. All political parties and labor unions were to come under the banner of the Arab Socialist Union, or ASU, while the Society of the Muslim Brothers was banned after the attempted assassination of Nasser in 1954. As for al-Azhar, it came under thorough state control in 1961, when the long struggle over the right to appoint its rector came to an end.

Under Nasser, ex-liberals had generally become quiet, or expressed their admiration for ‘a period of miracles.’ “The radical nationalist program, which the middle class intellectuals regarded as their own,” was forestalled by Nasser.<sup>59</sup> Rather than acting as critics of the regime and the prevailing situation, many of them were supportive and were absorbed into the great wave of Nasserism. In fact, no notable liberal ideologue spoke out against the growing dictatorial trend during the 1950s and 1960s. One may say that Nasser’s charm almost changed the direction of the entire liberal tide.

At this juncture Israel launched the Six Day War in June 1967. Egypt suffered from

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<sup>59</sup> Op.cit., Meijer, *The Quest* -----, pp.188-9. However, later during the 60s, repressive measures by Nasser quieted critics in the country. Cf. Raymond W. Baker, *Egypt’s Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat* (Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1978), “Nasserism with a Liberal Face,” pp. 151-157.

the shame of defeat and Nasser's reputation was seriously challenged. His downfall was intensified by the economic difficulties which accompanied an inefficiently run centrally planned economy. This was one of the consequences of Nasser's much vaunted Arab Socialism.

These accumulating complaints against the regime and its policies were the main reasons behind Sadat's rapid shift to an open-door and laissez-faire policy as implemented soon after his assumption of the presidency in 1971. The same heap of complaints was also the source of various Islamic movements under Sadat.<sup>60</sup> Sadat had to cope with the political forces of the Nasserist left and the Communists, which made his stance vis-à-vis the Muslim Brothers, for example, much more lenient, however much trouble this would store up for him in the future. Sadat increased the number of university students almost without any upper limit hoping that they act as a counterbalance against the Nasserites and the Communists, although in fact the universities became a hot bed for both Muslim activists and leftists.<sup>61</sup> His victory in the 1973 October War against Israel gave Sadat some brief respite, although he was still widely criticized and said to be "smaller than the one who lost the war, Nasser." As time went on, Sadat often came to be called a new Pharaoh.

Five major Islamic radical groups were formed rather swiftly: The Youth of Muhammad (*Shabab Muhammad*), Excommunication and Holy Flight (*al-Takfir wa*

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam, Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 72-87.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Egypt under Sadat: Elites, Power Structure, and Political Change in a Post-Populist State," *Social Problems*, vol.28, no.4 (April 1981): pp. 442-464.

*al-Hijra*), the Group of the Holy War (*Jama'at al-Jihad*), the Rescue from Hell (*al-Inqadh min Jihannam*) and the Army of Allah (*Jund Allah*). An umbrella body to cover the student members of all these organizations was also set up and was called the Islamic Group (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*). The number of mosques in Cairo doubled from twenty thousand to forty thousand,<sup>62</sup> in the 1970s and in the fall of 1981, 1,500 Muslim activists were arrested, which triggered the anger of the *al-Jihad* group assassins in November of the same year.

With these developments, liberals began to become more prominent in society. In other words, Sadat's laissez-faire policy awakened liberal activity in Egypt once again.

### **The Era of Mubarak**

Here I will refer to two matters: first, the development of the Islamic fundamentalists from Sadat's time through Mubarak's regime up to the turn of the last century, second, the general stance taken by Mubarak towards the trend presented as above. The aim is to see the position in which the liberals have been placed during this period.<sup>63</sup>

The first is a good sample of the mutual exchange of political actions and reactions. When Sadat's laissez-faire policy started in the 1970s and when the activities of the Islamic fundamentalists became more overt, the first reaction was the return of many intellectuals

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<sup>62</sup> This number includes *musallas* or prayer rooms or simple places of worship. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 175.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Bruce K. Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak, Liberalism, Islam and Democracy in the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

to the barracks of the Islamists, including Hasan Hanafi,<sup>64</sup> Tariq al-Bishri, ‘Adil Husayn and Khalid Muhammad Khalid, who were all once counted more as socialists. Anwar ‘Abd al-Malik, formerly a well known communist, also followed the Islamist call. These people are generally grouped under the name of “the New Traditionalists (*al-Turathiyyun al-Judud*)”, who had been disappointed by Nasserist policies and saw some promise in the resurgence of Islamism.

After the assassination of Sadat in 1981, the fundamentalists adopted an even more radical posture. The success of the Khomeini Revolution in Iran in 1979 was an additional stimulant. Terror was felt not only within the country but through the region as well, since Khomeini attempted to export his revolution. As a reaction to this extreme shift, another variety of Islamists began to appear at the beginning of the 1990s, known as “the Centrists (*al-Wasatiyya*).” They took a milder stance on the issues in front of them and included such people as Muhammad al-Ghazzali (d. 1995), Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Ahmad Kamal Abu al-Majd (1930), Muhammad Salim al- ‘Awwa (1942), Muhammad ‘Amara (1931)<sup>65</sup> and Fahmi Huwaydi (1936).<sup>66</sup>

In the early 1990s Mubarak started to take much harsher measures against the fundamentalist movements, which were becoming increasingly radical. These harsh

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<sup>64</sup> In Emmanuel Sivan, “The Clash within Islam,” *Survival*, 45 (2003): pp. 25-44, Hasan Hanafi is counted as a liberal.

<sup>65</sup> Op.cit., Ayubi, *Political Islam* ----- . In Chapter 9, ‘Amara is counted as liberal. pp. 201-213.

<sup>66</sup> Sagi Polka, “The Centrist Stream in Egypt and its Role in the Public Discourse Surrounding the Shaping of the Country’s Cultural Identity,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 39, no.3 (July, 2003): pp. 37-64.



measures encouraged the provisional establishment of the Center Party (*al-Hizb al-Wasat*) in January 1996, formed mainly by a moderate group from the Muslim Brotherhood. Naturally, this was a serious schism within its organization and as a result there were a number of political maneuverings on all sides. Here, however, it will suffice simply to make a reference to this new party.

Taking a generally pragmatic political stance, Mubarak mostly showed patience towards the actions and reactions of the Islamist fundamentalists mentioned above. However, in the last analysis, he sided with the moderate Islamists over anyone else. One might usefully compare him to Sadat, who applied his *laissez-faire* policy to all parties concerned except his enemies the Nasserists, against whom he occasionally incited the forces of the Islamists. Mubarak, who took over the presidency in the wake of the assassination of Sadat, had to face Islamist pressure squarely right from the beginning.<sup>67</sup>

Mubarak's siding with the moderate Islamists has been a cause for dismay and has encouraged considerable debate and activism among liberals. It coincided with the decline of Marxism and of populist ideologies such as Nasserism and Ba'athism in the 1980s, and thus opened up a wider space for the liberals to work with. This was the background to the emergence of so-called "Neo-Liberalism."

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<sup>67</sup> Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim, "Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s," *Third World Quarterly*, vol.10, no.2 (April, 1988): pp. 632-357.

### **Husayn Ahmad Amin's Milieu among Liberals<sup>68</sup>**

Let us now turn to the Neo-Liberals in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Unlike the Islamists, they had no representatives and no umbrella organizations. However, they all employed historical relativism to project a flexible Islam by interpreting its texts in a socio-economic, political and cultural context. They also eschewed the *a priori* rejection of Western culture as the embodiment of colonialism and prejudice, viewing it rather as a source of inspiration and imitation. Simply put, they all followed the footsteps of the first generation of such liberals as Taha Husayn and Ahmad Amin, and came to think that Islam had been constantly evolving throughout history in response to changing circumstances, and that it should engage with world civilization and borrow whatever it needs. Having said this, however, they usually took the core of Islamic belief as unchangeable and deemed it necessary to preserve it and consolidate it.

Thus the so-called Neo-Liberalism is not an ideology found in written texts nor does it have a formal organization with registered members. It is a loosely identified group of those who share basic values and aspirations as liberals, with the common concerns mentioned above. Hence the range of their names are somewhat amorphous, but three individuals stand out for their depth and innovative argumentation: Faraj Fuda, Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi and Husayn Ahmad Amin. Relations between among them were quite intimate; Faraj Fuda used to call Husayn, "My professor."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Shamir cautiously used the term 'Neo-Liberalism' in 1995, however, Hatina overtly makes recourse to it in 2007. See their respective literature in the bibliography.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. op.cit., Shamir, "Liberalism ---," pp.195-212. He picks up these three as the most

A whole picture of Neo-Liberalism is presented here by introducing firstly prominent figures and secondly the thematic overview of their discussion.

### Prominent figures

Due to his tragic assassination, the name of Faraj ‘Ali Fuda (1945-92) attracted much attention around the world. He was elected to the National Council of Egypt in 1986, and wrote many books and articles against Islamic extremism. He asserts that the state and Islam must be separated and, at the same time, that Egyptian national unity must be maintained, thus stressing the importance to accommodate the Coptic minority in the Egyptian body politic. He maintains that a correct understanding of Islamic history is essential as a basis for these arguments. His works include; *Qabla al-Suqut (Before the Fall)*, Cairo, 1985. *al-Haqiqa al-Ghaiba (The Absent Truth)*, Cairo, 1988. *Nakun aw la Nakun (To be or not to be)*, Cairo, 1992. *Hatta la Yakun Kalaman fi’l-Hawa (So It Won’t be Just Talk)*, Cairo, 1992 (posthumously published). The Jihad organization assassinated him on June 8, 1992, which was a turning point in the conciliatory attitude of the government towards terrorists.<sup>70</sup>

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representative. Cf. also Jabir Qumayha, “*al-‘Almaniyyun al-Thalatha,*” *al-Wahda al-Islamiyya*, www.alwahdah.com, 3.8, 2005. These three are “the most famous secular leaders in Egypt and in the Arab countries.”(accessed January 15, 2010)

<sup>70</sup> Soon after his death during the fall of 1992, two liberal societies were set up with a view to keep the torch of Faraj Fuda: the Enlightenment Society (*Jam’iyyat al-Tanwir*) headed by ‘Abd al-Mu‘ati Hijazi which praises the first generation of liberals and promotes a separation of state and religion, and the New Appeal Society (*Jam’iyyat al-Nida al-Jadid*) headed by Sa‘id al-Najjar and Sa’d al-Din Ibrahim, which promotes human rights, science, change of laws, policies against fundamentalists, etc.

Husayn Ahmad Amin (b.1932) fits into this trio of neo-liberal thinkers: He calls for reactivating *ijtihad* and for a historical consideration in implementing the shari‘a, which is the man-made product of centuries. He published such books as *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin ila Muqtada al-Suluk fi'l-Qarn al-'Ishrin (The Sad Muslim's Guide to the Requirements of Conduct in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*, Cairo, 1985. On a new approach to the interpretation of the shari‘a and its authority: *Tatbiq al-Shari‘a al-Islamiyya (Application of the Islamic Shari‘a)*, Cairo, 1987. As to the analysis of the changing world: *al-Islam fi'l-'Alam al-Mutaghayyir (Islam in the Changing World)*, Cairo, 1988, and *al-Mawqif al-Hadari fi al-Naz‘at al-Diniyya (A Civilized Position on Religious Trends)*, Cairo, 1993. As will be discussed later in this study, it is noted that he also emphasizes the absolute value to maintain the essence of Islam hand in hand with a historical interpretation of the shari‘a. It is the responsibility of Islamic thinkers, as Husayn asserts, to clarify what this essence is and to establish an intricate relation between it and other historically transient factors.

Muhammad Sa‘id al-‘Ashmawi (b.1932) was a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He contends that Islam is not a religion of legal codes but one of compassion, *rahma*. He points out that out of a total of six thousand verses the Qur‘an contains only two hundred verses of a legal nature, and argues that the application of the shari‘a must go along with various conditions, in particular, the public interest. For some time in 1978 he lectured at Harvard University, and retired from the judiciary service in 1993. His publication indicates the range of his discussion: *Ruh al-'Adala (The Spirit of Justice)*, Beirut, 1983, *Usul al-Shari‘a (The Roots of the Shari‘a)*, Cairo, 1983, *Jawhar al-Islam (The Essence of Islam)*, Cairo, 1984, *al-Islam al-Siyasi (Political Islam)*, Cairo, 1987,

*al-Shari‘a al-Islamiyya wa al-Qanun al-Islami (The Shari‘a and Islamic Law)*, Cairo, 1988, and *al-Khalifa al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Caliphate)*, Cairo, 1990.

A list of other prominent Egyptian liberals follows, each with his résumé and some major publications.<sup>71</sup> It has to be provisional because the list is not a product of those listed. From the list, it becomes abundantly clear that they are almost all highly educated with doctorates, and many are involved in journalism in one way or another. Thus they have attained an academic level much higher than the first generation, but the later generation of liberals, like the earlier generation, was mostly recruited from the middle to upper class. Many of them enjoy running their own associations and intellectual centers, phenomena symbolic of the continuing development of civil society, also since the earlier generation.

#### Individuals <sup>72</sup>

‘Abd al-Fattah, Nabil: A lawyer and deputy director of the Ahrām Center for Political and Strategic Studies. His book, *al-Mushaf wa al-Sayf (The Qur’an and the Sword)*, Cairo, 1984, is one of the major analyses of religious extremism in Egypt from the 1960s through the early 1980s.

‘Abd al-Karim, Khalil (1930-2002): An Azhari, he employed his vast erudition in a liberal reading of Islamic heritage, and defended Ahmad Abu Zayd in his trial in 1996. He

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<sup>71</sup> The list is compiled from the following sources: David Sagiv, *Fundamentalism and Intellectuals in Egypt, 1973-1993* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 69-81. Op.cit., Sivan, “The Clash ---,” pp.25-44. Op.cit., Ayubi, *Political Islam* -----, pp.201-213.

<sup>72</sup> Other prominent liberals who are not in the list are, for example, writers Fathi Ghanim, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Yusif Idris, researchers on Islamists ‘Adil Mahmud, Gunayna Ni‘mat Allah, philosopher Mahmud Zaki Najib and a journalist Muhammad Sa‘id.

asserts that the Qur'an does not stipulate a particular form of the state, just like Mahmud Mutawalli. His publications include *Li-tatbiq al-Shari'a la li'l-hukm (For the Application of the Shari'a and not for the Governance)*, Cairo, 1987. *Dawlat Yathrib (The State of al-Madina)*, Cairo, 1999. *al-Judhur al-Tarikhiyya li'l-Shari'a al-Islamiyya (The Historical Roots of Islamic Shari'a)*, Cairo, 1990.

Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid (b. 1943): He is one of Islam's leading liberal theologians and holds a PhD degree in Islamic studies from Cairo University. He was promoted to professorship in 1995; however, because of the thesis he submitted for his promotion, he was charged with apostasy, and in consequence required to divorce his wife. The thesis dealt with the Qur'an as a mythical and literary work. Eventually in 1996, the couple had to flee to Spain and then to the Netherlands.

Khalfallah, Muhammad Ahmad (1916-1997): He wrote in his doctoral thesis that the prophetic stories in the Qur'an were not historical, hence, he was accused of atheism and gross ignorance. Later in 1954, he submitted another thesis on Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, for which he received the degree. As he says, there is nothing specific about forms of government in the Qur'an and, hence, it is mandated to the will of the people. *al-Qur'an wa al-Dawla (The Qur'an and the State)*, Beirut, 1981. On the other hand, he asserts that Arab Socialism is consonant with Islam and further claims that Islam requires democracy.

Mutawalli, Mahmud: In the Qur'an, the state is not stipulated and the word *hukm* used in the Qur'an should be translated as "adjudication" rather than "governance." The word *'imara* is closest to "politics." Muhammad 'Amara, who is counted as a Centrist

as mentioned above, Husayn Amin and al-‘Ashmawi all agree with this view. *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-‘Amal al-Islami (The Muslim Brothers and Islamic Action)*, Cairo, 1985.

al-Najjar, Husayn Fawzi (1900-88): After receiving a doctorate in journalism from Cairo University, he was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard. He asserts that the shari‘a clearly determined the existence of the Islamic community, *umma*, but not of any state. *al-Dawla wa al-Hukm fi al-Islam (The State and Governance in Islam)*, Cairo, 1985.

al-Qimni, Sayyid Muhammad (b.1947): He is an Azhari but he was called “the Arab Salman Rushdie,” for interpreting the Prophet’s struggle with the Meccans in terms of power politics in his *al-Hizb al-Hashimi (The Hashimite Party)*, Cairo, 1989. *Dawlat al-Rasu (The State of the Prophet)*, Cairo, 1993. He was the object of a death threat from *al-Qa‘ida* Group in 2005, after which he has refrained from any public appearances.

Sayf al-Dawla, ‘Ismat (1923-1996): He was a jurist who promoted democracy as a way of development. He was arrested several times under Sadat for organizing an antigovernment group. He rejected the notion of a state comprised only of Muslims or a state including all Muslims. He wrote *al-‘Uruba wa al-Islam (Arabism and Islam)*, Beirut, 1986.

### Leftists<sup>73</sup>

Ramadan, ‘Abd al-‘Azim (1928-2007): He was a historian and was Dean of the Faculty of Education at al-Minufiyya University. He says that fundamentalists claim only the implementation of the shari‘a, whereas in a theocracy everything, including politics, economics and the judiciary, will come under the spell of religion. *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-Tanzim al-Sirri (The Muslim Brotherhood and the Underground Organization)*, Cairo, 1982.

Shukri, Ghali (b. 1935): A Copt from the Minufiyya district, he was a lecturer at the Sorbonne between 1976 and 1980 and taught social sciences at the Lebanese University in Beirut. *al-Aqbat fi Watan Mutaghayyir (The Copts in a Changing Nation)*, Cairo, 1991.

al-Tawila, ‘Abd al-Sattar (b.1928): He is a journalist and supports the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine, a rare case for a journalist. In his book, *Umara al-Irhab (The Amirs of Terrorism)*, Cairo, 1992, he campaigned against fundamentalist terrorism and assassination attempts.

Zakariyya, Fu‘ad (b. 1927): He is a philosophy professor and believes that human nature changes, hence he asks why shouldn’t laws change? Islam is not some a-historical system beyond human experience. *al-Haqiqa wa al-Wahm fi al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Mu‘asira (Truth and Fantasy in the Contemporary Islamic Movement)*, Cairo, 1986. *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya fi Mizan al-‘Aql (The Islamic Awakening in the Scale of Reason)*,

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<sup>73</sup> As mentioned earlier in this study, many of those who joined the New Traditionalists (*al-Turathiyyun al-Judud*) are ex-socialists, such as Hasan Hanafi, Tariq al-Bishri and ‘Adil Husayn.



Cairo, 1989.

### Journalists

Akram, Makram Muhammad (b.1935): He is the editor of the journal *al-Hilal* and the weekly *al-Musawwar*. Because he was close to President Mubarak, the radicals attempted to assassinate him in 1987 when he accused them of attempting to kill two Egyptian Ministers of Interior the same year.

Baha al-Din, Ahmad (1927-96): He was a prolific writer and published many books about his trips abroad, his talks with Sadat, the Palestinian question, etc., and was awarded Egypt's highest Order of Merit in 1964 and 1988.

Haykal, Muhammad Hasanayn (b.1923): He was Nasser's close advisor but came to oppose Sadat's making peace with Israel perhaps because of the influence of his father, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, a pre-war liberal. He also opposes fundamentalists and has written extensively on Egypt's policies. He was awarded the Order of Merit in 1960.

Mansur, Anis (b.1924): He was Sadat's closest adviser, just as Haykal was for Nasser. He welcomes Israeli journalists to Egypt and attacks extremism at every opportunity. He served as editor of the important journals *October* and *Mayo*.

### Economists

al-Najjar, Sa'id: An official at the World Bank who became head of the New Appeal Society formed near the end of 1992.

Ibrahim, Sa'ad al-Din (b. 1938): A renowned human rights activist and a 2002 Nobel Peace

Prize nominee for his work promoting the causes of minority rights and democracy. He established the Ibn Khaldun Institute for Development Studies in 1988, and conducted monitoring elections and training students in social science research methods. He was arrested in July, 2000, and sentenced to seven years imprisonment – but released in February, 2002 - on charges of operating the Institute without a license, providing information detrimental to the country to foreign states, provoking religious strife between Muslims and Copts, etc. But it is said that the real cause was that he denounced as fraudulent the 1995 Egyptian election, a charge that was later proven true.

#### A thematic overview<sup>74</sup>

##### Implementation of the shari‘a and the Islamic state

It is evident that the liberals claim that what belongs to Caesar is due to Caesar; religion should be handled by the clerics and politicians should run the affairs of state. A naïve application of the shari‘a with a caliphate system, they believe, would be doomed to end in dictatorship. The days of the Prophet Muhammad cannot be recreated in human history. That said, these ideas have been developed with some differentiation in tone as well as in manner. Let us see some of the ramifications.

One of the most straightforward arguments is found in the words of al-‘Ashmawi. He says that the word shari‘a appears in the Qur’an only four times and there it means “path” or “way,” not law. Islam, as he says, is a religion of compassion and benevolence and not a

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<sup>74</sup> It must be emphasized that a summary or an overview of the views of various liberals and fundamentalists are rather rare due to possible political complications, e.g., allegations of distortion and other claims.

legalistic religion, like Judaism. As noted earlier, he remarks that throughout the six thousand verses of the Qur'an, only two hundred touch upon legal matters. The theocratic system under the Prophet, he concludes, was only possible thanks to his special characteristics and the rule of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs was very much an example of worldly politics. Those who claim that the state should be run by Islam understand the word in the Qur'an, *hukm*, as rule, though it only means judgment in ruling, and hence it cannot be a basis of assertion. In Islam, everyone is a cleric and it is Islamic society that implements the shari'a. In the end, Islam and the state should be treated separately and the shari'a should not be applied by the state.

Faraj Fuda takes a slightly different view as to the rule of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, because he says that their rule, as well as the rule of the Prophet himself, was an exceptional utopian period of governance. From that time on, politics and religion have been separate. It is important, he says, for us to recognize the difference between Islam as a religion and Islam as a state in order to preserve the former. Further, he condemns the latter as an impractical illusion, although he argues that religion is one component of society's conscience. The application of the shari'a by the state inevitably leads to theocracy, and the religious state in its turn will lead to the rule of divine truth. This will without doubt lead to the collapse of Egyptian national unity, particularly since over 15% of the population is Copts.

Husayn Ahmad Amin spoke in clear terms as well. He says that in the Qur'an there are only eighty verses of a legal nature out of the entire six thousand verses, and that the shari'a is a man-made product that men have worked on over hundreds of years; therefore,

it is changeable and should be adjusted to the requirements of the age. The perception of religion must be based on a historical perspective and the concept of development, and therefore, legal exegesis, *ijtihad*, should be openly revitalized.

Some reference is made here to other voices, although they all support the separation of religion and state. Ramadan rebuts the fundamentalists, saying that when they demand the application of the shari‘a, they only talk about the political and judicial aspects and exclude its economic side. This is because, he says, the fundamentalists are concerned with their own conservative interests. What is vital, he argues, is to apply the shari‘a in its totality, since “we are more Muslim than you [Islamists].”<sup>75</sup>

One more view to be added is that of Husayn Fawzi al-Najjar, who says that what is taught in the Qur’an is the establishment of the *umma* and not any specific political institution or system. What is at stake is whether or not the world will become Islamized. That is, as he concludes, the goal of the teachings of the Qur’an.

The latter two views could be interpreted, though their precise meaning is not entirely clear, as going further than the fundamentalists in abiding by the essentials of Islam and the shari‘a. It should be remembered here that many claims by the Neo-Liberalists were not directed against Islam; rather, they were speaking up to be “more Muslim.” Hence one should not be mistaken as to their delicate sense of orientation. Also it is worth paying particular attention to whether or not a liberal discussant is claiming support for the separation of religion and state because Islam originally requires such a separation. As an

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Azim Ramadan, *Misr fi ‘Ahd al-Sadat* (2 vols, Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 293-303.

argument, it is stronger, of course, to say that this separation is built into the system rather than saying simply that it is preferable as a political choice. On this point also, the positions of Ramadan and al-Najjar are not clear.

#### Question of the Caliphate or the Imamate

It is interesting to see that the liberals are responding to the fundamentalists regarding the caliphate with an almost uniform discourse, saying it is tantamount to dictatorship. The liberals do not argue much about democracy per se, except for some who advocate in terms of pluralism such as Fuda or others who communicate through the Western media such as Husayn Ahmad Amin.<sup>76</sup> It almost seems as if they are defending the cause of democracy by way of a rebuttal of the institution of the caliphate.

The near-consensus argument is based on their observation that the institution of the caliphate has never been unidimensional. Sometimes it worked on the basis of designation such as when Abu Bakr chose ‘Umar and sometimes by acclamation or *bay‘a* among the people, for example, when ‘Uthman was chosen after ‘Umar. Further, after ‘Ali, Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufiyan appointed himself caliph in Damascus, it became systematized as hereditary succession.

It is worth mentioning, as the liberals say, that the institution of the caliphate is not mentioned in the Qur’an or *hadith*, which has made the position of the liberals easier vis-à-vis the Islamists. It seems that al-Azhar is no longer as strict about this issue and has

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<sup>76</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*al-Shura al-Islamiyya---*,” *BBC Arabic.com* (9.9, 2003).

adopted a more flexible attitude, in contrast to the period during which ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq published his book *Islam and the Fundamentals of Government (al-Islam was Usul al-Hukm)*, in 1925. Because the caliphate had been abolished by Atatürk, King Fu’ad, who was interested in obtaining the title, collaborated with al-Azhar to excommunicate al-Raziq soon after the book’s publication. The book itself sank into oblivion for quite a while in Egypt and was better known in Europe. However, the question of reinstating the caliphate as a system of governance has been brought to the fore once again since that the Islamists have brought the issue into the open. In the eyes of the Islamists, the institution of the caliphate symbolizes the longing of Muslims for the glorious past, hence they claim it as the core of the Islamic state.

al-‘Ashmawi stresses that the term *khalifa* has two meanings: one who succeeds someone legally or actually, or one who succeeds someone chronologically. However, these two meanings became obscured and people began to treat the caliphs as if they were successors to the Prophet, and moreover, had inherited some of his prophetic powers. Then the caliph actually became an emperor. He emphasizes that Islam does not endorse or dictate any particular form of rule.

Faraj Fuda is also vocal on this matter; he holds that the Prophet did not address the matter of the caliphate either directly or indirectly. He says that there have been several different ways in history to elect a caliph: by appointment, consensus or kinship. Therefore there has not been any fixed norm about the selection. Whether or not a caliph is bound by a group decision, or *shura*, is contested and whether or not he is obliged to consult with the people is also questioned. Thus one may understand that Fuda considered that the system of

the caliphate was very much in abeyance.

Husayn Ahmad Amin argues in the following way: in 1925, King Fu'ad was eager to attain a title of caliph after the abolition of the institution in Turkey the previous year. In fact, al-Raziq's book was intended to obstruct the design of the King. It was only natural for the King to contrive with al-Azhar to have al-Raziq excommunicated and his book banned. The caliphate, he says, has indeed been a source of wickedness and corruption through history.

Zakariya says that the important element of the Islamists' rosy dream is that the application of the shari'a will automatically cause all the problems from which we suffer to evaporate. The problem is that in reality, the principles of justice, generosity, *shura* and the like as derived from the shari'a have become mere words to justify the deeds of tyrants who disregard everything connected with these lofty principles. Thus Zakariya finds no room for the caliphate to be admitted to his purview.

al-Tawila contends that Islamists allege that the caliph can be a king or president of the republic, but the important thing is the application of the shari'a. Historically, the caliphs were always tainted as tyrants, by crime, ugliness and backwardness. Such a political system is anything but democratic.

Husayn Fawzi al-Najjar says that Islam did not delineate the form of regime or designate a successor to the Prophet to rule the Muslims after him. The caliphate was created according to purely Arab political notions which display no trace of any imitation of others. However, the public acclamation or *bay'a* based on consensus and election was carried out by men of state, who were then heard and obeyed by the rest of the Muslims.

The coercive and distorting effect this process would have had is obvious.

Baha al-Din regarded the caliphate as a form of dictatorship, whereas Makram Muhammad Ahmad, who was the subject of an assassination attempt in 1987, charges the Muslim Brotherhood for not behaving in accordance with democracy even after they gained seats in the parliament through election (in 1984 and 1987). Regarding the caliphate, he says that at the time of the Ottoman caliphs, Egypt was undergoing one of the worst periods of ignorance and decline in its history.

#### Western civilization and national unity

Another area where almost all Egyptian liberals agree is the importance of learning from Western civilization, which should be understood to include education, acquiring technologies and modern science. They often refer to such *hadith* as “Pursue science, even if it is in China (*utlub al-ilm hatta wa law fi al-Sin* ).”<sup>77</sup>

al-‘Ashmawi says, “Culture in the western world is not totally evil. Western culture also has high values such as organization, hygiene, credibility, precision, innovation, planning, cooperation, and service to others. These values are part of the conceptual world of the spirit. It is not necessarily only materialistic.”<sup>78</sup>

Fuda warns that the danger to Islam comes from those who prod young ones out of universities simply because the sciences are secular (He refers to what has been presented

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<sup>77</sup> This *hadith* is not authentic, as it is not included in any of the major compendiums of *hadiths*, e.g., by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>78</sup> Muhammad Sa’id al-‘Ashmawi, *al-Islam al-Siyasi* (Cairo: Sina, 1987), p. 68.



by Marx, Freud and Darwin as examples of such secular sciences in the eyes of Islamists). Islam, he says, remains a religion of science and sanity; it would be better for Muslims to study sciences rather than religious laws which mandate the shedding of blood.

Another point shared by the liberals concerns the issue of national identity and unity. The question refers in particular to the Coptic minority. No official population census has been carried out in Egypt for the Coptic community since 1945, due to its political implications. Since then it has officially stood at two million; however, it is generally believed that it is now ten million. The Copts' position within the Egyptian polity has not been questioned for many centuries, but the recent radicalization of Muslims in Egypt has been having a serious effect on them. In an extreme case, some radical elements started to survey the Coptic community and levy "hush money." The Copts are also fighting together with other Egyptians in the struggle against Israel, for example, and are contributing considerably to the development of the country and the welfare of the nation. It is surely only fair, therefore, to give them equal legal standing.

Hence Ghali Shukri, a Coptic intellectual and literary critic with left-wing views advocates egalitarian treatment legally and socially. He goes so far as to say that there has not been a Coptic period in Egyptian history.

For Faraj Fuda, the goals were two-fold: to reveal the Islamists' futility in trying to solve present day problems based on the shari'a, and to nurture loyalty to Egypt, which has served as a melting pot for the Pharaonic, Islamic, Coptic, Arabic and African civilizations. He rejected the notion of an Islamic community, mocking the claim that an Iranian Muslim could be closer to him than his Coptic neighbors and compatriots. To him, the entity of the

nation of Egypt stands high as a concrete base for survival and development.

The positions favorable towards adopting some positive elements in Western civilization and adopting an egalitarian attitude to the Copts are two separate issues, although they may in fact be more or less two sides of the same coin. This is because they are both in some sense non-Islamic and hence, require a particular flexibility in applying Islamic norms and creative thinking, which are the very tasks of the Islamic radicals.

### Liberalism across borders

A short list of Muslim liberals in other Arab countries is provided as follows with a view to the wider international horizon.<sup>79</sup> Some try to work on reinterpreting the Qur'an, such as Arkoun and Shahrur, and others work on philosophy such as Ansari.

Arkoun, Muhammad (Algeria, b. 1929): He received his doctorate at the Sorbonne and held a professorship there for many years. His life long subject is the critique of Islamic reason, while admitting pluralism in interpreting the Qur'an. He practices history as anthropology of the past. *Critique de la Raison Islamique*, Paris, 1984, *Rethinking Islam: common questions, uncommon answers*, Boulder, Colorado, 1993: *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, London, 2002. He was appointed a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

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<sup>79</sup> A more thorough perspective referred to as Islamic Reformation will be provided in Chapter 8 of this study. Its arena of discussion will be borderless, extending from Pakistan and Iran to Europe.

Muhammad Shahrur (b. 1938):<sup>80</sup> An emeritus professor of civil engineering at the University of Damascus. He says that the traditional interpretation of the Qur'an is unscientific because social realities change. He claims that the Qur'an should be read as if "the Prophet just died and informed us of this Book," in his best selling study of the Qur'an, *al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'a Mu'asira (The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading)*, Damascus, 1990. He used modern linguistics and frequent metaphors and analogies drawn from engineering and the sciences. For example, he says that if Muhammad was divinely inspired, he would have been transformed into a preprogrammed robot and robots are not suitable examples for humanity, hence the Companions of the Prophet.

Ansari, Abdou Filali (Morocco, b.1946): He has received a PhD in philosophy from the University of Dijon, France, and has a chair at the Aga Khan University in London. He says that everyone thinks of something different when Islam is mentioned: history, society, law or culture. Therefore, he claims, Islam itself does not exist [as one entity]. He promotes the recognition of the importance of the philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126-98) because he asserted that reason refers us to religion since it cannot provide ethical guidance, but religious belief designates reason to enact ethics in this world. This view has been rejected by many Muslims as a double truth, but it offered Medieval Europe a foundation for new insights.

Some more will be mentioned here for the sake of fairness, though they are not

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. op.cit., Kurzman, *Liberal Islam* -----, pp. 139-42.

always easy to group.

Taha, Muhammad (Sudan, 1909-1985): He was a politician, theologian and engineer. He stood against the direct application of the shari‘a as in Saudi Arabia and the teachings of the Muslim Brothers. He was also the first Arab to call for direct peace negotiations with Israel right after the 1967 War. His most famous books on Islam are the trilogy published in 1966-67: *Tariq Muhammad (Muhammad's Path)*, *Risalat al-Salat (The Message of Praying)*, and *al-Risala al-Thaniya min al-Islam (The Second Message of Islam)*. The Shari‘a Court announced his apostasy in 1968, and he was subsequently sentenced to death by the Numayri regime in 1985.

Haydar, Khalil ‘Ali (Kuwait): He is a columnist who says that a return to Islamic rule is a great myth, and that Muslims in America should be good citizens. *Tayyarat al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (The Trends of the Islamic Resurgence)*, Kuwait, 1987.

al-Ansari, ‘Abd al-Hamid (Qatar): He is a former Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Law at the University of Qatar and is known as a human rights activist. *al-Huquq al-Siyasiyya lil-Mar’a: Ru’ya Tahliliyya Fiqhiyya Mu‘asira (Political Rights for Women: A Contemporary Analytical Legal View)*, Cairo, 2000.

al-Sayyid, Ridwan (b.1935): Born in Lebanon, he is an Azhari and holds a PhD degree in Islamic studies from Tübingen University, Germany. He asserts that two illusions must be eradicated: first, the notion of Islam as an idealized system of rule, and second, the separation of Islam and influential circles in the Arab and Islamic world. *Mafahim al-Jama‘a fi al-Islam (The Concept of Groups in Islam)*, Beirut, 1984. *al-Umma wa al-Jama‘a wa al-Islam (Community, Group and Islam)*, Beirut, 1984.

Talbi, Muhammad (b.1921) and Rashid al-Gannushi (b.1941): They are both Tunisians.

Talbi is a professor of the history of North Africa at the University of Tunis. He says that 40% of the Muslims in the world live in states where they are minorities, and hence that the idea of an Islamic unity is a fantasy and democracy is a way of consultation between the ruler and the ruled. *Iyal Allah (Families of Allah)*, Tunis, 1992. *Ummat al-Wasat (Community of Moderation)*, Tunis, 1996. al-Gannushi stresses cooperation and coexistence with the West, and that secularism and nationalism behind democracy are problems. However, he is known for his belief in gradualism to attain democracy.

### Conclusion

“Neo-Liberalism” in Egypt is struggling in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism, just as the first generation had to struggle against the overwhelming power of the West. The new generation is certainly receiving rich nourishment from its predecessor. It also enjoys the basic infrastructure of civil society: various institutions and organizations, active media, and academic institutes of all sorts.

Despite all this, the claim of the Neo-Liberals in Egypt to authority is dwindling; as Husayn Ahmad Amin says, “We are nothing but a bunch of dissidents writing on water.”<sup>81</sup> One of the weaknesses with the liberals’ program, it is claimed, is that their discourse is too difficult, too complicated when compared to the simplified fundamentalist call that “Islam is the solution.” A second difficulty might be that the regime leans toward the Islamists

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<sup>81</sup> Op.cit., Sivan, “The Clash -----,” p. 39.

rather than the liberals. In the first generation, the government, whether in terms of the royal family or the major party of the Wafd, sided with the liberals in their common struggle against the power of the West.

A certain self-criticism has been voiced among the liberals that Egyptian liberalism in the postrevolutionary era did not have to pay a high price for its activities or its liberal values. Unlike in the West, it established itself rather easily and without any serious struggle. Faraj Fuda defined himself as a “flesh and blood liberal”<sup>82</sup> and fell victim to the terrorists. Perhaps what is at stake is the resoluteness and commitment on the part of the liberals and, behind them, the degree of political awareness and sense of balance of the Egyptian people.

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<sup>82</sup> Op.cit., Hatina, *Identity Politics* -----, p. 115.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE THOUGHT OF AHMAD AND HUSAYN AMIN**

In this chapter, the main features of the thought of Ahmad and Husayn Amin will be analyzed and contrasted so that both can be better assessed in their historical contexts and may be seen as participating in two distinct but deeply related paradigms.

#### **Paradigm Shift**

As mentioned earlier, fragile optimism and deep sorrow seem to be fundamental characteristics of the two writers, and may be regarded as a part of the paradigms for them. In fact, they should be seen certainly as comprising and defining very vital backgrounds for their works. Here, however, attention will be focused on the main contents and compositions of their thoughts. The aim of presenting these paradigms is to see the range and direction of the discussions of the two, and thus, to make it possible to view them as symbolic of a larger historical shift.

To the best of my understanding, Ahmad Amin was mainly concerned with the following matters, although some remained below the surface:

(1) The quintessence of religious belief – Ahmad claims that the apex of religious belief, even in

the contemporary world, consists in the recognition of the Absolute by way of a spark of light or the power of intuition, and the aim of human life is to attain this sublime status of mind, surpassing the realms of beauty, goodness, and truth.

- (2) The importance of reason – Human reason is the key factor in every sphere of life, including religion. The Mu‘tazilis during the eighth and the tenth centuries were the first to emphasize the use of reason in Islam.
- (3) A call for a new civilization – The West is deficient in spirituality while the East, with its still vibrant spirituality, might be better equipped for the task of establishing a new and more humane civilization.
- (4) Political education – Egyptian society is still far from political maturity. Education and enlightenment are necessary. Ideally, Nasser’s military regime should soon return to a republican system of government.
- (5) Renewal of Arabic literature – Literature should be evaluated more by its meaning rather than its style and rhetoric. Language needs to be renewed and Arabic grammar ought to be simplified.

The schema above takes in much of Ahmad Amin’s thought,<sup>83</sup> although it should be stressed that such thinking was shared by many other contemporary writers, as has been briefly discussed in Chapter II. As we saw, Taha Husayn’s range was just about the same as Ahmad

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<sup>83</sup> For the full range of Ahmad’s argument, cf. H.M.H. Mazyad, *Ahmad Amin, Advocate of Social and Literary Reform in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1963). Amin Makoto Mizutani, *An Intellectual Struggle of a Moderate Muslim: Ahmad Amin* (Ministry of Culture of Egypt, Cairo, 2007), and William Shepard, *The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual, The Religious Aspects and Implications of the Writings of Ahmad Amin* (New Delhi: Vicas Publishing House, 1982).



Amin's, although there were some significant differences. For example, Ahmad emphasized the religious debate more than Taha Husayn, whereas Taha stressed literary criticism. Again, Taha Husayn promoted the idea of the Mediterranean character of Egyptian civilization, while Ahmad placed himself along the spectrum of Arab-Islamic culture, though he certainly admitted the need for a new and humane, but not necessarily Islamic, civilization.<sup>84</sup>

One may further compare Ahmad's paradigm with Muhammad Husayn Haykal's. Haykal, who was leader of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, concentrated on political argument and political memoirs, whereas Ahmad did not publish on political issues at all. But Haykal was also one of the leading protagonists in promoting a new civilization based on the East or so-called Easternism, as well as one of the most highly regarded writers on Islamic subjects in the late 1930s. In fact, his book, *Fi Manzil al-Wahy (In the Falling-Spot of the Revelation)*, Cairo, 1937, is said to have ushered in a new epoch of Islamism in print culture during that time, reflecting and intensifying the ongoing passion within society. Furthermore, he was involved in literature as well, and wrote a novel, *Zaynab* (1913), the love story of a village girl, which Gibb described as "the first real Egyptian novel."<sup>85</sup>

One could continue in this vein, comparing the various types among liberal writers, but the overall picture will not be much different from the description above. This is hardly surprising given that all the writers were working in the rather secluded environment of Cairo, where

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. op. cit., Cachia, *Taha Husein* ---, Pierre regrets that Taha could not direct his energy exclusively to scholarly works as he displayed in his early stage. p. 239.

<sup>85</sup> Gibb may have been misled by a comment of Mahmud Taymur, who meant to say that it was the first novel of "national literature." See op. cit., Brugman, *An Introduction* ---, pp. 210-11."

everyone knew everyone else quite well, and even small articles produced by publishing houses were soon read and commented on by many others. Thus, rather than going about the hair-splitting business of deciphering the differences between the various liberal writers of Ahmad Amin's time, it makes greater sense to examine the shift in paradigms from one time period to the other.

Before moving on to this paradigm shift between eras, one last point which should be mentioned is that no serious economic writing appeared during the first generation. There were no influential, qualified economists at the time, although there were prominent industrialists and businessmen such as Muhammad Tal'at Harb (1867-194) who founded Bank Misr but left no economic analysis. The first academic socio-economic analyses of Egyptian society, using statistical data, did not appear until 1938: *Siyasat al-Ghadd (The Policy of Tomorrow)* by Mirit Butros Ghali and *'Ala Hamish al-Siyasa (On the Margin of Politics)* by Hafiz 'Afif. However, these publications were not warmly received by those involved in political and economic activities, nor among the literati of the time. Thus the focus now turns from a horizontal observation to a vertical one: a paradigm shift over the two generations.

Husayn Amin discussed various issues, mainly centering on the following questions:<sup>86</sup>

- (1) A flexible application of the shari'a – Both the increasing presence of the Muslim Brothers, with their demand to implement the shari'a to its fullest extent and the success of the Iranian

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<sup>86</sup> There is only one article on Husayn Ahmad Amin in English: Nadia Abu Zahra, "Islamic History, Islamic Identity and the Reform of Islamic Law: The Thought of Huwayn Ahmad Amin," in John Cooper, Ronald L. Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud (eds.) *Islamic Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1998), pp. 82-104. There are references to him in: Ajami, *The Dream Palace*, ----, pp. 228-30. Ayubi, *Political Islam* ----, pp. 206-9. Hatina, *Identity Politics* ----, pp. 122-7. Sagi, *Fundamentalism* ----, pp. 70-1, 92-5, 114-6, Shamir, "Liberalism," pp. 204-6.

Revolution of 1979, encouraged the activities of fundamentalists as well as liberals. Husayn Amin has always been one of those on the front line, calling for its flexible interpretation and implementation so that it could be accommodated in the contemporary world.

- (2) The role of a historian – The key factor of his argument is his concern with historicism or historical relativism. The role of the historian is to remove all the accretions which became attached to Islam over the centuries and extract its quintessence to show to the public. This is also the way to revive Islam. Religious belief should be shared by many; it is not a personal matter. He says that the most important factor for retaining the flexibility of Islam is using historical methodology and taking a historical view. Ultimately he believes that history is the appearance of the divine will in human society.<sup>87</sup>
- (3) The rejuvenation of Islamic civilization to cope with the West – Religion and tradition are the two bases for coping with the West, though Muslims must admit many of their faults and deficiencies over the past two centuries. The West is not faithful to its word and Muslims ought to discuss things more intellectually, freely, honestly, and without romanticism.
- (4) The fight against Islamic radicalism: Husayn finds no merit in discussions with radicals as long as they remain rigid. He claims that Islam from its inception calls for the renewal of its political and economic systems. The Qur'an, by way of stressing the need for consultation, sets forth a basis for democracy in the 38<sup>th</sup> verse of Sura 42 and in the 159<sup>th</sup> verse of Sura 3.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, *al-Islam fi 'Alam Mutaghayyir* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1988), p. 158.

<sup>88</sup> “And those who answer the Call of their Lord, and perform the prayer, and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them.”(42:38) and “So pass over their faults, and ask Allah's Forgiveness for them; and

- (5) Translation of English literature – More recently, Husayn has made several translations of Shakespeare and other classic works of English literature. He did not express any particular view on Arab literature or literary critique as such.

As shown above, one may be able to grasp even on a provisional basis a comparative vision between the two paradigms, one for the father and the other for the son.

- (1) Much more than his father, Husayn stressed the importance of interpreting the shari‘a in historical context. This is obviously because the question of the application of the shari‘a has become a hot issue, particularly since the 1980s. In fact, the issue of the relationship between the caliphate, the state and the shari‘a had already been touched upon in Ahmad Amin’s time, because of the upheaval over the excommunication of ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq, the author of *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukum (Islam and the Roots of Governance)* in 1925. In fact, for Ahmad, the most pressing task was to reestablish the validity of religious belief in the contemporary world. This he did through expounding an intuitive approach to the essence of belief, as he defined it. He said that it is a sublime state of mind, which anyone has the ability to attain.<sup>89</sup>
- (2) For Ahmad, the stress on the importance of human reason in every sphere of human life was most crucial with a view to reform and development. This could be traced back to the teaching of Muhammad ‘Abduh and many other leading scholars, as well as some European intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill. It seems that Ahmad was influenced mostly by the

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consult them in the affairs.” (3:159).

<sup>89</sup> Shepard claims, “Amin should have advanced in the theological task, since it would integrate the mind of the believer into that pattern of life centered on religious symbols, which is religious faith.” Cf. the concluding remarks in, op.cit., Shepard, *The Faith of a Modern Muslim* --, p. 204.

Director of the School of Islamic Jurisprudence, ‘Atif Barakat, a strict moralist, who always emphasized the importance of reason even in religious matters.

For Husayn, his father’s era is over; instead, he stresses the role of the historian in crystallizing religious belief and setting up a proper norm for this world. In this sense, one may say that Husayn commits the historian to a whole series of works based on reason. He did not have to stress the value of reason as his father had to do sixty years ago; it is enough for him to suggest how and by whom the work of reason should be carried out. Also, as Husayn does not assign any role to the ulama or Islamic scholars, one may be able to see the indication of his loss of confidence in traditional Islamic intellectuals.

- (3) As to the third point, the need to create a new civilization, Ahmad was clearly more hopeful and proactive. He dreamed of a new civilization with abundant humane factors based on the spirituality of the East. Husayn lays stress on overcoming the supremacy of the West and the importance of the rejuvenation of Muslim society in general, but the whole scenario as he envisages it is a much more straightforward path to reviving the past glory of Islam. It is difficult to detect the delicate requisite of humane factor in Husayn’s discourse in this field. Whether or not this should be considered disturbing will be discussed later in this study.
- (4) Ahmad Amin was well aware that what was needed most in Egypt in his day was political education and enlightenment rather than preaching high- handed theories and principles. He had to make it clear at the outset that politics was not some kind of natural disaster, which people could not do anything about, but a human product which people could create and change. More than half a century later, Husayn Amin obviously does not need to be concerned with imparting such primordial lessons. Instead he is more vocal in calling for

democracy, although he does not seem to go much farther than the conventional line of resorting to the Qur'anic sources and narrating some historical events and facts, and does not present a detailed argument on institutions. It is true that the first generation of liberals did not take up the question of the institutionalization of political functions, and this failure was detrimental for developing stable politics and a stable democratic system. After Egypt's bitter experiences, why did this conventional mode of thinking have to be maintained? The question looms larger in the context of the high stature and ample international experience Husayn has attained. But this point is too premature to be clear at this stage.

- (5) Ahmad Amin was an authority on Arab literature and he certainly did argue a lot about its reform and about how to reform, by way of providing a "modern" method of literary criticism. Husayn is not especially interested in Arabic literature, but he has translated several of Shakespeare's plays thanks to his study of English literature at the University of London in his youth. It is the mark of a new era in the field when the call for any substantive change has ceased. The Arabic language also has gone through a number of modifications and continues to undergo this process without facing any serious stumbling blocks. After almost a century and a half of calls for reforms in literature and language, it may well be that things are now moving towards self-sustained renewal and renovation. Since this segment of discussion does not go much farther with a view to the situation above, literature will not be discussed further in this study.

It seems consistent with the nature of the question, which is qualitative rather than quantitative and gradual, that the shift in paradigms was produced and presented without sharp delineation. However, I have attempted to locate the key points of the polemics of the two as

precisely as possible, including the underlying themes in various arguments, and to see in a historical context how they are associated or are unrelated today. It is hoped, however, that the discussion here will serve as a conceptual spring-board which will take us into a more elaborate discussion in the next chapter.

### **Fragile Optimism vs. Deep Sorrow**

A fragile but welcome optimism was a distinctive feature of the first generation of Egyptian liberals, the time of the Egyptian “Renaissance.” In contrast, deep disappointment has permeated the liberals of Husayn’s generation and is evident in his strong yearning for the era of his father and the first generation of liberals. Thus the entirely different dispositions of each thinker’s time constitute two backdrops painted with contrasting hues: one bright and the other dark.

The aim of this section is to elaborate both these aspects by providing additional discussion and deliberation. I will start with an earlier and brighter wing of the two sides.

As far as the rise and fall of the first attempt at liberalism is concerned, several main historical causes have been discussed in Chapter II. However, it may be worth expanding a little further here to incorporate the recent analysis put forward by Maghraoui, particularly in relation to the cause of the fall.<sup>90</sup> He concludes, “the Egyptian liberal reformers attempted to redefine the territorial, historical, racial, and cultural boundaries of the new Egyptian political community to

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<sup>90</sup> Abdelslam M. Maghraoui, *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1921-1936* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). In this book, the author does not give any definition of ‘liberalism,’ neither in the sense of political science nor history.

which ordinary Egyptians were supposed to owe allegiance. ----- To become eligible for the supposed privileges of modern citizenship, the Egyptian individual had to be appropriated, transformed, controlled, and alienated from his or her communal identity.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, one had to postulate an “eligible Egyptian” to advance the argument.

Reading the quotation above, one immediately senses the author’s shrewd grasp of the situation and is tempted to accept the analysis. Looking from another angle, however, it may point to an immaturity of the Egyptian political community at the time.

In the same concluding section, Maghraoui starts with a critical assessment of Nadav Safran and P. J. Vatikiotis, because, as he says, they claim that “Egyptian leaders failed to appreciate the liberal ideas of European political philosophy and missed a historic opportunity to embrace parliamentary rule.” For Maghraoui, blaming liberal reformers at the time “relieves the colonial order from much accountability and overlooks the cultural tensions and political contradictions that accompanied the imposition of ‘democratic’ institutions under the auspices of colonial authority.” This criticism is enough of a truism to be fairly readily accepted, although whether the point of relieving colonial accountability was intended or not should be further examined in its own context with a general scholarly disposition of both of Safran and Vatikiotis.

The remaining question here is, as I see it, whether or not Maghraoui has actually gone beyond the very point of his criticism. One must say that in making it, he is joining the group of people whom he has criticized, in that he is identifying the root cause of the failure of liberalism in terms of its ideal or conceptual approach, rather than in relation to “the cultural tensions and

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91 Op.cit., pp. 144-145.



political contradictions” on the ground. I am arguing this with a full acknowledgement that the author has proven himself over the years no less serious a scholar than those he is criticizing.

The point I wish to assert here is that all three scholars mentioned above are working on one and the same subject and they are all pointing at a truism: there was a considerable “unreal hold which liberal European political ideas had over Egyptian leaders” and, at the same time, Egyptian leaders had to postulate a politically workable, and in that sense, mature community from which they could kick off their history and upon which they could build a new nation after the drafting of the 1923 constitution. This process would have naturally entailed that “the Egyptian individual had to be appropriated, transformed, controlled, and alienated from his or her communal identity.”

After reviewing these three authors’ contention, one would agree that there does not seem to be a clash or a serious contradiction among them. An ideal and conceptual approach on politics is largely shared by the three scholars. The unanswered question, therefore, remains to examine “the cultural tensions and political contradictions that accompanied the imposition of ‘democratic’ institutions under the auspices of colonial authority,” as pointed out by Maghraoui.<sup>92</sup>

We now turn to the second scene, painted with darker colors, that is, the scene to which Husayn belongs. The deep disappointment suffusing own era and his strong yearning for the era of the first generation were mentioned in Chapter I, as a part of the relationship between Husayn and his father. Given the context, the following two dimensions were not fully developed previously. One is a sorrow going beyond the level of disappointment, among Egyptians at large, and among liberals in particular, and the other is a sense of the very real threat coming from the

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<sup>92</sup> Op.cit., p. 144.

Islamic extremists. Both relate to more emotional currents among contemporary liberals

Ajami explains the deep sorrow of the Egyptians as a source of liberalism in contemporary Egypt. He says that Egypt had four chances for serious renewal and development: the era of reforms by Muhammad ‘Ali between 1808 and 1848, the reign of Isma‘il Pasha between 1863 and 1879, the epoch of the liberals during the 1920s and 1930s, and Nasser’s rule between 1952 and 1970. But everything has gone wrong and what is left now is just a sense of sorrow and bewilderment as to what to look for next.<sup>93</sup> This sense of deep sorrow is understandable; however, how it led to the growth of liberalism is another matter.

What should not be missed here is a sort of pathos, if we are to understand the psyche of these liberals more fully. The deeper it goes, the stronger becomes their yearning for the splendid days of the first generation, and the harder pressed becomes their desire to reactivate the passion so prevalent among the first generation.

Another deep emotional aspect of the liberals is a sense of the encroaching threat of the fundamentalists in Egypt and more generally in the Islamic world. This aspect is more easily understood as a psychological dynamo to encourage the liberals in their work. It may be relevant here to make a reference to a one-act drama, entitled “In the Judge’s House,” by Husayn Ahmad Amin.<sup>94</sup> The play portrays family life in an ordinary home in Cairo, though the father is a judge and is thus expected to be more knowledgeable about what is happening in the country than an

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<sup>93</sup> Fouad Ajami, “The Sorrows of Egypt,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol.74, no. 5 (Sep-Oct. 1995): pp. 72-88.

<sup>94</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, *al-Musawwar* (June 26, 1987). English translation, “The Judge’s House (*Fi bayt al-qadi*),” tr. by P. J. Vatikiotis, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 25, no.1 (Jan. 1989): pp. 23-30.

ordinary citizen. The parents talk quite seriously about events in town and about various religious movements in the country. Then suddenly they notice that their son has just left the house. They then begin to worry that their son is going to the police to report their conversation, which contained some critical comments about religious extremism. At school, the pupils are taught to send reports to the police on any anti-Islamist words or actions, because it is the right thing to do.

This is family life, as Husayn depicts it in his drama. Once Islamists take over power in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab countries, the country would become a police state, with no space left for free discussion or true family life. This is what Husayn wanted to warn people of, what it might mean for Egyptians if they sympathize with the Islamic movement and extend their support to it. It is not known whether the play had a good or bad reception: however, short as it is, it represents an attempt on Husayn's part to communicate to people on a more emotional and intuitive level, rather than through logical reasoning and argument.

### **Family as a Network**

Urbanization and industrialization since the latter half of the nineteenth century have affected many major cities in the world in a somewhat similar manner. Primarily, this has resulted in mass migrations from the countryside to the cities, which has resulted in major social transformations. Many people of differing religious, geographical, politico-economic, vocational, and ethnic backgrounds have had to mingle in one way or another, packed closely in city quarters.

On the other hand, many new institutions and systems were introduced, such as government services and bureaucracies, educational systems and schools, and modern factories and offices. These functional units naturally started to replace the old established social networks,

which were sometimes based on neighborhood and kinship, and local vocational cooperatives or guilds at other times. These general trends may summarily be considered as the shift from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society), though with a variety of different symptoms.

The Middle East, including Egypt, has not escaped this general shift in social composition and units of interests and survival. If one extracts some characteristics of this process from three countries in the region, Turkey, Egypt and Iran, it is noted that Turkey went ahead of the other two, followed by Egypt. Iran advanced, but more rapidly during the 1960s under the policy of the “White Revolution” of Muhammad Reza Shah, though, obviously, with considerable doubt about its efficacy. These three then followed a similar path at different times, in the order of their geographical distance from Europe.

Having said this, it is still often remarked that in the contemporary Middle East, personal relations matter much, and in particular, a family tie is a crucial factor of interaction in virtually all fields of collective activity, i.e., political, economic, social, and cultural. It may be regarded as one of the most stable social networks, given that it is rooted in Islam and Arab heritage. The reason I am making this reference here is, of course, to draw attention to a salient aspect of the relationship between the father, Ahmad, and the son, Husayn.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The importance of family ties in Egyptian politics is discussed in, Robert Springborg, *Family, Power, and Politics in Egypt, Sayed Bey Marei-His Clan, Clients, and Cohorts* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). A family tie in a community as an informal network in the lower class of Cairo is analyzed sociologically in Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation, Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995).

Asking what this family tie is, in the world of thought and writing, could be well construed as asking about the nature of the legacy passed from father to son. I would like to point to three main legacies handed down by Ahmad to his son, Husayn, or rather to the Ahmad's sons, especially Hafiz and Galal.

The first is that they were all encouraged to think and write on Islamic and other cultural affairs from a liberal point of view. This might sound rather too natural and unworthy of highlighting as the first legacy. However, it should be remembered that Husayn's lifelong work was as a civil servant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Galal was a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo, and Hafiz, the eldest, was a civil engineer at various government agencies. None of them had the specialized training in history or Islamic issues to participate in polemics from a professional position.

Hafiz was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture to publish *Ahmad Amin, Mufakkir sabaqa 'Asrahu (Ahmad Amin, A Thinker before his Time)*, Cairo, 1987, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his father's death. In one of Galal's books, *Shakhsiyyat laha Tarikh (Those Who Have History)*, Beirut, 2000, he dedicated some pages to a description of his father. It was imitation or inheritance that he entitled his book, *Madha 'Allamatni al-Haya (What Life Has Taught Me)*, Cairo, 2008, because it was one of his father's favorite titles when he used to write short articles in magazines such as *al-Thaqafa*. Galal also contributed a foreword describing the character of his father, saying that he was truly a man of reason, in *Fi Bayt Ahmad Amin*, written by Husayn and mentioned in Chapter I. In a way, one might say that carrying on the legacy of their father had become a family business, to a use contemporary jargon.

The second main legacy to be mentioned is a particular attachment to the study of history or certain historical considerations in arguing about Islamic matters. One has to give cautious consideration, as Husayn says, to any attempt to understand and assess the true intentions of the Islamic creed and its legal stipulations. The meaning ought to be understood in accordance with changing historical and social circumstances, that is, in the light of historicism or historical relativism. Husayn was so proud of his father's series in Islamic history that he started to fashion himself as a historian, writing the lives of some Rightly Guided Caliphs when he was still in his early teens. These efforts must have been quite successful, because he received special commendation at the time from Mustafa 'Abd al-Raziq, a brother of 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq and Shaykh of al-Azhar.

On the other hand, it is interesting that Husayn does not make much of an attempt to discuss questions relating to religious belief as such, though he repeatedly reconfirms that Islamic matters need to be understood in their historical context, with the exception of the very core of the tenets of the religion. The inner meaning of the Islamic creed, he asserts, should not be affected by the vicissitudes of this world, and should stay untouched, stretching over many centuries and standing above all trifles and trivialities. When he stresses this point, what does he have in mind? How can he be prepared to respond to any enquiries on the very matter he raises: the very core of religious belief, particularly in Islam?

This is what the father, Ahmad, had worked hard to present as his own thought and tried to elaborate it and expound on it to general readers. He said that the central notion of Islamic belief was to reach the highest cognizance of the truth and the reality, which are in the oneness of the Eternal and the Absolute, i.e., Allah. Everyone is endowed with the ability to attain this state of

recognition but it does not mean that anyone can achieve it at any place and at any time. It is realized, as Ahmad explains, through intuition, like a spark of lightning. Later in this study, more will be presented on his notion of religious belief; however, suffice it to mention here that Husayn seems to have relied on this father's work when it came to discussions of religious belief as he did not care to be involved with and did not seem to tilt to this side of polemics.

As the third and last legacy, it is noted that the sons were all immersed in arguments concerning civilization, especially that of how to cope with the overwhelming power and charm of Western civilization and how one ought to adjust Islamic ideas and teachings accordingly. Ahmad Amin published many articles on this problem and his final digest, a book, *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb (The East and the West)*, Cairo, was published posthumously in 1955. He said that eventually a new civilization should be constructed, characterized by humanism and based on Eastern civilization, which has a more ample appreciation of spirituality, a missing factor in Western civilization. Husayn argued about this issue rather frequently, but it will be discussed later in this study. Here a reference could be made to efforts made in this area by Galal Amin, Husayn's younger brother.

In Galal's view, economic development plans as typically promoted by the United Nations and many other development organizations do not really serve the interests of receiving countries. They are good for the givers, because their aid actually comes in the form of commodities and services from those givers, who would further gain from interest on loans. Direct foreign investments are also detrimental to the receiving countries because the foreign investors' activities exploit cheap labor and the local market, and do not consider any economic and social dislocation often caused in the local economies. This whole process leads to dualism in the culture of the

receiving countries since it divides them in two: those who manage to buy foreign goods, and the rest, usually the bulk, of the population. Many ethical codes and traditional manners and customs such as the slow tempo of life, family attachment, stability rather than rapid change, are adversely affected as well. Development was, in-effect, Westernization and the growth of dependency on the West. What is needed is independent development, for which the Third World is equipped with what is necessary, e.g., the labor force and much of the capital. When the West realizes that it is dependent on the Third World, these factors of production would be in better condition because the Third World would have greater negotiating power in relation to the West. “What is taking place in the Third World is nothing but a dramatic encounter of civilizations in which the weaker has been paying a very heavy price.”<sup>96</sup>

For Galal, the scene was just another round of the attack (*ghazw*) on civilization [*ghazw* was the term used to refer to the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 and often used by his father, Ahmad, in his arguments about civilization]. Arabs still retain the potential to regain power given that values and customs are strongly rooted in the three quarters of the population who do not yet know urban life. Arabs should distinguish human products from specifically Western products because they should only absorb the former. Just as the Chinese had adapted to Marxism differently from the people of the Soviet Union, the Arabs also should learn whatever is useful for them, and employ it in their own way. At the take-off stage of development, the psychological factor would play a key role, in addition to the usual indicators of savings and investment. This

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<sup>96</sup> Galal A. Amin, “Dependent Development,” *Alternatives* 2 (1976): p. 399.



factor is what would release the latent energy of the Arabs, and it can be derived from Islam.<sup>97</sup>

Though his argument might be new in some places, it is striking to find so many echoes of Ahmad's world view. This phenomenon will be further elucidated when his and Husayn's views are reviewed in the following chapters.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Op.cit., Ayubi, *Political Islam*, ---, p. 213. He includes Galal Amin among the New Traditionalists (*al-Turathiyyun al-Judud*).

<sup>98</sup> Galal Amin, "*al-Ghazw al-Hadari: Nata'amal ma'hu am Nasudduh?*" in his, *Tanmiya am Taba'iyya Iqtisadiyya wa Thaqafiyy* (Cairo: Matbu'at al-Qahira, 1983), pp. 114-121.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSIONS OF ISLAM**

In this chapter, the main arguments on Islam by the two writers are analyzed and contrasted. The weight given to specific issues vary between them to a considerable extent. Does this reflect the differences of the societies that each represents, or is it the deliberate outcome of considerations on Husayn's part? If that is the case, why is it? In what sense can one say that their views are liberal rather than anything else? These are the questions to which the following sections are addressed.

#### **Religious Belief**

In discussing Islam, one would want to look into the question of religious belief as such, it being the heart of the matter. Both writers did so, though with a big difference in weight and depth. Husayn appears to rely on his father's arguments as far as this question is concerned, though he mentions repeatedly the dire need to understand the spirit of Islam. Hence, let us start with his views.

He stresses the importance of religious belief as a solace for "a sad Muslim;" one is

supposed to find joy and happiness through religious belief.<sup>99</sup> Even if one is left alone, Husayn says, religious belief could enrich the mind of a believer and provide respite. However, in order to attain true belief, all the dust and rubbish accumulated through history in Islam must be cleared away and eradicated, and this must be done with the guidance of the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition or hadiths, and books of accurate and correct history.<sup>100</sup>

He further says it is most vital that one should be replete with the spirit of Islam (*Ruh al-Islam*), and that this spirit should be a sufficient compass by which to navigate, because the course of history will be equivalent to the spirit of Islam. For anything we face in the world, Husayn says, we need a free and intellectual environment without terrorism, bickering, and accusations of excommunication.<sup>101</sup> In the end, he believes that, as in the age of the Prophet, the time is now ripe for the successful promulgation of Islam, with two conditions. The first is that Islam should not be isolated and should be a part of the world community, admitting pluralism therein. The second condition is that Muslims should regain their confidence in their Arab Islamic heritage, much as their ancestors had, when they acquired the Greek academic legacy. These works ought to go hand in hand with

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<sup>99</sup> Ahmad uses a similar phrase in his essay title; "Belief is a source of happiness." He says that when one is exalted by the love of God and nullifies fairy tales and fantasy through reason, one is at the height of happiness and, at the same time, of progress. This state, as Ahmad argues, is realized in the tension between the plea for a reward and heaven, and a fear of punishment and the conflagration of hell. "*al-Iman.y.anbu'u al-sa'ada,*" *al-Hilal* (1.1954): *Fayd*, vol. 9, pp. 45-48.

<sup>100</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1983), pp. 33-35.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-78.

identifying the true will of God (*al-irada al-ilahiyya*), because history is ultimately the expression of Allah's will. In tackling such a daunting task, says Husayn, we need a great Islamic thinker (*mufakkir islami*) to show us both the way to define true Islamic belief and how to cope with various current issues.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, while he calls for true and purified religious belief as the foundation on which to build a just life and cope with the challenges of the age, Husayn does not present his own understanding and vision of what that purified belief might be. Nor does he clarify what he means by the spirit of Islam or the will of God. This stance of his is most likely rooted in the fact that his father had extensively written about it. In what follows, we shall see Ahmad's argument concerning this point. He elaborates what religious belief is in Islam, and hopes, so it seems, that it will not dwindle away, but stand firm and strong in the face of scientific power, Western culture, and modernity at large.

The best source material for this analysis is Ahmad's numerous articles in his 10 volume *Fayd al-Khatir*, which includes, in particular, the text of his speech, *Hadith Ramadan (Ramadan Speech)*. They were delivered over the radio twenty-three times or so during Ramadan during the 1940s,<sup>103</sup> and may be viewed as the quintessence of his thinking on the subject. Having been expressed over a number of years, they are not always well coordinated, sometimes repetitive and at other times ambiguous. However, with a view

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<sup>102</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: muntalaqat al-islak*" (The last of a series of three articles) *al-Musawwar* (11. 18 1983): pp. 64-66.

<sup>103</sup> As far as I can tell, '*Hadith Ramadan*' was delivered once in 1940 and 1948, four times in 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945 and five times in 1946, that is to say twenty-three times in all.

to their pivotal importance in his thinking about Islam, I have chosen to discuss them in their original order to retain the delicate equilibrium of his thoughts.<sup>104</sup>

The key words employed by Ahmad in this discussion are “inspiration” (*iltiham*), “revelation” (*wahy*), the “oneness” (*tawhid*) of God and all existing matter, “love” (*hubb*) and “fear” (*khawf*) of God as the basic relation of the believer to the absolute. Inspiration and revelation are described as something like a flash of lightning.

### Defense of religion

Ahmad’s chief concern was to encourage the resurrection of genuine religious belief in the modern world, in response to the onslaught upon it by science and secularism. The main theme of *Hadith Ramadan*, which he delivered over four days in 1942, was a defense of religious belief as a unique realm and wholly distinct from science. The gist of his argument from one of the four 1942 *Hadith Ramadan*, “Science and religion,” is as follows.

Through observation and reliance on evidence and experimentation, science can lead to truth. However, scientific truth is not the only domain of truth, and science is certainly not the only method of discerning truth. Various arts, such as poetry, painting, and music, encompass another realm of truth that cannot be realized by science, but is grasped by way of feeling. Inspiration, purification of the soul, and opening one’s heart all constitute paths to truth. The workings of reason and feeling may differ for each person, resulting in scientists, artists, and men of religion. Each discipline oversees a certain domain of truth:

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Mizutani, *An Intellectual Struggle* ---, pp. 78-91.

science deals with materials and the tangible world, art deals with intangible beauty and purity, while religion, surpassing the other two, deals with spirituality and provides meaning to the abstract matters, making one aware of the mover of the universe. This being said, science and religion are in fact complementary to each other, and they are one in seeking truth, albeit through different methods, one material and the other spiritual.

Religious inspiration (*iltiham*) is defined by Ahmad in another article (“In the cave of *Hira*”).<sup>105</sup> The Prophet Muhammad was illiterate, but because of the guidance he received, his powers of language, knowledge and logic are unsurpassed. His method was different from that of poets, philosophers and scientists. “Then in his heart shined a divine spark, just like when clouds are gathered, it thunders.”<sup>106</sup>

The next *Hadith Ramadan* is entitled “Belief in God.”<sup>107</sup> Here Ahmad argues that the heart seeks tranquility, although reason might reject it. Feeling is vital since it is the medium in which people’s minds first turn to God, with reason following after. God is the reason and spirit of the universe at the same time, and God forms a single system where each and every part is joined to form a complete whole. Humanity’s most important discovery is this one system and the oneness of existence (*tawhid al-ujud*). Those who believe in the one spirit, reason, and objective of the world are believers and those who do

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<sup>105</sup> “*Fi gharr Hira*,” *al-Risala*, 4.5, 1937, *Fayd*, vol.2., pp. 296-300.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299. Detlev Khalid contrasts this notion of inspiration and revelation with that of Muhammad ‘Abduh, who presented it as “knowledge that a man finds within himself, with certainty that it comes from God.” “Ahmad Amin and the Legacy of Muhammad ‘Abduh,” *Islamic Studies*, 9 (1970): pp. 1-31.

<sup>107</sup> “*al-Iman bi al-lah*,” *al-Thaqafa* (9.29, 1942): *Fayd*, vol.4, pp. 157-161.

not are unbelievers. All of nature and its beauty are nothing but that which makes one feel the ordinance of the Creator, God. Even the theory of evolution cannot identify the originator of life, and science cannot find a solution to “what” (*mahiyya*) but strives to answer the question of “how” (*kayfa*) only. The last and best phrase one can utter is that God is the lord of the universe.

### Religious inspiration

In 1943, Ahmad discussed the unique realm of spiritual life, or religion, in contrast to the realms of art and science, and tried to point out the unequivocal value of religion in the modern world.

He argued that religiosity is embedded in human nature and that one should aspire to truth, goodness and beauty, all of which are realized in religion. However, everyone is granted different traits and those who are endowed with a spiritual bent are indeed in the minority. It is the same with art and music; anyone can paint or sing, but not everyone can become an artist or singer. A spiritual talent is clearly superior to any other talents, and the apex of this spirituality is cognition of the oneness of God. Besides science there is spirit, besides reason there is heart, and besides logic there is religious belief. The mistake of the Western world in the last century was that it strengthened the scientific side at the expense of other human endowments (“A spiritual life”- 1).<sup>108</sup>

In the next article, Ahmad goes on to argue that this world consists of two parts: the

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<sup>108</sup> “*al-Haya al-ruhiyya*,”(1) *al-Thaqafa* (9.7, 1943): *Fayd*, vol. 5, pp. 1-7.

outer world, which is seen, and the inner world, which is not seen. Belief in the unseen inner world is not a fantasy but a part of human nature. While the former is recognized by knowledge (*'ilm*) based upon the five senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, touching and tasting, the latter is recognized by spiritual exercises, which ignite inspiration and cognizance (*ma'rifa*) (“A spiritual life” - 2).<sup>109</sup>

The pillar of religion is intuitional inspiration and spiritual exercises designed to reach towards the inner world, or, as he puts it, “contact by the noblest feeling with the highest power” (*al-ittisal bi al-shu'ur al-anbal ila al-quwa al-'ulya*).<sup>110</sup> In order to approach true civilization, the four elements of science, philosophy, art and religion must achieve an equilibrium. It is a fact that everyone is endowed with these four talents to varying degrees, but that modern civilization lacks the elements of heart and religion.

True religion enriches feeling with sublimity and nobility, curing any feelings of inferiority, while the opposite is true for a religion in decay. True religion brings the soul from darkness and fear to tranquility and happiness. It will broaden the soul so that it can recognize the tie between itself and all mankind and between itself and the rest of creation, like that of a family whose lord is God (“A spiritual life” - 4).<sup>111</sup>

In 1944, Ahmad explained further that religious revelation (*wahy*) is difficult to describe, because it is deeper and wider than what art is supposed to express: that is, the

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<sup>109</sup> “*al-Haya al-ruhiyya*,”(2), *al-Thaqafa* (9.14, 1943): *Fayd*, vol.5, pp. 8-14.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>111</sup> “*al-Haya al-ruhiyya*,”(4), *al-Thaqafa* (9.28, 1943): *Fayd*, vol.5, pp. 20-26.



entire world – ocean, skies and ground included – must be expressed in short verses. Another difficulty is that prophets must simultaneously deal with the material world as well as with spirituality. Thirdly, prophets must meet the demands of many people with varying backgrounds, making it more difficult to describe revelation in a manner that is acceptable to the general public. A prophet's message is two-fold: the concrete side is the establishment of rites and laws for social reform and the intangible side sees to the erection of a ladder for the soul to climb to know righteousness, truth, and God, through the heart. Rituals and laws may differ in different environments, but the hidden message differs only according to the level reached on this ladder (“On a spiritual life” - 1).<sup>112</sup>

There are different ways of training each talent; religious feeling can be nourished by spiritual exercises and the purification of the soul, including the observance of religious rites. All religions are propagated by a heart-felt call (*da'wa*) rather than the theology behind them, which provides proof of God not for unbelievers but only for those who already believe in Him. Indeed a call for belief is a call for what is in the soul, and when the soul is prepared, anything can serve as proof (“On a spiritual life” - 2).<sup>113</sup>

Here, Ahmad once again returns to the question of religion and science. He says that no matter how far science develops, there will always be a sphere that it cannot explain, and that religion starts where science ends. Indeed, religion alone can explain what exists behind the material world: the spiritual life of the soul and God. But, in spite of all this,

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<sup>112</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(1) *al-Thaqafa* (8.14, 1944): *Fayd*, vol. 6, pp. 45-50.

<sup>113</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(2) *al-Thaqafa* (8.21, 1944): *Fayd*, vol. 6, pp. 51-55.

there is no conflict between science and religion. In fact, through cooperation between reason and religion, a most beautiful fruit was born – that is, ethics. Science raised the standard of ethics in life because love and respect for truth is now augmented by love for science itself (“On a spiritual life” - 3).<sup>114</sup>

It is clear that one of Ahmad’s main concerns is the question of how religion can stand up against science. With inspiration as the driving force of religious belief, he stressed that everyone needs to proceed in this direction no matter whether it be quickly rewarded or not. According to him, this state of affairs is what religious belief is based upon, and it leaves no room for change or even the slightest tinge of doubt.

One may conclude by saying that both father and son recognize that the essence of true religious belief is not amenable to change. Hence it stands beyond and above history or as something ahistorical, while everything else is transient and changing. However, neither author dealt with the complex and, maybe, amorphous co-relation between the realms of the historical and ahistorical.

### **Islamic Studies**

We start again with the son, Husayn. By occupation, he was a jurist and an administrator, but his thoughts were thoroughly supported by a study of history. Without any hesitation, he admits on several occasions that he has learned and adopted an approach and a stand-point characteristic of the study of history.

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<sup>114</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(3) *al-Thaqafa* (8.28, 1944): *Fayd*, vol. 6, pp. 56-60.

The most complete expression is found in his description of his youth; he was thirteen years of age when he was given the task of studying the relation between the two ‘Abbasid caliphs, al-Amin and al-Ma’mun. His father taught him how to do the research in a balanced way, because all the literature Husayn had with him was either written by Shi‘is or in Persian, meaning that they all sided with al-Ma’mun.<sup>115</sup> Ahmad taught his young son to develop a critical eye toward historical sources, as Husayn says.<sup>116</sup> He further elaborates in the same passage that his father had taught the importance of judging between the various chains of transmitters of tales and stories (which was much despised by those who received training in the West), the necessity to check historians and their backgrounds meticulously, and to take account of the epoch in which they wrote and compiled their works. It was also vital to know the identity of their patrons, who provided their income. Soon after this study of the two caliphs, Husayn began, as he argues, abiding strictly by the principles and methods of historical criticism and examination.

He further stresses that medieval Islamic historians tried their best to maintain an objective viewpoint, which was inculcated during their previous studies of the Qur’an, hadiths and the Prophet’s biography. Husayn considered their faithfulness and sincerity as tantamount to the modern spirit of intellectual enquiry. When they dealt with topics relating

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<sup>115</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun (813-33) conquered Baghdad and sentenced his predecessor, al-Amin, to death owing to their difference over the status of Khorasan, north of Iran. al-Ma’mun gave it semiautonomous status, thus allowing it to have more Persian and Turkish factors in the state apparatus, such as the establishment of a Turkish slave army or *mamluks*.

<sup>116</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, *al-Mawqif al-Hadari min al-Naz’at al-Diniyya* (Cairo: Sina, 1994), p. 123.

to the Prophet treating them as sacred, it was only to cope with the onslaught of Christianity in the medieval period. This sequence leads to the necessity in our time to produce a new and unapologetic biography of the Prophet.<sup>117</sup>

In the context of historical method, Husayn interestingly refers to something a modern British historian, E. H. Carr (1892-1982), wrote in a series of lectures in 1961, entitled *What Is History?* Carr says that history-writing resembles what a fisherman does; he chooses the kinds of fish he wants from the group of fish caught in the net. Historical events and matters might be overflowing but it is the historian's work to choose what to work on.<sup>118</sup> In this context, Husayn emphasizes the necessity to carry out strictly objective research, without regard for nationalist emotions, political stands or psychological needs. By this he is referring to the Arab penchant for idealism and for viewing things in sharply dichotomous terms. This trait may be traced back to a tendency to romanticize desert life and the pre-Islamic world.<sup>119</sup>

One might add here that his father, Ahmad, was eager to stress that the highest value of human reason resided in religious belief, as we saw above. This strong call for reason, in the case of Husayn, is amply contained in his call for objective historical research without heed to nationalism, romanticism, or politicization.

Ahmad the historian published the Islamic history series as was mentioned in the

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<sup>117</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Dalil al-Muslim* ---, pp. 38, 54.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Hawla al-Da'wa ila Tatbiq al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1985), pp. 265-275.

review of his work in Chapter I above. These are essentially academic writings and are to be categorized differently from other essays which contain his opinions, thoughts and polemics. However, in spite of their academic nature, certain common arguments reappear in the course of Ahmad's discussions of Islamic history. A few resounding subjects are reviewed below, because of the importance of their social repercussions and because some of them have been carried over into Husayn's generation.

### Genesis of Islam

The book *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)* published in 1927 was a debut work for Ahmad in the fullest sense of the word. Mazyad wrote,

[Ahmad] Amin's work was indeed the first detailed and critical historical investigation made by a Muslim Arab into the formative processes of Islamic culture. . . . Ignác Goldziher (1850-1921) . . . laid the foundation of a modern historian's view of early Islamic cultural history: that Islam in its growth was influenced by other religions and cultures. . . . But the classical self-view – to use a term introduced by G. von Grunebaum – of Islamic history was diametrically opposed to this, for it was held that the Islamic religion descended in an unbroken stream from its origins without being influenced by other systems.<sup>120</sup>

As we saw in the review of Ahmad's works in Chapter I of this study, he emphasized, while relying heavily on European studies of Islam and Islamic history, that Islam developed under the influence of other religions and cultures. One can say that he brought about an almost Copernican transformation to the self-image of

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<sup>120</sup> Mazyad, *Ahmad Amin* ---, p. 36.

Muslims and their attitude toward their religion.<sup>121</sup> An Indian modernist scholar, Afzal Iqbal, was also quite impressed by the book.<sup>122</sup> In the preface to the second edition, published in 1933, Ahmad refers to the fact that he had received many encouraging responses from various scholars, such as Mustafa ‘Abd al-Raziq, a strong supporter of Muhammad ‘Abduh, and ‘Abd al-Wahhab ‘Azzam, a professor of literature at the Egyptian University.

However, the storm the book created within Egyptian society does not seem to have been caused by its content; rather, it invited such clamor due to the timing of its publication and to the fact that it was written by a Muslim. In fact, the book merely followed the parameters of discussions about Islam which had gained wide currency in Egypt.

To see the development, let me start with the preface to the book’s first edition, in which Taha Husayn states that there is a need to carry out comprehensive research on the early period of Islam from various viewpoints. Thus Ahmad has written a study of intellectual life, ‘Abd al-Hamid al-‘Abbadi will write on politics and Taha Husayn himself will write on literature. It is fascinating to paint an obsolete scene with new touches and colors and the three books were to take a

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Mizutani, *An Intellectual Struggle* --- , pp. 93-95.

<sup>122</sup> Afzal Iqbal, *The Culture of Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1969), p. 16, as quoted by Detlev Khalid in “Ahmad Amin – Modern Interpretation of Muslim Universalism,” *Islamic Studies*, 8 (1969): p. 86. note 11.

variety of influences from foreign lands into consideration.<sup>123</sup> As Taha Husayn was by then a well known and popular writer and the leader of modern literary criticism, it was only natural that his preface should situate Ahmad's book firmly within the modernist and reformist trend.

One critique bluntly argues that *Fajr al-Islam* contains very few new facts, the best part being a good study of Persia and the influence of Greek philosophy, though the critic finds the whole book to be of great value and pleasure.<sup>124</sup> Another reviewer appreciates the book, since it is based on first-hand materials as well as European and Arab secondary sources – making it the first book ever written on the history of Arabic thought to stand on such firm ground – and argues that it will serve as a strong foundation to build upon and a good source for future work.<sup>125</sup> Neither of the other two assessments published in 1929 hinted at its transformative aspect, but both essentially express admiration for Ahmad's strong academic base.<sup>126</sup>

It is highly likely that the various European orientalist lecturers who came to lecture at the Egyptian University in the 1910s and the 1920s were a major source of these new views

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<sup>123</sup> In fact the books by al-'Abbadī and Taha Husayn were never published.

<sup>124</sup> 'Abd al-Wahhab Hamud, "Fajr al-Islam," *al-Balagh* (2.26, 1929), pp. 1-6.

<sup>125</sup> Sami, "Fajr al-Islam," *al-Hadith*, 4 (1929): pp. 309-312.

<sup>126</sup> al-Muharrir, "Fajr al-Islam," *al-Hilal*, 1 (1929): p. 47; Anonymous, "Fajr al-Islam," *al-Muqtataf* (4, 1929): pp. 459-60. Some three decades later Zaki al-Mahasini describes the three main points of the book as being the influence of Persia, the treatment of the Khawarijs and the Mu'tazilis, showing that he was more attracted to the book's transformative aspect. Zaki al-Mahasini, *Muhadarat 'an Ahmad Amin* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya, 1963), pp. 75-89.

and ideas. For example, three contemporary Italian scholars expressed somewhat similar views: Guidi taught pre-Islamic history, emphasizing the strong influence of Persian and Byzantine cultures, Nallino lectured on Arabic literature and astronomy, while Santillana was in charge of Islamic and Greek philosophy. Their views could not have been confined to the lecture halls of the university, but must have echoed throughout Cairo intellectual circles.<sup>127</sup>

To conclude the analysis, despite how complicated the reality might have been, it would be fair to say that Ahmad contributed to the overall modernist trend of the time by presenting his views on the early history of Islam at a highly opportune moment. However it must be emphasized that *Fajr al-Islam* did not present an entirely novel view of the subject to Egyptian intellectuals, or in any way take them by surprise. What was striking for Egyptian readers at the time was that this picture was finally presented by a native Muslim scholar, couched in very convincing terms, and not through the Western sources from whom they were accustomed to hearing.

For whatever reasons, *Fajr al-Islam* created a major stir in a tradition-bound society.

As Vatikiotis puts it:

[Ahmad] Amin began work in the 1920s on a more subtle attack upon tradition; yet one that was intellectually most imaginative, if not altogether successful. . . e.g. the intellectual life of the Islamic community in the first century AH (AD 662-770) – *Fajr al-Islam (The Dawn of Islam)*.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Op.cit., D. Malcolm Reid, "Cairo University and ---," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>128</sup> Op.cit., Vatikiotis, *The History ---*, p. 312.



## Shi'ism

Unlike the previous case, rancor arose against Ahmad's academic, hence objectively intended, writing on Shi'ism. He found his involvement with the issue rather unexpected.

If the enmity between the followers of 'Ali and those of Mu'awiya was reasonable in their days or afterwards, it is no more reasonable today. For there is no conflict today over any caliphate or imamate, but rather over who is better, Abu Bakr and 'Umar or 'Ali, and this cannot be decided except by God. . . . Other than that, the disagreement between Shi'i and Sunni Muslims is like the disagreement between Hanafites, Shaf'ites, and Malikites, and it does not necessitate any enmity. . . . When I published my book *Fajr al-Islam*, it had an unpleasant effect on many Shi'a men which I had not anticipated. I thought that scholarly historical research was something and present practical living was something else.<sup>129</sup>

He criticized Shi'ism in *Fajr al-Islam* as follows.

This belief (of divinity) in 'Ali does not fit the simple and beautiful Islamic notion of the oneness of God and a detachment from the material. It is fortunate that this view of 'Ali is not the expression of all, nor a majority of Shi'is, but it is an expression of some small group among them, e.g., radicals.

It is true that Shi'ism was a shelter for all those who wanted to destroy Islam, whether for their enmity or contempt, for all those who wanted to introduce their ancestors' teachings – Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism, and for all those who wanted an independence or a resistance movement against their kingdom. They employed the love of the Prophet's family as a curtain to place all their desiderata behind it.<sup>130</sup>

When Ahmad met the Shi'i shaykh Kashif al-Ghita' in Baghdad,<sup>131</sup> he was reproved

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<sup>129</sup> *My Life*, p. 173. Similar thinking is expressed in *Zuhr al-Islam*, vol.4, p. 48, where he stressed that schismatic strife is part of the historical record.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276. Shephard argues that while asserting the superiority of Islam vis-à-vis other religions, Ahmad's stance is not so much proselytizing as communal: see "A Modernist View of Islam and other Religions," *The Muslim World*, 64 (1975): pp. 78-92.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Muhammad al-Husayn al-Kashif al-Ghita, *Asl al-Shi'a wa Usuluha*, (Beirut, 1930, reprint London: Bazzaz Publishing, 1994). *My Life*, pp. 173-174. When Ahmad visited

for depending on Sunni sources. So he consulted some Shi‘i sources in writing his next work, *Duha al-Islam (The Morning of Islam)*, though he criticized Shi‘ism even more sharply “in a rational impartial manner.”<sup>132</sup>

It seems that this creed of the Shi‘is paralyses reason and kills thinking, and that it provides khalifa or imam limitless power. He then will do as he wills without anyone to object or anybody to stand against him squarely or protest against oppression, since imam’s action itself is justice. A just democracy which is of the people and for the people, is far from that way, and assesses actions by reason, makes khalifa, imam and king a servant to the people. When he does not serve them, he no longer deserves to stay in government.<sup>133</sup>

I think that when the people understand their rights and duties and when their thinking is freed from paralysis, they will reform the Shi‘i view of imams, which is only good for historical compilation.<sup>134</sup>

One may note here Ahmad’s reference to democracy in vilifying the Shi‘i political system of the Imamate as dictatorial and totalitarian.<sup>135</sup> His impartiality is even more obvious when he goes on to criticize some Sunni positions such as that the prophets are sinless and for their treatment of saints.<sup>136</sup> He writes: “I did this in support of what I believed to be the truth.”<sup>137</sup>

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Baghdad in 1931, he participated in a gathering of no less than four thousand people who became agitated by a shaykh’s statement, referring to *Fajr al-Islam*.

<sup>132</sup> Op.cit., *My Life*, p. 173.

<sup>133</sup> Op.cit., *Duha* ---, vol.3, p. 221.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>135</sup> On a “modern, liberal mind” in Ahmad Amin’s discussion of Shi‘ism, see op.cit., Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, ---, p. 44.

<sup>136</sup> Op.cit., *Duha* ---, vol.3, p. 235.

<sup>137</sup> Op.cit., *My Life*, p. 173.

Ahmad also made efforts to promote reconciliation between the two sects, though these had few lasting effects. First, his Committee on Authorship (*Lajnat al-Talif wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr*) published a book on the history of the Qur'an written by a leading Shi'i scholar, al-Zanjani, and Ahmad congratulated him on this collaboration.<sup>138</sup> An Iraqi Shi'i writer responded favorably and suggested collaboration between the Committee on Authorship and the Iraqi Association for Publication.<sup>139</sup> Ahmad expanded upon the suggestion by proposing a meeting in Iraq for reconciliation and suggesting that a day commemorating reconciliation be agreed upon ("The Sunnis and the Shi'is").<sup>140</sup> This proposal once again had repercussions but it did not materialize.<sup>141</sup>

For his part Husayn did not develop any particular arguments on Shi'ism; however, he wrote on it in the general context of Islamic sects. He says that Shi'ism originated among the Arab tribes of the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, who claimed that 'Ali, the

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<sup>138</sup> Abu 'Abdallah al-Zanjani, *Tarikh al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta:lif), 1935.

<sup>139</sup> Muhammad Rida al-Muzzafar, "*al-Sunniyyun wa al-shi'a*," *al-Risala* (10.7, 1935): pp. 1612-14.

<sup>140</sup> "*al-Sunniyyun wa al-shi'a*," *al-Risala* (10.28, 1935): pp. 1726-28 (not included in *Fayd*). The journal, *al-Risala*, often quoted in this section, was an organ (1933-53) of an association called the Group for the Reconciliation of the Islamic Schools (*Jama'at al-Taqrif bayna al-Madhahib al-Islamiyya*) in Cairo, edited by Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat.

<sup>141</sup> Both Muhammad Bahjat al-Baytar in his "*al-Sunniyyun wa al-shi'a*," *al-Risala* (11.11, 1935): pp. 1815-16, and al-Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr in his "*Hawla al-sunniyyin wa al-shi'a – ila al-ustadh Ahmad Amin*," *al-Risala* (12. 16, 1935): pp. 2025-26, supported the proposal for a conciliatory meeting. However, the first mentioned in the text, al-Muzaffar, in his "*al-Sunniyyun wa al-shi'a wa al-mu'tamar*," *al-Risala* (12.30, 1935): pp. 2097-99, warned that just an idea could not work and that good preparation was necessary. He said that the Iraqi government was aiming to establish good relations between the two, but faced great difficulties.

husband of the Prophet's daughter, should be the successor since the Prophet Muhammad had no sons. He stresses also that this view differs from that of an Orientalist, Dozy, who claimed that Shi'ism originated in Persia.<sup>142</sup> Ahmad's writings have been recognized as being heavily dependent on Orientalists such as Goldziher, Browne, Macdonald, O'Leary, Dozy and Wellhausen, and indeed he acknowledges their influence on his work.<sup>143</sup> Husayn was clearly conscious of his father's indebtedness in this respect.

### Sufism

The end of WWII ushered in a period in which Ahmad criticized modern civilization and scientific development more sharply, while his emphasis on Sufism and spiritualism grew. He approached Sufism as a way of developing emotion and feeling as a source of religious belief. As before, his radio broadcasts in Ramadan provided a good opportunity to convey his thoughts and anxieties to the general public. Though some parts are repetitive, each talk has its own unique character. Hence, once again a review below follows, in roughly chronological order.

In 1945, Ahmad pointed out that the materialist civilization of the modern world has not brought about true happiness. Since illogicalities can be found in many aspects of religious thought, religion has come to be disregarded in favor of science alone. All this has

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<sup>142</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Dalil al-Muslim* ---, p. 139.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. op.cit., Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, p. 43.

led to unhappiness (“On a spiritual life”- 1).<sup>144</sup> Sufism works by way of inspiration, similar to the intuition (*fitra*) of a poet or an artist, but it is superior to those others. With regard to spiritualism, Ahmad says the whole world comprises one unit, just as many different fabrics are woven in a single factory. Their differences are superficial and their intrinsic unity real (“On a spiritual life”- 2).<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the world of the Sufi cannot be defined by time, space or size, and it can be explained only through metaphors. A Sufi prepares his mind through exercise (*riyada*) and sinks it deep into a world where no distinction is made between subject and object, a process which neither science nor reason can realize. It is only attained through feeling and spirit and is like a light in the soul that makes a person feel the oneness of the universe. This feeling is accompanied by tranquility, compassion, power, and love for everything and for God (“On a spiritual life”- 3).<sup>146</sup>

In 1946, Ahmad extended his arguments concerning spiritualism and the criticism of modern civilization, arguing that the word of God is all-encompassing. There is a spirit in each of us, in living creatures and in the world itself, and all of them are concealed from sight by God in the invisible world. By touching this spirit, a human being is improved, his value increased and his taste upgraded (“On a spiritual life”- 2).<sup>147</sup> Today’s world does not need to concern itself with regulating trade markets or military measures, nor establishing

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<sup>144</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(1) *al-Thaqafa* (7.30, 1945): *Fayd*, vol. 7, pp. 27-32.

<sup>145</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(2) *al-Thaqafa* (8.6, 1945): *Fayd*, vol. 7, pp. 32-37.

<sup>146</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(3) *al-Thaqafa* (8.13, 1945): *Fayd*, vol.7, pp. 37-42.

<sup>147</sup> Op.cit., “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(2) *al-Thaqafa* (8.6, 1946): *Fayd*, vol. 7, pp. 32-37.

conditions for peace upon the basis of booty and revenge---all this is the old logic stemming from the aftermath of the Second World War. New political leaders must address both the material and the spiritual, and strive for a world filled with love for human welfare, justice, and brotherly relations between nations (“On a spiritual life”- 4).<sup>148</sup> The world now needs reconciliation between science and religion. Educational programs must be changed so that they will be based upon love of God and a conviction that humankind should do away with the distinctions of race, nation, language and religion. If this transformation is achieved, there will no longer be the nationalist emotion of Zionism, nor wars such as the crusades or otherwise (“On a spiritual life”- 5).<sup>149</sup> The last *Hadith Ramadan* in 1948 dealt with the question of the unity of all things and of unity with God. This is, as Ahmad puts it, the final stage and culmination of Islamic belief, and, at the same time, the starting point and basis of Muslim life (“*Allah* as described by Islam”).<sup>150</sup>

Hence Ahmad elaborated the view that belief goes beyond the realm of reason with the aid of emotion and feeling. This correlation seems to be an extension of what he had already stated about religious belief, when he said that belief comes where reason ends. Also noticeable in his discussion of Sufism is his almost proselytizing tone. Nonetheless, it is quite understandable when keeping in mind Ahmad’s appreciation of the empathetic Sufi method, as we saw in his brief resumé in Chapter II.

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<sup>148</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(4) *al-Thaqafa* (8.20, 1946): *Fayd*, vol.7, pp. 32-36.

<sup>149</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(5) *al-Thaqafa* (8.27, 1946): *Fayd*, vol.7, pp. 290-95.

<sup>150</sup> “*Allah kama yasifuhu al-Islam*,”*al-Thaqafa* (8.3, 1948): p. 3. (not included in *Fayd*)

On the other hand, Husayn takes up the subject with the coolness of the third person. In his essay he describes some of the extra-Islamic influences on Sufism: it picked up an ascetic bent and even the fashion of sheepskin clothing from Christian monks, and it adopted its teachings from books of Greek philosophy, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras and other Indian sources. He notes its broad relationship to the whole of Islam, that it has a rich history, with various schools not only among the Sunnis but the Shi'is as well. Sufism contributed greatly to Islam by showing that merely exhibiting the outer appearance of truth without inner belief is cheap ostentation, while inner conviction without outside observance is a symptom of encroaching unbelief. It demonstrated how Islam ought to be, when the general trend of Islam was centered around specialized theologians, and had become distant from the minds of the public during the Abbasid epoch; this was the best and most sound epoch for Sufism. It did not eradicate, however, the accumulated dust and rubbish of Islam, the matter of which Ibn Taymiyya (1258-1326) had worked on at a later stage.<sup>151</sup>

By presenting his views in this way, Husayn, unlike his father, did not adopt an empathetic approach but stood strictly within the framework of research. As such, he was inclined to admit certain positive contributions, although they had been extinguished in the course of history.<sup>152</sup> He saw both positive and negative aspects to the question he posed in

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<sup>151</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Dalil al-Muslim* ---, pp. 112-114.

<sup>152</sup> Nadia Abu Zahra counts Sufism as one of the three additions to Islam, which, according to her reading, Husayn asserts that they should be eradicated. The other two are Mahdism and a belief in saints (*awliya*). Nevertheless, Husayn expresses in clear terms his appreciation for some positive contributions by Sufism, as in the above text. Cf. her article, "Islamic History, --- : The Thought of Husayn Ahmad Amin," in op.cit., Cooper, *Islam and Modernity* ---, p. 88.

the title of his essay, “Is Sufism a part of Islam?”<sup>153</sup> The net result of his academic considerations, however, appears to be affirmative rather than negative. It would be naïve to think that Husayn wrote this without heeding the very negative stance taken by the Islamist fundamentalists toward Sufism. One may add that with this view of Sufism, Husayn wisely avoided clashing with his father’s basic stance.

### **Application of the Shari’a**

Unlike the above two areas, religious belief and Islamic studies, where the father dominated the scene, I now arrive at a subject discussed mainly by the son. However, at the outset, there are a few points to bear in mind. One is that Husayn was well versed in the principles of historical relativism and historicism. As we saw above, his father claimed that rituals and laws may differ in different environments, but the hidden message differs only according to the level of the ladder (“On a spiritual life” - 1).<sup>154</sup> Hence Husayn is not entirely outside the aegis of his father, or rather, one may say that Husayn developed this particular aspect of historicism in legal discussion as carried over from Ahmad. The second is that the argument on the application of the shari’a may appear narrowly legal, although it was in fact a highly political issue, because the discussion is largely carried on between hard-liners, the Islamists, and soft-liners, the liberals, without really defining the terms used, including the shari’a itself. One cannot be sure exactly what a polemicist means when he

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<sup>153</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, *Dalil al-Muslim* --- , pp. 91-114.

<sup>154</sup> “*Fi al-haya al-ruhiyya*,”(1) *al-Thaqafa* (8.14, 1944): *Fayd*, vol. 6, pp. 45-50.



uses the word “shari‘a”, with its vast frames of reference that cover both this world and the hereafter, and with its multifarious stipulations and the exegesis it requires.<sup>155</sup>

With this basic understanding in mind, a review of Husayn’s argument will follow.

- (1) Husayn took the middle way by claiming that the shari‘a cannot be applied in its entirety as the traditionalists assert nor should it be completely set aside as was done in Turkey.<sup>156</sup> Its essence ought to be respected and abided by. The fact that there were many occasions that required the defense of Islam against its foes in later periods made the Prophet’s biography a target of idealization and mythicization. The same phenomenon can be said with regard to hadith literature; it had been fabricated to satisfy various needs, whether personal or public. All these things distorted Islam and did not contribute to strengthening belief.
- (2) To ascertain what these fundamentals are is a task left to Muslims at large, and to historians in particular, who are to work with their own personal views and interpretations. The gate of *ijtihad* must be wide open as it was at an early period in Islam’s history. Only based upon such an understanding would it become possible to apply the shari‘a. The adoption of *ijma‘* or consensus as a basis of legislation blocked the possibility of flexible legal implementation, because clerics were trying to defend

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<sup>155</sup> A shouting match is going on over these definitions: cf. Fawzi M. Najjar, “The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol.18 (Spring 1996): pp. 1-2.

<sup>156</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*Mulahazat hawla al-da‘wa ila tatbiq al-shari‘a al-islamiyya*,” *al-Musawwar*, (2 articles in a series) (10. 14, 1983): pp. 52-54, & (12. 9, 1983): pp. 40-43 (included in the book of *Hawla al-Da‘wa*). The reference here is found in the article of 12.9, p. 41.

their own interests by fabricating consensus. The ulama should also contribute to collective knowledge and understanding, so that positive laws can supplement the shari‘a.

- (3) Another claim elaborates this theme. In the Qur’an, there are no more than eighty verses of a legal nature, hence the shari‘a must contain man-made segments that have developed and solidified over hundreds of years. In fact, Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*, is replete with contradictions. It is mutable and should be adjusted to the requirements of the age. For example, the theft of a female camel or a goat-skin water vessel was such a grave threat to tribal life in a desert environment at the time of the Prophet that it called for severe punishment, such as the amputation of the thief’s hands. But times change. Historical relativism is essential to understanding the whole meaning of each Qur’anic verse and pieces of *Sunna* or Prophetic practice.

Such is the gist of his discussion. Let us look at his argumentation in detail, which nicely supports his thesis, with evidence taken from history, religion, and law. What he emphasizes most is objective historical understanding. For example, during the period of rightly-guided caliphs, things were handled more or less as they were at the time of the Prophet; however, during the Umayyads, many Roman, Sassanid and local legal customs and practices (*‘urf*) were accommodated. Since the shari‘a developed throughout the ages, it was unavoidable that various new ideas came to be incorporated, particularly that of sanctifying the shari‘a. For example, in order to avoid conflict with the shari‘a, many books of practical wisdom or *hiyal* were compiled, particularly in the Hanafi and Shafi‘i schools. To avoid outright interest on loans, for instance, it was taught that one could commit to buy

back one's goods in the future at a higher cost than the price received from the buyer. This was nothing but de facto interest.<sup>157</sup>

What, then, is the shari'a to start with? As has been mentioned already, there are only eighty verses in the Qur'an, that stipulate legal affairs out of some six thousand verses.<sup>158</sup> Further, these eighty verses are all very general in expression, and therefore hard to apply as practical and realistic law. In addition, many hadiths relating to matters such as wars and politics are not very elaborate. Legal sources were scanty and ambiguous in many senses, so the shari'a invited the introduction of variation in stipulation and practice. The Malikis gave slaves the right to own property since the people in the town of al-Madina enjoyed a full sense of equality, while the Hanafis did not provide that right to slaves because the people in the Fertile Crescent had been under the influence of Roman practice and so lacked a sense of equality vis-à-vis the Persians.<sup>159</sup> Another complication arose when the Shafi'i introduced consensus or *ijma'* as the third source of the shari'a. Through the process of collecting many hadiths, people came to believe in the saying: "My community does not agree on error," (*la tajma' ummati 'ala dalala*). Though this was treated almost as the basis of the work of the collection of prophetic sayings, its authenticity should not be accepted too readily. The fact that most of the hadiths are *ijma'*-based is another serious

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., "*Mulahazat* ---," 12.9, 1983, p. 42.

<sup>158</sup> Ahmad also refers to the scanty number of Qur'anic verses touching on legal issues in the context of defending the innovative nature of the shari'a in history against the Orientalists' criticism that it was overly rigid. See Chapter VI on the way they criticized Islamic science.

<sup>159</sup> Op.cit., "*Mulahazat* ---," 10.14, 1983, p. 53.

problem. Making a grand occasion of celebrating the Prophet's birthday was a later development, again only to be acknowledged by *ijma'*. The development of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh* is thus replete with many contradictory stipulations. When one reads that fire should be set in the belly of the thief who steals from an orphan, this should be taken only as a metaphor indicating the relation of the thief to Allah, and not as an actual punishment. Husayn refers to the Abbasid time saying, "There were many cases of jurists from the Abbasid time refusing to take up judgeships, because of the huge discrepancy between reality and the shari'a."<sup>160</sup>

Husayn claims in the clearest terms that man-made positive laws change, while holy laws do not change and apply at any time and in any place.<sup>161</sup> Without learning of the historical stages in the structure of the shari'a (*haqiqa atwar bina al-shari'a*), misunderstanding would persist for a long time, while, as Husayn says, many Islamists do not study much or read only cheap and easy reading materials. Ibn Khaldun was probably the only exceptional intellectual who fully grasped the changing nature of the law.<sup>162</sup>

After the publication of Husayn's book, *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin*, in 1983, he was much criticized and vilified by radical groups.<sup>163</sup> The complaints were mainly about his

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<sup>160</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, "Qudat al-shar'," *al-Musawwa*, (6. 14, 1985): pp. 31-32, (included in *al-Islam fi 'Alam Mutaghayyir*; p. 31).

<sup>161</sup> Op.cit., "Mulahazat ---," 10.14, 1983, p. 52.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>163</sup> Due to the threats from some radicals, Husayn's lecture was cancelled after he arrived at the venue in Texas. Cf. "T'mal al-takfir fi a'mal al-takfir," *al-Musawwar* (2. 24, 1984): pp.43-45.(included in *Hawla al-Da'wa*) p.43. "Amin, pressured by attacks against him, sought a Foreign Ministry appointment and was posted to Brazil as consul-general in Rio

casting doubt on the authenticity of many hadiths. He quotes Ibn Taymiyya, who says: “The correctly transmitted [words] in Islamic law always match reasonable [situations],” (*Inna sahih al-manqul fi al-shar‘ al-islami muwafiq daiman li-sahih al-ma‘qul*), as testimony that interpretation changes.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, he writes of the significance of *ijtihad* in the characteristic style of a liberal, saying, “The closure of the gate of *ijtihad* means the suppression of the freedom of doubt, but it is a basic freedom for the development of science, thought and civilization.”<sup>165</sup>

Soon after the publication of his *Dalil al-Muslim al-Hazin*, he responded in an interview with a political magazine, *Rose al-Yusif*, in which he stressed the necessity of the use of human reason.<sup>166</sup> There have been many amendments, he says, to the commercial and civil codes of the shari‘a, but objections are rarely raised. Some people insist on following the criminal code literally, on cutting off the hands of thieves and flogging for adultery, for example. He also argues that our age now demands the expansion of the rights of women, who are becoming more active in social life; the testimony of two women was regarded equal to the testimony of one man in the past, since women’s lives were more secluded from society. He argues that the number of authentic hadiths is seven thousand, from the seven hundred thousand chosen by al-Bukhari. Considering that four thousand are

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de Janeiro,” is mentioned in op.cit., Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics* --- , p. 130.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., “*Imal al-tafkir* ---,” p. 45.

<sup>165</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*al-Ijtihad: haqq am wajib?*” *al-Musawwar* (6. 21, 1985): pp. 76-77 (included in *al-Islam fi ‘Alam Mutaghayyir*, p. 76).

<sup>166</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*Tatbiq al-shari‘a al-islamiyya amr laysa sahlan*,” *Roz al-Yusif* (1.17, 1985): pp. 32-35.

redundant, there are only three thousand hadiths, a very small number to constitute the full range of a legal code. This makes it all the more natural for us to exercise the right to apply the shari‘a in accordance with changing circumstances. An intelligent understanding of history is also vital, as he always contends, to illuminate Islam. For example, he says that the veiling of women was practiced in Persia and many of those who worked on interpreting the Qur’an in the early period of Islam were, in fact, Persians, with the result that veiling came to be taken as a Qur’anic injunction.<sup>167</sup>

In 1983 Husayn was invited to participate in a seminar held in Beirut, and acted as a commentator on a lecture by one of the leading protagonists of the New Traditionalist approach (*al-turathiyyun al-judud*), Tariq al-Bishri.<sup>168</sup> His comments on this public occasion comprise a good, practical summary of what he claims in other writings. He begins by reiterating that what is essential is to find the essence of a stable God’s will with regard to transient matters (*iktishaf kunh al-irada al-ilahiyya al-thabita fi al-mutaghayyir*). As to the shari‘a, there were many ways in which it had not been applied, so that in the nineteenth century people started imitating the Western legal system. Tariq, as Husayn said, asserts that Islamic law only exists to blame the West for the confusion it caused and to hold it responsible. Nonetheless, as Husayn believes, the fact is that during the nineteenth

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<sup>167</sup> On the argument regarding veiling by Husayn, see its summary in, Nadia Abu Zahra, “Islamic History, ---,” pp. 96-97.

<sup>168</sup> “*Ta‘qib* (Comments on Tariq al-Bishri’s lecture on Shari‘a and the Positive Law),” *Record of the Seminar on Heritage and the Challenge of the Times in the Arab World*, organized by the Center for the Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), (Beirut, 1985): pp. 617-650. (included in *al-Islam fi ‘Alam Mutaghayyir*)

and twentieth centuries, Western codes came in simply because of the incapacity and inadequacy of Islamic law and not necessarily as a part of the colonial artifice. ‘Abd al-Raziq al-Sanhuri, who worked on the codification of the Egyptian Civil Code of 1947, had to reconcile a dual legal system, but it was a requirement of the age and al-Sanhuri was not to be blamed for the duality. Husayn concluded by alluding to the clothing of a child, which no longer fit the adult.

In concluding this chapter, it is noted again that the unique middle way taken by Husayn on the shari‘a issue distinguishes him from other prominent liberals of his time such as Foda or al-‘Ashmawi, as seen in Chapter III. Further, since it is so reminiscent of his father’s characteristic position, a small addition is in order here.

His father was often referred to as “the middle of the roader” by his contemporaries.<sup>169</sup> There are two contexts for this epithet. One context was his appreciation of the Mu‘tazila as a great theological school relying much on the work of reason in religious matters. One Mu‘tazili principle, the position between two opposites (*al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*), already hints at a compromising stance. The Khawarij group believed that one guilty of serious sins (*kaba’ir*) is no longer a believer and thus not a member of the community, while the Murji‘a held that faith is knowledge in the heart and not an outward act, so that even the guilty can remain believers. The Mu‘tazili position is that such an offender should be punished in the hereafter but still remains a member of the community, as *fasiq*, somewhere between a believer, *mumin*, and a nonbeliever, *kafir*.

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<sup>169</sup> The “middle-of-the-roader” is an expression of Hasan Saab, “The Spirit of Reform in Islam,” *Islamic Studies* (3.3, 1963): p. 25.

Another context was the relation of Ahmad's thought to the famous reformer, Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). Detlev Khalid has stressed the close relationship between Ahmad's thought on Islam to that of Muhammad 'Abduh.<sup>170</sup> Among the many followers and students of 'Abduh, he says, the radical wing is represented by 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq while the conservative wing is represented by Muhammad Rashid Rida. "The general criterion for considering Ahmad Amin most entitled to the claim of being a 'genuine' successor is that among his contemporaries, he is the best example of what the Lebanese scholar, Hassan Saab, calls the middle-of-the-roader or the central school (*al-madrasa al-usta*)."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Detlev Khalid, "Ahmad Amin and the Legacy of Muhammad 'Abduh," *Islamic Studies* 9 (1970): pp. 1-31.

<sup>171</sup> The term "the central school" was used by 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, "*al-Madrasa al-usta*," *Funun wa Shujun* (Beirut, 1974), pp. 3-44.



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DISCUSSIONS OF CIVILIZATION**

The overwhelming impact of Western civilization upon the Muslim world was still felt at the end of the twentieth century, and so this section will see how the two thinkers viewed the tasks facing Muslims and how they thought that they should cope with them. Both Ahmad and Husayn reflected the experience of their respective times, just as they were proactively influencing their own society.

#### **Western Civilization as a Challenge**

In this section, after providing an outline of the argument presented by both Ahmad and Husayn, the discussion will be divided into three parts: defining some of the terms used, the question of how they viewed Western civilization, and the solutions which they proposed.

#### An outline of the argument

Ahmad began to write most of his articles on the subject from the mid-1930s when his overall literary production increased. His first article directly criticizing modern

civilization appeared in 1937 (“Lies of civilization”).<sup>172</sup> His central theme, the spiritualism of the East and the materialism of the West, was first taken up in 1939 (“Between the West and the East, or materialism and spirituality”).<sup>173</sup> This inclination toward a stronger and more direct criticism of the West was part of a general trend among the Egyptian intelligentsia at the time, though other prominent writers were probably more outspoken.<sup>174</sup> In fact, Ahmad never discarded Western civilization *per se*, since even in 1949 he argued that a civilization should be based upon science, like Western civilization (“The disease of the East is Tradition”).<sup>175</sup> Based upon these discussions, his major work on the subject was published posthumously in 1955, *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb (The East and the West)*. In this book, he makes no reference to Islam at all, and calls for the establishment of a humane civilization (*al-hadara al-insaniyya*). By so doing, he advances beyond the logic of “East or West.” This book can be seen as the culmination and apex of Ahmad’s argument on civilization.

Husayn holds Muslims themselves responsible for their disarray and stagnation. As he says, they always tend to blame others for their problems: in the past it was the Tatars, then the Ottomans, and now the West. As a result of the predominance of the West, some Muslims are inclined to think that any attempt to learn from the West would be to fall into

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<sup>172</sup> “*Akadhib al-madaniyya*,” *al-Hilal* (5, 1937): *Fayd*, vol. 1, pp. 131-136.

<sup>173</sup> “*Bayna al-gharb wa al-sharq – aw al-maddiyya wa al-ruhiyya*,” *al-Thaqafa* (1.10, 1939): *Fayd*, vol. 2, pp. 52-56.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Brugman, *An Introduction* ---, p. 359., Vatikiotis, *The History* ---, pp. 324-5.

<sup>175</sup> “*Afat al-sharq al-taqalid*,” *al-Hilal* (6, 1949): *Fayd*, vol.8 pp. 26-29.

the clutches of the West, and would be against the religion of Islam. The problem should be solved through a rejuvenation of religion and a reconsideration of its tradition and legacy, in all of which Islam has a major role to play. Husayn published his *al-Mawqif al-Hadari fi al-Naz'at al-Diniyya*, (*The Attitude of Civilization towards Religious Trends*), in 1994. The centerpiece in a collection of his essays is entitled, *Mawqif al-muslimin al-'arab min al-hadara al-urubiyya* (*The Attitude of Arab Muslims toward European Civilization*). There are also other articles on the subject, including a series of three long essays entitled *al-Mushkila wa al-hall* (*The Problem and the Solution*), published in 1983 in *al-Musawwar* magazine. Husayn did not join in the call to recognize the spirituality of the East, which had died away entirely after the revolution of 1952.

### Definition

Ahmad had his own notion of “the world” where civilization should be built and developed, though Husayn did not specifically refer to it. Ahmad’s “world” is divided into the East and the West, although he maintains that the distinction between them is not necessarily based on geography:

Typical of the Occident is the progress of mechanization, the movement of trade, democracy, particular literary and artistic styles--- pragmatic rather than philosophical---and the esteem for women with their considerable degree of freedom. Characteristic of the Orient is mutual trust, a tendency towards totalitarianism, haggling in business, limited rights of women, and widespread superstition. According to such definitions, any references to geography become meaningless. We might just as well conclude that the Japanese have become Occidentals in so far as they possess Occidental character traits, just as we might say that some Europeans have become Orientals in as much as they have Oriental characteristics.

On such a basis Oriental and Occidental affiliations are qualities without geographical relevance. Consequently, when we speak of

Occidental civilization we do not mean the civilization which brought the Occident into confrontation with the Orient, rather we refer only to the peculiarities and characteristics which bear the mark of Occidental civilization. . . . As for us, we are inclined to differentiate according to natural disposition and frame of mind.<sup>176</sup>

On this basis, Ahmad was able to argue that each civilization can learn from the others: thus the East should be capable of learning from the West and even of developing it further by supplying new dimensions. In addition, this distinction was more tenable than a geographical one in broadening and generalizing his argument on the relations between various civilizations including the West and the East.

As to the meaning of “civilization,” the titles of chapters two through ten in *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* give the semantic width and depth of the term. It is clear that his vision does not contain any surprises and is almost synonymous with what we mean by it today.

Chapter 2	Totalitarianism and Democracy
Chapter 3	Education
Chapter 4	Fate and Predestination in the Orient versus Cause and Effect in the Occident
Chapter 5	Social Life
Chapter 6	Economic Life in the Orient and the Occident
Chapter 7	Individuals and Family
Chapter 8	Women
Chapter 9	Imitation versus Innovation
Chapter 10	Moral Values in the Orient and the Occident

In contrast to “civilization,” Ahmad defines the significance of “culture” as follows, referring only to the mental and spiritual aspects of human life (“The Significance of

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<sup>176</sup> Op.cit., *al-Sharq* ---, pp. 8-9.

Culture”).<sup>177</sup>

The essential value of culture lies in what it offers to our view of things and of newer and truer assessments of them. This is quite vital, since a religion will be better than another one according to how it attempts to elevate one's view of God and life; knowledge will be better than other knowledge according to whether it leads to a high and correct view. The culture of a man cannot be judged by how much he reads or how much he learns of the sciences and literature. What matters is how much knowledge offers him, how high his viewpoint of the world is, and how much art inspires his lofty sensitivity and aesthetic sense.

### Western civilization

How does Ahmad view and characterize modern Western civilization? In *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, he makes the following abridged quotation from Spengler's *The Decline of the West*:

With the loss of faith, man lost also his peace of mind, and scientific speculation began to take its place. By the same token, man attached importance to material things to the detriment of spiritual things and relied on easily ascertainable reality instead of eternal reality, whose proof requires the test of generations.<sup>178</sup>

The above statement must have been a great impetus to Ahmad's thought, as it comes from the West itself. He presents the following concluding remarks about modern Western civilization:

Throughout the nineteenth century, people believed in the steady progress of the world and looked to the future with confidence. But the twentieth century changed all this. People began to become extremely skeptical and lost faith in everything. All sorts of theories were put forward by scientists. Then pessimism became widespread. But why did

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<sup>177</sup> “*Qima al-thaqafa*,” *al-Risala* (2.19, 1934): *Fayd*, vol. 1, pp. 257-260.

<sup>178</sup> Op.cit., *al-Sharq*, pp. 43-44. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trs. C. F. Atkinson (N.Y.: Knopf, 1939).

people give up all hope, and why were they so pessimistic when so much had been accomplished in the various fields? They were like Midas, the legendary king of Phrygia, who transformed everything into gold that he touched; when eating bread, it changed to gold.<sup>179</sup>

This concern was one thing, but his underlying resentment of the West was another. This mentality has its own structure and historical background, and deserves accentuation as a crucial ethos probably shared by many Arab Muslims. One unfortunate encounter of the Islamic world with the West, which was doomed to lead to antagonism, is described below:

All attempts to reconcile Islam with modern civilization have failed until today, because it first approached Islam with fire and the sword rather than persuasion and a sense of utility. Then, modern civilization came with modern inventions and scientific and technical results in one hand, and in the other hand colonialism and the means of exploitation. Muslims received [modern civilization] with loathing but if the approach had been made in a different manner they could have accepted it just as they had accepted Greek, Persian and Turkish civilization before. It is also because it came by the hand of enthusiastic Christians, who had oppressed Muslims from the time of the Crusades till today. Lastly, Muslims were obsessed with what is called in psychology an inferiority complex.<sup>180</sup>

That the first historical layer of antagonism may have been against the Crusaders, coupled with the conviction that the spirit of the Crusades is still alive, or that there is a ‘Crusader syndrome’, is very obvious in Ahmad’s view of the West:

Christians are still hostile today against Muslims by aiding Jews and their taking of Palestine from Muslim hands.<sup>181</sup>  
The spirit of the Crusades is hidden just like a fire in sand. . . .

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<sup>179</sup> Op.cit., p. 45.

<sup>180</sup> Op.cit., *Yawm ---*, p. 215.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

Christianity is still fanatical in all its elements and it always looks at Islam as an enemy with contempt and loathsome religious fanaticism. . . . International laws do not treat Islamic countries on an equal footing with Christian countries.<sup>182</sup>

What the Westerners call a criticized and prohibited fanaticism in the East is, in the West, a blessed national consideration, a sacred patriotism, and a praised nationalism. What is called in the West pride, glory, patriotism and national honor, they call in the East a heated extravagance, harmful chauvinism and a disdain and aversion against Western foreigners.<sup>183</sup>

Mr. Gladstone, a well-known Englishman, said, "It is necessary to terminate the Qur'an and to expel Muslims from Europe." Lord Salisbury, a great Englishman, said, "it is necessary to return what the Crescent had taken from the Cross to the Cross and not vice versa".<sup>184</sup>

The idea of the Crusaders' enmity against Muslims was derived from the Greeks just as literature and philosophy came from the Greeks. The idea is that the world is divided into Greeks and barbarians. [The Crusaders] believed also that the world was divided into European masters and non-European subordinates. European orientalist were expected to correct the situation by their research and knowledge but it became clear that they came from the same environment which produced the Crusaders.<sup>185</sup>

The second layer of enmity, it seems, is the more recent development of colonialism and the question of Palestine. This dimension is not unrelated to the first layer of the Crusade syndrome. However, what should be pointed out here is that Ahmad strongly feels that he has been deceived and betrayed by the West, which offers more grounds for antagonism and distrust. In his autobiography, *Hayati*, he describes his experience of attending a round-table conference on the Palestine problem convened by the British Foreign Office in 1946. As head of the Egyptian delegation, he participated fully in the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

debate. After lengthy talks, he says, the conference suddenly came to a close when the British side unilaterally and abruptly announced that it had listened closely to the views of the Egyptians and the Arabs, that they would be informed of the outcome of their deliberations in due course, and that another round of conferences might be convened should they become necessary. Ahmad does not elaborate upon his reaction here, but rather concludes this episode immediately after his reference to the British announcement merely by adding “And [they said] good-bye.”<sup>186</sup>

The third layer of antagonism may be found in his claim that the West misunderstands and distorts Islam. What he describes as a misunderstanding of Islam – not to speak of intentional distortion – on the part of the West is so regretted by Ahmad that it could easily become a basis for hostility, particularly when it offers a pretext to slander and disdain of Islam.

The belief in fate and divine decrees and reliance upon God are considered by many Europeans as defects of Islam, but if they had been correct in judging the present situation, they would have realized that these were the defects of Muslims rather than of Islam.<sup>187</sup>

Some Europeans said, “Islam could not have spread so quickly without the sword and Muslims conquered their empire with the Qur’an in one hand and the sword in the other.” This is a clear mistake since the sword was used only for self-defense and conquest took place with the spread of propaganda and preaching.<sup>188</sup>

Some Orientalists blame Islam for its stiffness and allege that Muslims do not use reason, but stand by the traditions of their forefathers. However, there are not more than one hundred verses of a legal nature in the Qur’an, handed down with the utmost care for the

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<sup>186</sup> Op.cit., *Hayati*, p. 315.

<sup>187</sup> Op.,cit., *Yawm ---*, p. 24.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 27.



purpose of legislation, whereas the current events of each epoch and age will be in the thousands. [It is therefore required to innovate laws anew.]”<sup>189</sup>

We may now turn to Husayn to see how he understands Western civilization and to what extent this animosity still persists. First, he makes some interesting points: he compares two figures who wrote about the West: Usama bin Munqidh (1095-1188) who was a commander fighting against the Crusaders and wrote *The Book of Consideration* (*Kitab al-I'tibar*) and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (1756-1825), who was an established historian and wrote a history of Egypt (*Kitab ‘Aja’ib al-Athar*). As Husayn says, both pay respect to Europe, but the former looks at Europe with tolerance and permissiveness as a lesser power, whereas the latter accuses an overwhelmingly powerful Europe of being made up of infidels or *kuffar*. In fact, because of the predominance of the West, Muslims incline to think that it would be to fall into a trap set by the West if one were to try to learn from it and would be against their religion. In fact, if it were not for this psychological defect and this ill skepticism and the loss of confidence, contemporary Islam might have developed in a very different way.<sup>190</sup> It was unfortunate that non-Westerners started to learn from the West in the twentieth century, when Europe exposed its defects and flaws, including a lack of spirituality.<sup>191</sup>

As Husayn says, Muslims tend to attribute responsibility for their difficulties to

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>190</sup> Op.cit., *al-Mawqif al-Hadari* ---, p. 108.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 102-3.

external factors rather than to themselves; in the past they have accused the Tatars and the Ottomans and now they blame the West.<sup>192</sup> Thus a list of the ways Muslims have weakened their own religion would include tyranny from within the society; the contention that the gate of *ijtihad* had been closed; the fabrication of hadiths (although this was carried out with good intentions); the tendency to read scholars' exegeses rather than original text (though this tendency can be seen in other religions as well); the intrusion of superstitions into Islam, such as the ritual to get rid of evils or *zar* in Egypt or, as in Africa, sanctifying cocks since they awaken Muslims at dawn to perform their prayers, and visiting the graves of saints. Other interesting instances to which Husayn makes reference are fixing the date of 'Ali's accession to the caliphate on the Persian New Year's Day, designating a spot in the suburb of Damascus where people worshiped the moon as the tomb of Shaykh *Hilal* or crescent, and designating also a spot near Tyre in southern Lebanon as the tomb of Shaykh *Ma'shuq*, who must have been adopted from the Phoenician mythological figure *Badonis* *Ma'shuq* Aphrodite. Furthermore, there are many references to trees in Egypt that people used to worship in older times and that were said to give shade to the grave of a pious Muslim woman called *Khadra* (Saint Green), as one finds in the book of *al-Khitat* of 'Ali Mubarak in the nineteenth century. He concludes by saying that Muslims picked up from the West only the practice and habit of wasting time and wealth, something secularism brought to them, unlike the Japanese, who mastered efficiency and the drive to learn, build

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<sup>192</sup> Op.cit., "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: hadir a-umma al-islamiyya*," *al-Musawwar* (10. 28, 1983): pp. 58-63.

and develop.<sup>193</sup>

Another description of Muslims' responsibilities was published in the Israeli journal *Jerusalem Quarterly* in 1987.<sup>194</sup> Once again, a summary of them as enumerated by Husayn might be in order:

“I come now to those areas where Muslims themselves bear the full responsibility for their backwardness and decline.”

- Internal misrule and armed competition, damaging their own commerce and industry.
- The closing of the door of *ijtihad* and the ulama's separation from the masses, in spite of the efforts toward reform by Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Ahmad Amin.
- Clinging to the belief that innovation is equivalent to heresy, that the call for change is a form of rebellion, and that new developments are disorderly interruptions of fixed routines and an unpleasant departure from familiar ways.
- Intellectual stagnation and the separation of traditional and modern knowledge. A religious scholar or *faqih* was looked down upon and came to be pronounced *fiqi* or stupid and intellectually limited.
- The shari'a is seen as static and immutable, timeless, and applicable to all Islamic societies. Sayings and legal decisions that would facilitate adaptation of the shari'a to new

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<sup>193</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, “*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: masuliyat al-muslimin*,” *al-Musawwar* (11. 4, 1983): pp. 56 -58.

<sup>194</sup> Husayn Ahmad Amin, “The Present Precarious State of the Muslim Umma,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.42 (Spring, 1987):pp. 19-37.

social and political developments were attributed to the Prophet. Thus political and religious development demanded the fabrication of many hadiths.

- As the ulama became preoccupied with irrelevant questions, the masses were attracted to Sufism. Another result was that the better educated turned to the Western way of life as the only way capable of meeting their needs.

- By the tenth century, Sufism had come to the end of its creative phase and was on its way to rapid decline. Sufi ethics facilitated conciliation with political despotism and forceful subjection.

- Alien beliefs were mingled with Islam, inter alia, the veneration of saints. There is not one revolutionary movement in the history of Islam that was not garbed in religious attire, for which the various sects resorted to reinterpretations of the Qur'an and the invention of hadiths.

- Arab historians agreed in the end to serve the aims set down by the ulama for historiography, i.e., it should be a means for edification and moral instruction, and preaching the tenets of Muslims sects. This led to a superficial glorification of the past and a nostalgia that is hardly justifiable.

- Muslims did not pick up from the West, as the Japanese did, its productivity, scientific spirit and zeal for construction, but learned only its habits of consumption, fashion and its lowest forms of entertainment. The tragi-comedy was that at the time when Muslims and other non-Western nations were well advanced on the road to Westernization, the West itself was in the throes of a painful spiritual crisis. Muslim nations fell between two stools: an Islamic heritage in which confidence no longer existed, and a Western way of life that

was now deemed reprehensible. Hence the bitter feelings toward the West that are now prevalent among the majority of Muslims.

After reviewing the overall structure of his thought, it seems that Husayn shares with his father the basic conviction that Western civilization contains a defect, specifically, a lack of spirituality. However, he does not attach great importance to the issue. Nor does he express serious antipathy and animosity towards the West. Rather, his attention was focused on the responsibility of Muslims themselves for their own defects, decay and backwardness. In the last resort, both of them hope for a rejuvenation of genuine belief in Islam and a reconstruction of Islamic civilization.

It might be necessary here to recognize a shift of the background between the father's time and the son's. Ahmad's position on the subject of Western civilization was not so much advocated in the early 1920s. His basic stance represented a usual choice common to many liberal writers at the time: It is best to take from the West whatever is good for Egypt and Islam, though naturally with some reservations and ambivalence due to Muslims' pride and confidence in their own heritage.<sup>195</sup> Later, during the 1930s and the 1940s, he became more critical toward the West, partly reflecting the tide of the epoch. In contrast, Husayn does not seem to harbor animosity, but rather is quick to blame Muslims at length for their defects and failures. Should one suppose that this implies that he would develop his thinking later along lines similar to his father's? The answer was negative toward the end of

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<sup>195</sup> Typical expression of the stance mentioned here may be his assertion on reforming the ablution basin: "When Cairo had a running water system with pipes and faucets, there was no more need for the ablution basin because faucets were cleaner and healthier. But old custom made people sad to part with the ablution basin." See, op.cit., *Hayati*, p. 24.

the twentieth century, since Husayn was busy fighting against the Islamists, who did not hesitate to express their antipathy toward the West.

However, if the tide of the Islamists wanes in the future and voices of hostility against the West became silent, one can not exclude too hastily the possibility that antipathy toward the West might surface once more again in liberal circles in Egypt. This is because for intellectuals there was always a certain amount of reservation mixed in with their appreciation for Western civilization, that is, their concern for its lack of spirituality had never wholly dwindled away. Furthermore, a multilayered animosity constructed out of the Crusader syndrome, memories of colonialism, and the Western onslaught against Islam and the Islamic sciences, would not fade away in the foreseeable future. The fact remains that there is a certain amount of ambivalence, and it seems to be unavoidably shared by many, including liberal Muslims.

#### A new civilization

Ahmad's feeling of antipathy and animosity toward the West surfaced during the 1930s and the 1940s, but it never became extreme nor did it become a dominant feature of his thought. This was simply because he made a more general and constructive argument through his articles and one of his major books, which was published posthumously in 1955: *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* or *The East and the West*. Hence it is now a good time to look into his argument concerning the building of a new civilization, together with some measures advanced by Husayn with a view to solving some of the problems that he identified.

While recognizing the achievements of Western science, Ahmad argues that a new civilization should be humane and based upon “spiritualism” and would be better established by the East where this element is more vibrant. In *Yawm al-Islam*, he refers to three essentials for a true civilization:

- (1) Elevation of the value of the individual and his work in society
- (2) Establishment of life based upon science
- (3) Regeneration of heart with sympathy for the welfare of mankind<sup>196</sup>

He presents another summary of his discussion on the civilizations of the East and the West:

- (1) The contention that one can differentiate between the Orient and the Occident in geographical terms is untenable.
- (2) The nations and civilizations that preceded modern civilization probably had merits which might profitably be adopted.
- (3) Modern civilization---far from being the best example---can be no model for other civilizations because of its imperfection. The advanced civilization that we are looking for is humane: rather than being dominated by patriotism and nationalism, it regards the whole world as one family, where disease is treated until it is healed, where a minor comrade is taken by the hand until he grows up and where the path for underdeveloped members is made easy until they have caught up.

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<sup>196</sup> Op.cit., *Yawm ---*, p. 201.

(4) The whole world can benefit if the Orient begins its renaissance and can thus offer the world something most urgently needed: a new civilization, a civilization in which peace replaces war, cooperation replaces competition, and understanding replaces coercion.<sup>197</sup>

Ahmad believes that the civilization we now need must be oriented toward the humane and the spiritual, which the East is best equipped to offer.

Some people seem to believe in the perpetual perfectability of civilizations because every civilization adopts the merits of the previous one while avoiding the disadvantages. . . . But I suspect that this theory is a reflection of the illusions of certain Europeans who consider their civilization to be paramount vis-à-vis others because it benefited from all preceding civilizations and avoided their pitfalls. In my view, civilization merely gives a new direction to human progress. . . . While the ancient Greek and European civilizations had been the product of Occidental social life, the ancient Egyptian and Arab civilizations were the upshot of Oriental social life. Each civilization supplied men with what they needed.<sup>198</sup>

Despite his lengthy call for a new civilization, he does not, unfortunately, develop a concrete methodology for achieving this goal in any systematic way.

It is therefore necessary for the leaders of the Orient to select the positive aspects of Occidental civilization and to reject the negative ones, and if possible also to keep the good parts of the ancient civilization. This will result in a civilization which is neither particularly Oriental nor Occidental in character.<sup>199</sup>

The need for the East to overcome its inferiority complex is discussed in various

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<sup>197</sup> Op.cit., *al-Sharq* ---, p. 27.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 19.



places:

It is true that adopting Western science is not bad; in fact, it is obligatory. Life cannot be happy unless it is built upon science, the reform of the present, and an observation of the present and future world. But it must be added in the case of Muslims that they should fight their inferiority complex and should feel that they inherit from their religion a spiritual power which the West has lost. They should be able to color European science, thanks to Islamic teaching, in a spiritual color and in a proper manner to be used for the welfare of mankind (“Between the past and the future”).<sup>200</sup>

A leader of this new civilization should be an outstanding figure and the appearance of such a genius is much awaited.

In the modern world, there is no genius. In the old days, a lower level was accepted and many episodes developed later must have been added on to an old day genius [so that he might appear greater than he really was]. With a proper assessment there are many gifted people in the modern world but it is more difficult to stand out due to social development. Even Napoleon may not have been great if he were alive today (“Scarcity of genius in the modern world”).<sup>201</sup>

As mentioned above, Ahmad regards the distinction between the East and the West as based not geographical factors but on characteristic traits. He also thinks that the manner of growth of new civilizations is more like filling the gaps that people find in previous societies, rather than an evolutionary process. While appreciating the achievements of the West, he sees its ultimate weakness in the spiritual domain, and hence envisages a new civilization to fill this gap. This role, he claims, will be properly played by the East with its

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<sup>200</sup> Ahmad Amin, *“Bayna al-madi wa al-mustaqbal,” al-Thaqafa* (1.30, 1950): *Fayd*, vol.8, pp. 211-217.

<sup>201</sup> Ahmad Amin, *“Qillat al-nubugh fi al-‘asr al-hadith,” al-Hilal* (7, 1935): pp. 1022-25. (not included in *Fayd*)

comparative advantage in this area.

This is indeed unique thinking and he particularly focuses his energies on arguing this point. Ultimately he aspires for a humane civilization, rather than siding with the West or the East, which was the case for many of his contemporaries between the 1930s and the 1950s. What, then, were the ideological factors which enabled him to reach such a state of mind?

The first and foremost factor is his natural inclination to maintain a neutral and objective position in thinking and value-judgment, or, more simply, his academic bent. He talks repeatedly in *Hayati* about this academic bent, and about not having a political bent which would allow him to take one side and work toward achieving partisan interests. Hafiz Amin, one of Ahmad's sons, supports the above point in a chapter entitled, "He rejected both schools," in his book, *Ahmad Amin, A Thinker before his Time*.<sup>202</sup> One possible factor in developing such a bent may have been his experience as a judge in Islamic courts between 1921 and 1926.

Secondly, he argues that someone must construct a bridge between East and West, and in his article, "A Lost Link,"<sup>203</sup> he regrets that no intellectual is working to bring Arab and European cultures together. He probably intends to place himself in the middle as a bridge between the two. As quoted earlier, al-'Aqqad has described Ahmad's position as

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<sup>202</sup> Hafiz Ahmad Amin, *Ahmad Amin, Mufakkir Sabaqa 'Asrahu* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture of Egypt, 1987), p. 27-31.

<sup>203</sup> "Halqa mafquda," *al-Risala* (1.15, 19339): *Fayd*, vol.1. pp. 30-34.

one in the “middle school.”<sup>204</sup>

Lastly, based upon his conceptual distinction, he was capable of going beyond notions bound by geographic ties. This vision of civilizations reminds us of the British historian Arnold Toynbee, who presented a picture of civilization-centers shifting around the globe.<sup>205</sup> However we have no evidence that Ahmad had read Toynbee’s works.

Ahmad’s argument on civilization, though unique and advanced, has not met with adequate assessment either in the Arab or the Western world. As for the Egyptian and Arab worlds, the book, *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, unlike most of his other major works, was never reviewed by his contemporaries. One factor which may have contributed to this was that it was published in 1955, right after the Revolution of 1952, when a new set of ideologies, including that of Arab Socialism, had begun to flood into Egyptian society. Faced with this enormous ideological transition, the call for a humane civilization might well have been swept away. Another factor may have been that the book is devoid of Islamic references and coloring, at least in its expressed manner. Such an argument and work, one may say, would not create any serious or profound stimulation among Egyptian and Arab readers.

As to the Western world, the book appeared just after the publication of *Yawm al-Islam* in 1952, which was received as an outright expression of hostility toward the West. *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* might well have been overshadowed by the repercussions produced by its uneasy predecessor. Von Grunebaum treats both books in the same vein, that is, as “instrument[s] of self-appeasement and pedagogy” and “even more radical

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<sup>204</sup> ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, “*al-Madhahib al-usta*,” *Akhbar al-Yawm* (6.5, 1954): p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> Joseph Arnold Toynbee, *Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

condemnation[s] of the West.”<sup>206</sup> Safran was so struck by *Yawm al-Islam* that he does not even discuss *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*.<sup>207</sup> Shepard deals with *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* squarely, but says regarding “spiritualism and materialism,” that it “actually does not add much to this theme.”<sup>208</sup> This assessment, in my view, unfortunately misses the very point of the uniqueness and advanced state of Ahmad’s call for a “humane civilization” without particular reference to Islam.

Thus his argument for a new civilization has been largely neglected so that it remains a largely abortive attempt, but it may also be seen as a harbinger made public in a premature context. We note that *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* is now out of print without having gone into a second printing and for that reason is now relatively difficult to find. An underlying theme, hand-in-hand with his argument on civilization, is his view of the Western world, i.e., one of resentment and rejection. This aspect of his thought, which still wields influence, may even serve as the fuel for Islamist activism today. Such a view is certainly not his creation but is rather supported by the experiences of Arab Muslims over many centuries. Ahmad here simply echoes this widely-shared view. When *Yawm al-Islam* was published, one book review said, “It is a cry of Muslims”.<sup>209</sup> This book, unlike *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, has gone through several reprints and is still widely available in

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<sup>206</sup> G.E. Grunebaum, *Modern Islam* (N.Y.: Vintage Book, 1962), pp. 366-372.

<sup>207</sup> Op.cit., Safran, *Egypt in Search ---*, pp. 226-228.

<sup>208</sup> Op.cit., Shepard, *The Faith ---*, p. 148.

<sup>209</sup> Muhammad ‘Abd al-Ghani Hasan, “*Yawm al-islam li duktur Ahmad Amin*,” *al-Thaqafa* (4.14, 1952): pp. 28-30.

bookshops in Cairo.

It must be stressed, however, that Ahmad's main concern was to encourage and assure the resurgence of the East, and not to criticize the West as such. Historical circumstances and the particular sequence of developments toy with his argument on civilization, and unjustifiably, only his criticism of the West has been highlighted, while his intellectual sincerity and integrity have not enjoyed the spotlight they deserve both in the East and the West.

So much for Ahmad; now let us see what Husayn had to say about future civilization-building. Naturally, the immediate question is whether or not Husayn continued and developed his father's idea: a call for a humane civilization regardless of the geographical East and the West. However, he only refers to this aspect of the question in any coherent manner on two occasions, both in the context of the various possible ways and means of rejuvenating Islamic society, rather than constructing a new civilization in Egypt or the East in general.

First, he posits two conditions for true development: one is to base efforts toward this end on history and tradition, and the other is to encourage a reconsideration of legacy and tradition, with regard to their connections with the future. Islam has a significant role to play in these endeavors. He further says that conditions now are very similar to those in the seventh century, when Islam was born. They existed at the time of *al-Jahiliyya* when the work of promulgation was extremely successful. These conditions are:

- (1) The isolation of Islamic society in this world is untenable, when it is turning into a small global village.

- (2) The revival of self-confidence in Islam and the Eastern heritage are much required.
- (3) Piety should be gauged in accordance with daily conduct; it does not come about by a birth certificate. Likewise, our society will not be Islamic simply because it is written so in the constitution or because it adopts some legal regulations. It becomes Islamic only when it subsumes the full spirit of Islam.
- (4) We know what the necessity to understand what the most sublime God's will or *irada ilahiyya* is like; it is the path of the development of history as well as that to which a believer is supposed to submit.

Since these conditions are not to be found at any time or any place, it is most important, as Husayn says, to rekindle the fire to expel social evils and to work toward pointing society in a just direction.<sup>210</sup>

On another occasion, he referred to how one should best cope with the vicissitudes of the present world. He says that the problem lies in the unwillingness of Muslim reactionaries to admit the possibility of values being adjusted and changed while their essence remains firm. As he points out, the way problems are addressed now, with so much tension, is devoid of any comprehensive concept, and it is not endowed with any organic and intimate relationship with those problems. This way, to his regret, will not work at all. He believes that the Islamic rejuvenation he imagines is capable of restoring Muslim society to its proper place, viz., being among lively and active nations. It is the task of this society, he concludes, to set desirable targets by the exchange of various opinions, to offer a

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<sup>210</sup> Op.cit., *Dalil al-Muslimin*, pp. 171-172.

flexible religious framework for the growth of a lively society and to provide its members with the chance to live together and to interact.<sup>211</sup>

Taken at large, Husayn as a thinker clarified some of the general approaches to reinvigorating Muslim society, although it seems that he did not elaborate how to put them into action. Let us not forget, however, that what he is interested in is Muslim society, not the East or the world as a whole. Neither is he paying any attention to any more comprehensive vision of a new civilization beyond the desirability of an Islamic one. It might be fair to conclude that Husayn is so occupied with the activities of the Islamists in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world that the question of reinvigorating Islamic society has somehow sapped his major productivity and passion.

### **Easternism**

In discussing the new civilization as Ahmad envisaged it, the issue of the spirituality of the East has already been mentioned. It is worth revisiting the question because it enjoyed such widespread attention during the 1930s and 1940s, only to fade away completely during the 1950s. Firstly the question is what this Easternism was, and then one may wonder why it should have been wiped away so quickly and so thoroughly from Egypt's critical and intellectual arena.

The parameters of Ahmad's criticisms of Western civilization, i.e., the spirituality (*al-ruhiyya*) of the East and the materialism (*al-maddiyya*) of the West, deserve more

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<sup>211</sup> Op.cit., *al-Islam fi 'Alam ---*, pp. 283-286.

detailed treatment here. First of all, let us note that this topic was quite popular among many writers during the 1920s and the 1930s. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, for example, first touched upon the topic in his introduction to *Jan Jak Rusaw*, published in 1921,<sup>212</sup> and contributed a concluding chapter, “Between the two lives, materialism and spiritualism,” to his previously-mentioned book, *Fi Manzil al-Wahy*, published in 1937. Tawfiq al-Hakim followed suit in his *Tahta Shams al-Fikr (Under the Sun of Thought*, Cairo, 1938) and *Zahrat al-‘Umr (A Flower of the Age*, Cairo, 1943). Furthermore, mention should be made of the formation of the Association of the Eastern League (*Jam ‘iyya al-Rabita al-Shariqiyya*) in February, 1922. Its members included such distinguished names as ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-‘Azzam and Ahmad Amin. It started to publish its journal, called *Majjat al-Rabita al-Shariqiyya*, in 1928, and the Association sent several delegations to conferences in some Arab countries.

Ahmad discussed spirituality on many occasions but his most thorough consideration is found in Chapter 11 of *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, “The Materialism of the West and the Spirituality of the East”:

The spiritual aspect must be seen separate from the intellectual and emotional aspects. . . . A person who is spiritually inclined realizes that he attains this state by means of his heart, not his intellect. He understands that to recognize this by means of the heart is more

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<sup>212</sup> Charles D. Smith, “The Crisis of Orientation: The Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 30’s,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 ((Oct., 1973): pp. 382-410. See, p. 403.



powerful than to do so with his intellect.<sup>213</sup>

It is interesting to note here that in his first article on this topic, “Between the West and the East - or materialism and spirituality,” mentioned earlier, he still considers such words as “emotion” (*‘awatif*) and “feeling” (*masha‘ir*) a significant part of spirituality, whereas here the concept is purified to include only what one might call a religious mind. His conceptual development was probably bound to take this form because he yearned to refute those who claimed at the time that spirituality was also found in the West and because those who made such claims tended to understand spirituality as emotion, sentiment and sympathy. In fact, Ahmad was prompted to write the above article as a rebuttal to Taha Husayn’s *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa*, which claimed that the West exhibits spirituality through the emotional aspect of love, its praise of bravery and beauty, its dislike of filthiness and ugliness, its charity for the poor, and its citizens spiritual and financial sacrifice for their nation.

Ahmad started to write on this topic with the aforementioned article in 1939 and onward with more intensity, though one may say that all sixty of his articles on civilization have implications for spiritualism and materialism to varying degrees.<sup>214</sup> The main reason

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<sup>213</sup> Op. cit., *al-Sharq* ---, pp. 137-140.

<sup>214</sup> Some of the more relevant articles of Ahmad are as follows. “*al-Maddiyya fi Urubba*,” *al-Siyasa al-Ushbu‘iyya* (1.21, 1939): pp. 4-5 (not included in *Fayd*). “*al-Din al-sina‘i*,” *al-Thaqafa* (5.30, 1939): *Fayd*, vol.2, pp. 12-15. “*al-Islah al-hadith*,” *al-Thaqafa* (8.20, 1940): *Fayd*, vol.2, pp. 291-295. “*Fi al-madaniyya al-haditha*,” *al-Thaqafa* (11.19, 1940): *Fayd*, vol.3, pp. 23-28. “*al-Ta‘aun al-thaqafi al-gharbi*,” *al-Hilal* (12, 1943): *Fayd*, vol.5, pp. 63-68. “*Sira‘u al-madi wa al-hadir*,” *al-Hilal* (1, 1949): *Fayd*, vol.8, pp. 21-25. “*Kun sayydan wa la takun ‘abdan*,” *al-Hilal* (10, 1949): *Fayd*, vol.8, pp. 38-42. “*Hiyad al-sharq*,” *al-Thaqafa* (4.3, 1950): pp. 3-4 (not included in *Fayd*). “*al-Taqlid wa al-ibtikar*,” (sources n.a.) *Fayd*, vol.9, pp.

for the upsurge from 1939 onwards was that the journal *al-Thaqafa*, edited by Ahmad for 14 years from its beginning, first appeared in January of that year. Now with a tool in hand that allowed him to express his thoughts more freely, he often published his articles on the topic in this weekly journal.

As for the genesis of Ahmad's interest in the topic, Shepard traces it to Rappoport's *A Primer of Philosophy*, London, 1916, which Ahmad translated and published in 1918, as *Mabadi al-Falsafa*.<sup>215</sup> However, the fact that Ahmad wrote on the topic for the first time in 1939 might suggest some distance from that. I think that Ahmad's ideological argument against Western civilization and in defense of the East was very much a product of his interactions in the 1930s, and was strengthened through his work on rebutting Taha Husayn, as described above.

The argument concerning spiritualism and materialism certainly has a wide range of implications for moral principles, views of life and the philosophy of the East and the West. Let us look at some of them as described by Ahmad.

Obviously, the difference between the materialism of the Occident and the spirituality of the Orient is deeply rooted in history. We are told that ancient Indian philosophy aimed at contemplation and the analysis of the inner self. . . . The Greeks, on the other hand, were interested in understanding the laws of the external world and wanted to define man's place in the universe.<sup>216</sup> They were concerned with the external world whereas the Indians turned inside to themselves. The Chinese, however, were concerned with neither the realm of man's inner life nor with his

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<sup>215</sup> Op.cit., Shepard, *The Faith* ---, p. 147.

<sup>216</sup> This conception of the Greeks might have been derived from the fact that the Arabs knew and studied Aristotle but not Plato. Cf. Muhammad Mandur, *Fi al-Mizan al-Jadid* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1944). pp. 60-64.

external life, rather they were interested in inter-human relations.

The triumph of science dazzled the reason and the rationale of the Occidentals so that they enthusiastically accelerated their course. They did everything possible to adopt Aristotle's concept of man as a rational animal. Darwin believed that man originated from animals, and Marx said that man's mentality is partly the product of his animal environment. In the twentieth century, Freud said that not only did man originate from animals, but that his mentality continues to preserve traces of his animal origin until today.<sup>217</sup>

As to future goals of the East and the West, he concludes as follows:

We want to see the spirituality of the Orient infused with a reasonable amount of materialism in order to utilize science in the service of the conveniences of life. But we also wish the materialism of the Occident to be infused with a certain amount of true spirituality devoid of humbug, delusions and superstitions. The result of such mutual interaction would be to give to the spirituality of the Orient an active hand and a determined power, and to give to the materialism of the Occident a pulsating heart and munificent feelings. It is high time; the pursuit might be difficult, but if this can be realized, it will produce people who know materialism as well as spirituality. Then they will be determined to follow the course which comprises the merits of the two ideologies, but without their demerits.<sup>218</sup>

The argument of Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism was thus advanced by Ahmad. Still, one may wonder about its validity and the kind of role it has played. In this regard, Gershoni and Jankowski state:

Easternism lacked both a programmatic dimension and an organizational embodiment, and as such possessed neither the ideological focus nor the political force to restructure Egypt in a more authentic Eastern mold.<sup>219</sup>

Ahmad's argument probably served to provide a psychological prop during the time of a

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<sup>217</sup> Op.cit., *al-Sharq* ---, pp. 139-143.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>219</sup> Op.cit., Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining* ---, p. 53.

catastrophic sequence of events: the Great Depression, the collapse of the League of Nations, the Second World War, the Palestine War of 1948, and other terrible events. However, the simplification that Ahmad and other contemporary writers resorted to in formulating and defining both the concept of spirituality and the concept of materialism and his concomitant lack of any deep or intimate understanding of Western European civilization, were regrettably self-defeating in the end.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION OF POLITICS

Egypt experienced periods of parliamentary democracy and military dictatorship throughout the twentieth century. An important additional development was the rise of Islamic radicalism particularly since the 1970s and the 1980s. Ahmad and Husayn had their respective tasks to tackle: for Ahmad, it appeared that the political enlightenment of the people was the most urgent, while Husayn thought that the Islamic extremists posed the most serious problem. Thus both had to struggle in quite different political contexts in Egypt, while retaining a cohort of shared values and orientation.

#### **Ahmad and Public Enlightenment**

At the outset, the reason that intellectuals in general failed to come up with realistic or practical political arguments during the 1930s and the 1940s needs to be considered. Safran describes this as an epoch in which “very little theorizing was done,” and he cites three main reasons for this phenomenon.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Op.cit., Safran, *Egypt in Search* ---, pp. 147-151.

First, intellectuals at the time expected the spread of education to lead automatically to an atmosphere in which democracy would flourish. Second, they viewed the constitution as a set of rules above society, rather than as a combination of certain human ideals and principles for political engineering, and thus, political theorizing was largely taken as a matter of the legal interpretation of the constitution. Lastly, the intellectuals tended to the idealistic view that all political theories are self-evident ethical imperatives. Safran concludes by saying that it seems that intellectual leaders brought the formal idealism and ethical approach of the traditional Islamic view of politics into the field of modern politics.

Aside from this general trend, two inherent questions arise relating to Ahmad. To discuss this matter, since he did not publish any books on the subject, one needs to look at some 125 articles, of which 40 were written during the 1930s and the remaining 85 falling in his next period.

One question might be the extent to which he was overly idealistic, and to what degree his value system should be regarded as being based upon traditional Islamic sources. Another undercurrent is the intention behind Ahmad's appeal and the impact it had upon the nation. One should bear in mind that in those years Egypt had an illiteracy rate of 95 percent around the turn of the century;<sup>221</sup> even in 1950, only thirty percent of children attended elementary school. Against this social and cultural background, his argument, though at times rather abstract and aloof from practicalities, retains its vivid appeal, and especially his main aim: the enlightenment of the people.

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<sup>221</sup> Op.cit., Vatikiotis, *History ...*, pp. 451 ff.

As to his political stand in that milieu, ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad described it as “modernizing conservatism” and one of his colleagues called him a “moral reformer”.<sup>222</sup> I suppose that no serious objection would be raised against these broad assessments, whatever the choice of words.

### Basic Concepts

#### The Notion of Politics

Historically the idea that political and social events were either natural phenomena like earthquakes or the outcome of fate controlled by some supreme power such as God, has been almost universally observed. This notion was probably what Ahmad considered his primary enemy.

He defines politics as responsible relations between ruler and ruled, but basically the character of the subjects determines that of the ruler and his government (“The art of governance”).<sup>223</sup> He writes, “People are the trunk, roots and leaves of a tree and rulers are merely flowers,” and he refers to an old saying of the early Islamic period, “You will get the government in accordance with what you are (*kama takununa yuwalla ‘alaykum* ).” The same awareness leads to another argument in which he rejects the traditional notion that politics is a matter of divine fate to be decided by God (“On the margin of governance”).<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Op.cit., al-Mahasini, *Muhadarat* ---, p. 186. and op.cit., Shepard, *The Faith* ---, p. 31.

<sup>223</sup> “*Fann al-hukm*,” *al-Risala* (9.6, 1937): *Fayd*, vol.1, pp. 266-270.

<sup>224</sup> “*Ala hamish al-hukm*,” *al-Thaqafa* (12.5, 1944): *Fayd*, vol.6, pp. 26-29.

In another article, he stresses that politics involves complicated skills and that the Arabs need to acquire such skills and techniques, overcoming the simplicity that is prevalent among them (“The art of politics”).<sup>225</sup> Here he is referring to foreign relations, and he blames the Arabs for their shortsightedness, seeking immediate benefits and making constant political realignments. The outcome of this bungling is that the Arabs have become playthings in the hands of the British and French, whose politicians study “even the science of politics.”

Islam does not normally think of the rights of man because it is more conscious of the command of God. The interests of ordinary people were usually well looked after in Islamic lands, but this came about through the labors of the *ulema*, and through the readiness of rulers to defer to the views of the *ulema* in many matters affecting ordinary people.<sup>226</sup>

If this is the classic state of politics and the place of “ordinary people” within the political framework, as Watt suggests, the audience whom Ahmad addressed most probably shared this passive ethos which was still prevalent in many ways in the 1950s and beyond.

## Democracy

Ahmad’s main article on the question, “Aristocratic democracy,” defines democracy as follows:

What is the meaning of democracy? It is the government of the people, by the people, for the good of the people. It is the abolition of the

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<sup>225</sup> “*Fann al-siyasa*,” *al-Thaqafa* (4.30, 1951): pp. 3-4. (not included in *Fayd*)

<sup>226</sup> W.M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, Islamic Surveys 6, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1968), p. 121.



domination of a particular class over the people as a whole. It is the promulgation of education, equality, freedom and brotherhood among all the people. It is the removal of obstacles in the way of the people's progress. It is the limitation of vast wealth and the abolition of grinding poverty. It is a war against political and economic privilege. It is to provide each individual with an opportunity to develop his talents and powers according to his aptitude. It is to educate public opinion and to accustom it to make sure that the government and the rulers govern for the public good. It is the general spirit that controls the people and directs them to the good of the whole. It is the abolition of the slavery of individuals and nations, of the ignorance and passions that enslave individuals and of the exploitation and colonialism that enslave nations. It is a revolution against the enslavement of the many by the few, of nations by individuals, and of nations by nations.<sup>227</sup>

In this article, Ahmad does not try to conceptualize democracy but almost intentionally presents it in a very empirical manner. However, it is clear that he considers the element of equality a prominent feature of democracy. In talking about the stumbling blocks in the way of attaining true democracy and equality in Egypt, he writes about the problem of cleanliness ("Enemy of democracy").<sup>228</sup> He says, for example, that the reason why there are different classes of seats in a train is because passengers detest the dirtiness of lower classes. Later we find, "But in general my immigrant forefathers were democratic common people whom nobody paid attention to and whose history went unnoticed," and "I also liked the true democracy of the people. Every person is looked upon as a person whether he is high or low . . . Thus everyone was equal in rights and obligations, and distinction between classes decreased."<sup>229</sup> This may be contrasted with the views of 'Abbas

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<sup>227</sup> "*al-Dimuqratiyya al-aristuqratiyya*," *al-Thaqafa* (8.19, 1941): *Fayd*, vol.3, pp. 97-100.

<sup>228</sup> "*Aduw al-dimuqratiyya*," *al-Risala* (10.1, 1934): *Fayd*, vol.1, pp. 83-86.

<sup>229</sup> *Op.cit.*, *My Life*, p. 11 and 205.

Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, who tended to view democracy as the right to vote, and saw interpreting the Islamic practice of acclamation in appointment, *bay‘a*, as equivalent to this right to vote.<sup>230</sup>

As to the significance of public opinion, Ahmad attaches the highest authority to the opinion of a nation, people and commoners, inasmuch as this opinion can affect the government through parliament. The eradication of illiteracy and the wide circulation of newspapers and radio broadcasts are also considered important in order to keep public opinion meaningful (“Public opinion”).<sup>231</sup> Ahmad expresses his high appreciation of public opinion by saying that, though it might be ignorant, it presents a better view than that of men of philosophy or the law (“Democracy of nature”).<sup>232</sup>

Lastly, regarding institutions, the only argument of any substance is to be found in “Parliamentary life.”<sup>233</sup> He points out that parliament has three roles: legislation, budget approval, and supervising the administration. He argues that the defects of the Egyptian parliament are that it has become a stage for intrigue by both ruling and opposition parties; that its members give priority to personal interests, for example, when making appointments while neglecting their duties as the representative body of the nation; and that it has come to be tossed around by the changing winds of circumstance, opportunity, and

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<sup>230</sup> See Safran’s rebukes and Enayat’s general support of Safran, in op.cit., Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, p. 133.

<sup>231</sup> “*al-Ray al-‘am*,” (sources n.a.) *Fayd*, vol.6, pp. 246-249.

<sup>232</sup> “*Dimuqratiyyat al-tabi‘a*,” *al-Risala* (7.2, 1934): *Fayd*, vol.1, pp. 105-109.

<sup>233</sup> “*al-Haya al-niyabiyya*,” *al-Hilal* (1&2, 1945): *Fayd*, vol.10, pp. 233-237.

human relations which do not necessarily reflect the interest of the country.

In the end, it may be fair to conclude that Ahmad had a straightforward comprehension of liberal democracy and did not put any particular effort into incorporating the concepts and values of modern democracy into Islam.<sup>234</sup> What he was not endowed with was a reality ripe enough to its fruition in Egypt; in particular, the independence that had been granted was only formal and British intervention in the political arena was a daily reality, whereas there was a lack of experience or real understanding of Western democracy among many political leaders. To use more contemporary jargon, it was unreasonable to expect a sense of civil society or an understanding that democracy is a very utilitarian process as well as an outcome.

#### Political and social values

Ahmad advocated establishing a new political morality under democracy, and commented on such values as justice, sacrifice, compromise, and “rights and duties.” He tried to give new color to the traditional political value of justice, and to introduce notions of sacrifice and compromise to the world of values. He also elaborated “rights” rather than “duties,” which was a complete reversal from traditional practice. On the other hand, he did not give other more traditional values in Western democracy, such as freedom, and philanthropy, their due weight as political values.

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<sup>234</sup> The incorporation of democracy into Islamic traditions has been a constant ideological trend since Rifa‘at Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi in the nineteenth century, and it culminated, among other works, in ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad’s book, *al-Dimuqratiyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1952).

### Call for morality

He called for the establishment of political morality, which should surpass the chauvinistic nationalism promoted by politicians and to relate to human beings world-wide, an idea preached by philosophers and men of religion, as well as specialists in sociology and ethics (“Political morality: its dominance today and its effect on the lives of peoples”).<sup>235</sup> From another angle, he called for a kind of morality which speaks in terms of “we” rather than “I,” and stresses social cooperation and implementation of duties, rather than individual effort and personal achievement (“Social morality”).<sup>236</sup> He continues to say that such social cooperation might lead to “sacrifices” of social significance and that this morality might make possible for the first time a self-rejuvenation of the East.

Reflecting upon some aspects of the traditional Islamic world view, he had to bring out a moralist reading of politics. I have referred several times to the fact that he had started his career as an instructor in ethics and that he wrote his first book on ethics. In spite of his evidently moralist bent, his only direct discussion of moral questions is found in a rather limited number of writings. In the articles mentioned above, “Political morality” and “Social morality,” he is very mindful of events taking place in Egypt and elsewhere. I would say that Ahmad’s moralist streak with regard to political matters is not so strong as to make his arguments a chain of abstract lessons and ideas. Among his famous contemporaries, for example, Taha Husayn contends that a struggle between the two norms

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<sup>235</sup> “*al-Akhlaq al-siyasiyya, saytaratuha al-yawm wa atharha fi hayat al-shu’ub*,” *al-Hilal* (3, 1936): *Fayd*, vol.10, pp. 180-184.

<sup>236</sup> “*al-Akhlaq al-ijtima’iyya*,” *al-Thaqafa* (4.20, 1948): *Fayd*, vol.10, pp. 155-158.

of justice and freedom was the root of the two World Wars, and al-‘Aqqad and al-Mazini go so far as to maintain that political education can be accomplished by the propagation of aesthetic values.<sup>237</sup>

#### Justice, sacrifice and compromise

Justice (‘*adala*, ‘*adl*) is discussed by Ahmad in a very contemporary guise from two angles, thereby painting this very traditional political value in a new color.

First, he argues that justice in society means the proper evaluation of each person’s merit and abiding by the principle of giving the right task to the right talent (“Justice”).<sup>238</sup> There are two parts to this, he says. In the first place, anything that works against appointing the ablest person and maximizing productivity, like considerations of seniority, nepotism, favoritism and partisanship should be discarded. In the second place, a sense of justice among each individual should be developed as the basis for the meritocracy mentioned above.

Second, he argues that social justice means the state fulfilling its duties to the people by enabling individuals to utilize their capacity to the full. This can be achieved by providing facilities for various kinds of social welfare (“Social justice”).<sup>239</sup> On the redistribution of income, he says that progressive taxation might be effective, though taken

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. op.cit., Safran, *Egypt in Search* ---, p.150.

<sup>238</sup> “*al-‘Adala*,” *al-Thaqafa* (8.19, 1941): *Fayd*, vol.3, pp. 87-91.

<sup>239</sup> “*al-‘Adala al-ijtima’iyya*,” (sources n.a.) *Fayd*, vol.6, pp. 263-266.

to extremes, this would become socialism. Though Ahmad was certainly not a socialist or ever make arguments concerning Marxism as such, he had a very favorable impression of British socialism.

Sacrifice (*tadhiya*) is a mode of action rather than a political value in itself, he regards it as a quasi-value. "Sacrifice"<sup>240</sup> emphasizes that the spirit of sacrifice and considerations of altruism could be markers of the level of development of society and state. However, it may be that personal interest may also provide a motive for making sacrifices, as in the sexual instincts of a female nurse treating a male patient. In fact, according to Ahmad, what counts is the outcome and not the motive, and even the presence of personal interest does not diminish the value of sacrifice; indeed, sacrifices can be made by those who find more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

In a democracy, compromise is such an important virtue that it deserves to be recognized among other values such as sincerity, bravery, and justice, although he suggests that neither the term nor the concept of finding a solution by agreement through mutual concessions are found in Arabic.<sup>241</sup> Ahmad discusses its equivalent in Arabic and comes up with the terms *musalaha* and *tasalluh*, trying to introduce this concept into a society where open power struggles were a daily reality. Though he does not actually relate this concept to the working of democracy, he promotes it through its Arabic equivalent, which is still used today, and counts it as one of the political values to be sought for itself, rather than as a modality for coming to agreement.

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<sup>240</sup> "al-Tadhiya," *al-Thaqafa* (2.3, 1942): *Fayd*, vol.3, pp. 232-236.

<sup>241</sup> "al-Musalaha," *al-Hilal* (3, 1938): *Fayd*, vol.1, pp. 137-142.

## Rights and duties

The question of rights and duties (*huquq wa wajibat*) is discussed in his Book of Ethics or *Kitab al-Akhlaq*, in which Ahmad argues that they are bound together, that is, each right a person enjoys makes it the duty of others to respect that right and, at the same time, he who exercises his rights must do so for the benefit of others as well as himself. He regrets that the latter duty is regarded mainly as an ethical matter while the former is addressed legally. In the same book, however, he is quite sketchy in describing duties, and he mentions them only in terms of duty to God and duty to society. On the other hand, his discussion of various rights is extensive: the right to life or natural right, the right to freedom (emancipation from slavery, national independence and the other civil freedoms of speech, gathering, opinion, press, political participation, etc.), the right to education, and some rights for women.

This seems quite a radical reversal from the traditional perspective in which people used to hear much more about duties than about human rights. However, the emphasis on duties rather than rights increased in the later years of Ahmad's life.

In discussing a happy society, Ahmad says that, though the connotations of happiness and unhappiness can vary, if all members of a society were to fulfill their rights and duties, this would be conducive to a happy society ("A happy society").<sup>242</sup> He further says that in contemporary Egypt, demands for rights are too often heard, while compliance with duties should be more stressed.

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<sup>242</sup> "*al-Mujtama' al-sa'id*," *al-Hilal* (5, 1948): pp. 81-88. (not included in *Fayd*.)

In another article, “Are we responsible for our social life?”<sup>243</sup> he argues that the social responsibility and duty of Egyptians is first to judge good and evil in a manner based upon reason and law, and second to endeavor to promote good and suppress evil. Such a conclusion prompts the question of the definition of good and evil. Ahmad does not elaborate here, but he seems to rely largely on conventional expressions such as “accepted and forbidden (*al-ma‘ruf wa al-munkar*),” which have been handed down since the days of the Prophet.

In discussing the value of the individual in society, he says that his criterion is based on whether or not one fulfills his duty, and not an individual’s social status. He explains his view by referring to the roles played by various figures in a fairytale, in which the beggar is no less important than the king as long as he plays or fulfills his role satisfactorily (“The world is a tale”).<sup>244</sup>

#### Some practical issues

Ahmad also voiced his views on realistic and practical questions. Here are some salient examples.

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<sup>243</sup> “*Hal nahnu masulun ‘an hayatina al-ijtima‘iyya?*” (sources n.a.): *Fayd*, vol.9, pp. 284-288.

<sup>244</sup> “*al-Dun.y.a riwaya,*” *al-Hilal* (2, 1954): *Fayd*, vol.9, pp. 85-87.



## Nasser and his revolution

During this period, Ahmad wrote three articles on the revolution and expressed his cautious optimism and conditional approval of the revolution as a prelude to true republicanism.

In 1947, he discussed the feasibility of a revolution in Egypt in a popular illustrated magazine, *al-Musawwar* (“We want another revolution”).<sup>245</sup> He is critical of the fact that twenty thousand guineas were spent on participation in the Olympic Games. The editor of the magazine responded to this article by saying, “We cannot agree with one of our modern thinkers, Ahmad Amin, since the Olympic Games are internationally recognized as an event which will work to prepare new ground for the new epoch”.<sup>246</sup>

On Nasser’s revolution, he first wrote expressing his approval of the general trend towards republicanism (“Monarchy and republicanism”).<sup>247</sup> This is because under a monarchy or the caliphate, only revolutions can prevent the concentration of power and authority in the hands of rulers, while under republicanism, leaders have a fixed period in office. Further, colonialism has a more amicable relation with monarchy as a tool of ruling those colonized than with republicanism.

His next article on the revolution was written a year later (“On the recent

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<sup>245</sup> “*Nurid thawra ukhra*,” *al-Musawwar* (4.18, 1947): p. 4. (not included in *Fayd*)

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. The editor’s rebuttal appears in the same issue of the magazine.

<sup>247</sup> “*Khawatir - al-malikiyya wa al-jumhuriyya*,” *al-Thaqafa* (12.22, 1952): *Fayd*, vol.9, pp. 256-257.

revolution”).<sup>248</sup> He says in it that the aim of the revolution must be the realization of social justice; thus, any unfairness and injustice, for example, perpetrated against universities at the whim of previous rulers, must be remedied. As to the political system, he clearly hopes that military will give way to a more natural system of constitutional and parliamentary government, and that Egypt would return to a form of political life run by experienced politicians and freely-elected members of parliament.

The last article on the subject, “Our first republic,”<sup>249</sup> calls for brotherly relations between a ruler and the ruled, and yearns for the joint endeavor of journalists, writers, and thinkers to help establish a genuine republican government in Egypt.

#### Arab unity

Ahmad had been one of the leading protagonists of Arab unity, and was interviewed on this topic together with Lutfi al-Sayyid and Muhammad Husayn Haykal.<sup>250</sup> However, his prime concern was cultural unity, and in this context he was director of the Cultural Department of the Arab League between 1947 and 1952.

In an article, “Leadership by Egypt”<sup>251</sup> written in 1936, he argues that Egypt is not aware of the expectations of other Arab nations but that she should carry the banner of

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<sup>248</sup> “*Khawatir - fi al-inqilab al-hadith*,” *al-Hilal* (7, 1953): *Fayd*, vol.9, pp. 119-122.

<sup>249</sup> “*Jumhuriyyatuna al-ula*,” *al-Hilal* (8, 1953): *Fayd*, vol.9, pp. 123-126.

<sup>250</sup> ‘*Abd al-Hamid al-Katib*, “*Hadith ma’a ustadh al-jil*,” *Akhbar al-Yawm* (8.6, 1977): p. 10.

<sup>251</sup> “*Misr tuhmil za’amtaha ‘ala al-bilad al-‘arabiyya*,” *al-Makshuf* (9.2, 1936): p. 14. (not included in *Fayd*)

leadership. Egypt should lead the movement towards cultural unification, because the elements of unity of language, literature, the religion of Islam, and basic political stands already exist among the Arab states (“Unification of measures between the Arab countries is the most important tool for the development of renaissance in the Arab East”).<sup>252</sup> Though still limited in numbers, Arab intellectuals should unite, and cultural unification would grow into spiritual unification, which would be more advantageous in coping with the West. In another article, “Cultural cooperation among the Arab states,”<sup>253</sup> he stresses the need to compile an Arab encyclopedia.

#### Public education

A keen interest in public education was a characteristic of Muhammad ‘Abduh, and was shared by many leaders of public opinion in Ahmad’s time. It was only natural, given their desire to enhance the intellectual standard of the people of Egypt, that intellectuals should first seek to promote an enlightened public opinion and secondly to create a sound basis for reform and development. As co-author, Ahmad wrote some twelve school textbooks mainly on history, literature, and language while he was teaching at the Egyptian University after 1926.

His most remarkable project was the establishment and management of the People’s

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<sup>252</sup> “*Tawhid al-wasail bayna al-aqtar al-‘arabiyya huwwa ahamm al-wasail li-taqaddum nahdat al-sharq al-‘arabi*,” *al-Hilal* (1, 1939): pp. 25-254. (not included in *Fayd*)

<sup>253</sup> “*al-Ta‘awun al-thaqafi bayna al-aqtar al-‘arabiyya*,” *al-Thaqafa* (1.3, 1949): pp. 5-7. (not included in *Fayd*)

University in 1945, when he was appointed director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Education. *Hayati* tells us that this was an evening university open to citizens, with classes arranged throughout the country and with approximately 17,000 registered students.<sup>254</sup> Though he resigned his office in the Ministry after about a year, Ahmad continued as the Chairman of the Board of the People's University until 1952.

His discussion of educational affairs, once again, did not dwell on institutional questions but mainly focused on the mental and moral aspects of learning. On university study, he says that its main objective is to carry out creative research and to build personality, and in that way differs from a school where the aim is to train and to learn ("A university as I imagine").<sup>255</sup> University students might be allowed to join nationwide political activities such as the revolutionary uprising against British forces in 1919, but they should stay away from petty partisan activities ("University and politics" and "A problem of students").<sup>256</sup> In another article, "A talk to young people,"<sup>257</sup> he says that youthful passion is the starting point of life and a basis for nation-building, and that one's later development will unfold accordingly. While bearing in mind that what makes a human being is not brain but mind and heart, in building a personality one should always try to nurture major virtues, though a good deal will depend upon heredity and environment.

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<sup>254</sup> Op.cit., *My Life*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>255</sup> "*al-Jami'a kama atasawwaruha*," (sources n.a.) *Fayd*, vol.1, pp. 65-69.

<sup>256</sup> "*al-Jami'a wa al-siyasa*," *al-Musawwar* (1.15, 1945): *Fayd*, vol.6, pp. 133-135. "*Mushkilat al-talaba*," *al-Musawwar* (3.7, 1947) p. 6. (not included in *Fayd*)

<sup>257</sup> "*Hadith ila al-shabab*," *al-Hilal* (12, 1935): *Fayd*, vol.10, pp. 380-386.

### Concluding remarks

One can summarize by saying that Ahmad's vision was the realistic, and sometimes practical, response of a modern Muslim to multifarious political and social issues. In particular, we have noted that one of his main thrusts on the subject was the enlightenment of the people. He argued vigorously on behalf of the idea that people themselves were responsible for the kind of government to be established, and called for enhancing general political awareness. Furthermore, he proposed a number of educational reforms, and was himself active in teaching and administration. He also attempted to eradicate some traditional notions, the workings of fate, as causes of poverty.

In spite of all this, out of nearly three hundred and fifty articles of commentary and criticism of Ahmad's work as listed in the bibliographical guide *A 'lam al-Adab al-Mu 'asir fi Misr*, only about fifteen are on this topic. Unlike the two other subjects, Islam and literature, his thoughts on political and social issues were not received with very great interest. On the other hand, Ahmad was given the epithet of "the Venerable Professor" (*al-ustadh al-jalil*), and occupied many key posts at the Egyptian Ministry of Education and the Arab League. Considering that he worked steadily on this matter and in view of his social standing, it would be fair to say that his writing and his radio programs must have quietly found their way to wide segments of the community. Rather than a symptomatic burst of emotion, the quiet and yet permeating effect of these appeals might be what enlightenment is all about and it would have been exactly what Ahmad strove for.

Another point to be raised here concerns his position on the harmonious relationship between reason and religious belief. He takes the view that reforms based upon reason must

be pursued even in religious traditions, while nothing should affect, and no suspicion be raised against, the core beliefs of Islam: an absolute submission to God and a belief in God as the unique and first cause of existence in the universe.

Though this view was apparently shared to varying degrees by many of his colleagues, it served as a strong fiber for tightly weaving the variegated arguments he presented on politics and society. In the end it is not an overstatement to say that he was actually trying to present a vision of politics and society that could stand without traditional allusions and assumptions. Hence, although Ahmad himself may have only be imperfectly aware of it, this vision might have turned out to be the real essence of his endeavor for the public's enlightenment.

### **Husayn and Islamic Radicalism**

Husyan's criticism of Islamic radicals is more empirical than theoretical or academic in nature, and in the end he made it clear why dialogue with them cannot lead to anything beneficial. He also had to argue some related issues, such as the institution of the caliphate as a system of government and those issues regarding relations with the Copts, who form some fifteen per cent of the population.

#### Criticism of Islamic radicalism

Husayn became vocal in criticizing Islamic radicalism in the early 1980s when such criticism intensified after the assassination of President Sadat. His most fundamental disagreement is with the radicals' belief in the applicability of the shari'a to contemporary

society, as we saw already in Chapter V of this study. In addition he argued against them in a number of other ways.

In 1983 he expressed his rejection and disdain for Islamic radicalism and terrorism in the clearest terms. It is too optimistic, he says, to think that those Islamic groups would be able to carry out reform measures; they are supremely ignorant of the fundamentals of religion since they read only cheap, trivial booklets, and not the classical nor the original texts; their foundation is very weak and their perspective is limited.<sup>258</sup>

Husayn's argument expanded when he published his book, *al-Islam fi 'Alam Mutaghayyir (Islam in a Changing World)* in 1988, a collection of essays and articles previously published on different occasions. In it, he said that the deterioration of education during the 1950s had given birth to the present radicalism, when the voices of those who claim secularism and Westernization, and who are calling for democracy and equality, did not appeal to the mind of the public. The defeat in the War of 1967 was a hard blow in many ways: especially, it made people think that Israel is a religious state. This awareness also led in part to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and elsewhere.<sup>259</sup>

What is most deplorable is the fact that many, including the Islamists as well as members of the revived Wafd Party, share a sense of nostalgia for their past glory. This mentality made them half-hearted in tackling contemporary problems, and consequently

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<sup>258</sup> Op.cit., "*al-Mushlika wa al-hall: hadir al-umma al-islamiyya*," *al-Musawwar* (10. 28, 1983): pp. 58-63.

<sup>259</sup> Op.cit., *al-Islam fi 'Alam ---*, pp. 158-161.

misled them in their evaluation of their past glories.<sup>260</sup>

Husayn tried to present the horrors of a society ruled by Islamic radicals in a one-act drama, entitled *Fi Bayt al-Qadi (In the Judge's Home)*, as mentioned in Chapter IV. It is a story of a couple who notice that their son has disappeared from the house after they have exchanged their views on contemporary society. They immediately become anxious, since, at school, teachers have been instructing pupils to report to police stations on anything that could be interpreted as critical of the Islamist movement. A society under their rule would be just another version of a police state, as the drama concludes.<sup>261</sup>

Criticizing radicals in such an outspoken manner could risk one's personal security, but Husayn dared to argue more thoroughly and explicitly in his book published in 1994, *al-Mawqif al-Hadari min al-Naz'at al-Diniyya* or *A Civilized Position towards Religious Trends*. He enumerated the reasons why there is no merit or benefit in engaging in dialogue with the radicals. There are those who do not wish to talk out of a fear that they might be made aware that their thoughts are wrong; many are too ignorant and shallow to carry out any meaningful or fruitful talks; there are those who refuse to talk because their personal interests are involved; many prefer to stay put in their comfortable environment; it is difficult to expect any good to come from talking to the Islamists since their linguistic and religious ideas are so bereft of common sense.

Having said all this, he reiterates that it might be possible to have a dialogue with

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., pp. 207-209.

<sup>261</sup> Op.cit., "*Fi bayt al-qadi (In the Judge's House)*," tr. by P.J. Vatikiotis, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25, no.1 (Jan. 1989): pp. 23-30.



those who are young and might therefore be flexible, who have a positive outlook towards the world. Thus, it is their attitude which decides the direction by acting as a navigating compass (*busala*). In the end, he had to repeat the same proposition that he had expressed many times in the past: it is most vital to separate what is essential, eternal and good at any time and in any place from what is temporal, diminishing, and fading, which burdens us and limits us and makes us blind on our way.<sup>262</sup>

The effect of the closing of the gate of *ijtihad* is that it suppresses the freedom of science, thought, and civilization, and further takes away the freedom of casting doubt and asking questions, and is thus against the injunction of the Qur'an. All these would be tantamount to avoiding one's responsibility to the next generation.<sup>263</sup>

### The caliphate and democracy

The question of the caliphate has been dealt with broadly in Chapter III of this study. 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq published his stormy book on the issue in 1925, *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm (Islam and the Fundamentals of Governance)*. After it was banned by al-Azhar, the book went into oblivion and the issue was not considered of much importance by the intelligentsia for quite some time. However, the question of reinstating the caliphate as a political system was spotlighted once again after the Islamists brought it back. In the eyes of the Islamists the caliphate symbolizes the longing of Muslims for the glorious past, hence their inclination to make it the core of the Islamic state. Almost all liberals have

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<sup>262</sup> Op.cit., *al-Mawqif---*, pp. 26.ff.

<sup>263</sup> Op.cit., *al-Mawqif---*, pp. 71-72.

responded negatively to the fundamentalists' desire to restore the caliphate, saying it is tantamount to dictatorship.

Their consensus is based on the observation that the caliphate as an institution has not been uniform throughout history: sometimes it worked on the basis of designation, as when Abu Bakr chose 'Umar, and sometimes by acclamation or *bay'a* among the people, as when 'Uthman was chosen after 'Umar. Furthermore, a hereditary succession became institutionalized when Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan appointed himself caliph in Damascus in 661 C.E.

It is worth mentioning that the caliphate is not mentioned in the Qur'an or *hadith*, which makes the position of the liberals vis-à-vis the Islamists easier. Significantly, it seems that al-Azhar has adopted a more flexible attitude toward the issue, particularly as opposed to the time of al-Raziq.

As to Husayn's argument, he elaborated on the issue by presenting his view in "A new reading of the book of 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq: *Islam and the Fundamentals of Governance*."<sup>264</sup> The main point of his argument is that al-Raziq only referred to the Qur'anic verses revealed in Makka and ignored those that came later in al-Madina. Certainly during the days in Makka, there would have been little need for political injunctions since, as Husayn points out, that was, before a regime had been set up. In al-Madina, however, the Prophet founded a state and the leadership there was not purely spiritual, like that of his fellow prophets. This is why, he continues, there are a number of verses relating to criminal

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<sup>264</sup> Op.cit., *Hawla al-Da'wa* ---, pp. 113-115.

penalties for those who committed theft or adultery, and some other regulations on the distribution of booty, the collection of alms, as well as provisions for the military.

In fact, in the Constitutions of Medina there are stipulations on, for example, the status of the Jews, and there came about many new revealed verses to the effect that the people should follow the Prophet, that is, the Qur'an verses: "Follow Allah and the Prophet, then you shall be given mercy" (3:132), "Those who follow Allah and the Prophet shall enter the heaven" (4:13), and "Fighting is now in order, though you might hate it. You might hate something which might be good for you, or you might like something which might be bad for you" (2:216).

What is at stake is the way to reconcile and harmonize the Meccan and Medinan verses. Husayn emphasizes that there was a development of the criteria and circumstances in which the verses were given, and al-Raziq had neglected the fact that the Prophet's calling (*da'wa*) also developed. There should be no contradiction or inconsistency in this process, since the later one, or the "extinguisher" (*nasikh*), overrides the previous one, or the "extinguished" (*mansukh*). In the end, it is clear that the principle of development should be accepted, and that this also applies to the question of the caliphate.

The above argument appears to be a somewhat roundabout way of asserting that the caliphate is no longer relevant in our day. It is grounded in the fact that social conditions are totally different now from those of the early period of Islam, when the Prophet carried out both political and religious tasks. al-Raziq refuted the applicability of the caliphate on the ground that it was not a part of the Islamic ordinance and because the Prophet's mission was purely religious. Hence Husayn had to criticize al-Raziq's discussion, which is, as

Husayn asserts, based upon a one-sided reading of the Qur'anic verses and, therefore, his discussion was not developed either accurately or logically. In the end, however, both came to agree in the end that the institution of the caliphate had no place in the twentieth century.

What goes hand in hand with the rejection of the revival of the caliphate because of its dictatorial character is the confirmation of the validity of democracy. Husayn does not find it necessary to stress this argument too emphatically, due, maybe, to its long history in previous generations. He refers to some who have voiced opposition to the establishment of democracy: in 1952, Sayyid Qutb wrote to Muhammad Najib in the new revolutionary regime, saying that Islam does not follow the rule of majority decision-making and that he finds democracy disgusting and hopes for a just autocracy, and Shaykh al-Azhar al-Sha'rawi declared publicly in 1982 that Islam and democracy were not compatible. Husayn rebuts these statements by claiming that democracy is imbedded in Islam as found in such Qur'anic verses as "those who consult (*shura*) each other [will be rewarded.]"(42:38) and "And consult them over matters." (3:159). He also makes a reference to the authoritative scholar al-Zarqawi (d. 1710), in stressing that, from the inception of Islam, the need for the constant renewal of political and economic systems had always been recognized.<sup>265</sup>

The occasion of his statement was a talk he was giving on the BBC Arabic service; he was most likely addressing not only Egypt but a wider audience including the states in the Persian Gulf, for example. In this sense, Husayn did not discuss democracy in Egypt any

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<sup>265</sup> Op.cit., Husayn Ahmad Amin, "*al-Shura al-Islamiyya---*," *BBC Arabic.com* (9.9, 2003).

further since he could be confident of its strength and legitimacy as derived from the past record of its argument in the country.

### The Copts

Another point shared by the liberals vis-à-vis the Islamists is the issue of national identity and unity. The question of the Coptic minority is also mentioned in Chapter III, included now as one of the questions made more acute by the presence of Islamic radicalism. A liberal would say that the Copts fought with other Egyptians in the wars against Israel, and are contributing considerably to the development of the country and the welfare of the nation. Then is it not, one may ask, only fair to treat them with equal legal standing?

Husayn argues in favor of protecting the equal rights of the Copts but from a perspective different from that of Faraj Fuda, who attached the highest value to the unity of the Egyptian nation. In the case of Husayn, the key issue was how to bring the notion of tolerance in religion and society closer to reality in Egypt.

In his book *Islam in a Changing World*, he first stressed that nothing had been taught about the six centuries of Coptic presence in Egypt between the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Islam. He says that people should regard ignorance as their prime enemy. As to an Arabic term for tolerance, *tasamuh* is often used; however, it retains the sense of looking down on other parties, as its English equivalent did when John Locke spoke about it in seventeenth-century Europe. Husayn instead proposes the term *mu'ayasha*, which refers to mutual existence and co-existence. He further asserts that it is a fantasy to believe

that religions naturally recognize each other's position and are prepared to carry out a dialogue for mutual understandings. Such mutual recognition was the product of a long history and the result of human rationality and secular consideration. Religious propaganda is essentially similar to colonialism. However, as is said in a proverb, one who does not know any land but his own, could not know his own very well either, hence, a true believer is he who knows other religions as well.<sup>266</sup>

A similar tenet is repeated in another book of his: *al-Mawqif al-Hadari*, published in 1994. In it, he says that the true solution lies in facing an ugly situation in a clear and candid manner. It is a bad habit of Egyptians that they tend to blame outsiders and foreigners or disclaim their responsibility by transferring it to the evil-mindedness of others and pretend that they are innocent. The term *mu'ayasha* or *i'tiraf* is suggested rather than *tasamuh* to refer to tolerance. It is nothing but a philosophical idea to claim that there are essentially no differences among the various religions and creeds, as it says in the Qur'an (109:6): "For you there is a religion (creed), and for me there is another religion (creed)." It is most important, however, that one respects others and this is the state of mind that determines one's level and stature. Religious tolerance is a product of mankind's long history, and a true believer is he who perceives the essence of other religions and then elevates his own through such perception and insight.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Op.cit., *al-Islam fi 'Alam* ... , pp. 172-176.

<sup>267</sup> Op.cit., *al-Mawqif* ... , pp. 80-82.

### A Shift in Balance

In the above discussion, one may observe an interesting tilt in the balance of arguments between the two writers.

Ahmad advocated “democracy” as he understood it, and tried to struggle against aristocracy, autocracy, and dictatorship. However, he was not concerned to reject the reinstatement of the caliphate in contemporary Egypt.<sup>268</sup> After ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq was excommunicated in 1926 for the publication of his book, *al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*, in 1925, Egypt’s intellectuals in general seem to have avoided the topic of whether or not the caliphate should be reinstated. The verdict by al-Azhar had its effect and was taken with due gravity, though probably very few believed that it would, in reality, come back. On the other hand, Ahmad spoke out loud his objection to Nasser after the revolution in 1952, saying that it was not normal and that Egypt should go back to parliamentary republicanism. He even used to mock Nasser’s broken Arabic, according to Husayn.<sup>269</sup>

As for Husayn, he rejected the caliphate directly, considering it a form of dictatorship. However, there were many other critics who spoke in the same tone of voice on the issue. Nonetheless, he never spoke ill of Mubarak in spite of his dictatorial system. It cannot be denied, though, that his policy tries to be benevolent and appears as though it works for the interests of the nation at large. Rather it is the Islamists who accuse Mubarak and his

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<sup>268</sup> In *Fajr al-Islam*, Ahmad mentioned the historical process of selecting the Rightly Guided Caliphs, but he did not argue whether it should be revitalized or not as a political issue. Likewise, he did not do so in any of his articles. Cf. op.cit., *Fajr* --- , pp. 252-255.

<sup>269</sup> Op.cit., *Fi Bayt Ahmad Amin* --- , p. 154.

political stance and modality of being overly secular and, essentially, not Islamic enough.

The change in the balance of argument I referred to above is clear: Ahmad was rather silent about the caliphate but was avowedly against Nasser, whereas Husayn is quiet about Mubarak but unmistakably against the caliphate. Both are staunch supporters of democracy, though, with their own concepts and with quite a few modifications of the typical Western model. This switch came naturally as both writers reacted to and survived in the currents around them. Their sincerity in trying to sustain their intellectual consistency might also have contributed to these symptoms.

Certainly their efforts may be well-justified, however, here suffice it to point out this phenomenon of a shift in emphasis between the two, and I do so simply because it gives us a more complete picture of the parameters of their concerns and discourses.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The intellectual history of our two writers has been studied in the context of their respective cultural and social backgrounds. Two further aspects remain to be elaborated as the conclusion of the study; firstly, the relation between father and son in thought and idea, which may be seen from both at an issue-specific microlevel and an overall macrolevel. The second aspect concerns their places in, and some future implications for, the currents of liberalism, secularism, and democracy in Egypt and the Middle East.

#### **From Father to Son: Microlevel and Macrolevel**

##### Microlevel

In previous chapters, we have seen a number of variations in the manner in which the relationship between Ahmad and Husayn was cast. Of course one could not expect any type of theoretical structure here, since its development was much more natural and flexible in nature, as most human relationships are. However, it would be of some interest to see exactly what took place within this intimate arena; furthermore, such a summary may help to clarify the understanding of a vital aspect of a modern Egyptian political trend:

liberalism.

Such an analysis is necessarily based on the observation of particular issues. In discussing religious belief, we noted that Husayn did not go far into the area, leaving it almost entirely to his father. Ahmad had dealt extensively with the issue and made his views public through twenty-three radio lectures which were broadcast in the months of Ramadan. Nonetheless, when it comes to the question of Shi'ism, while sharing with his father a historical assessment of its development as a product of political forces rather than a strictly religious movement, Husayn made it clear that his view on its genesis was very different. Ahmad seems to have relied to a very great extent on the works of European orientalist, such as Dozy, who claimed that Shi'ism started in Persia. Husayn asserted that it originated among the tribes of the southern Arabian Peninsula (which is more in line with current historical scholarship), and said in clear terms that his view should be differentiated from that of Dozy.

Husayn seems to have avoided a clash with one of the main tenets of the father's thinking, that is, an inclination to Sufism for its empathetic approach to religious belief. In general, Husayn is very critical about the kind of role played by Sufism in its long history, but he emphasized that he appreciated its positive role in the days of "sound" Sufism before the tenth century. As a historical evaluation, Husayn had to bring out both aspects of the role of Sufism, but he did emphasize its positive contribution during particular historical periods.

Ahmad was often described by his contemporaries as a "middle of the roader" and identified himself with the centrist school. Unsurprisingly, Husayn has ostensibly taken a

moderate stance towards the shari‘a, his major field of interest. He asserts that it should neither be applied in its entirety nor discarded either, as had been done in Turkey. He insists that we should take the essential part of it and throw away all the dust and rubbish piled upon it during the course of many centuries. In the end, both men have stated in the most unmistakable terms that the shari‘a must be interpreted flexibly with the full use of *ijtihad*, as has been done in various historical stages, including the time of the Prophet himself. Both would agree, that such flexibility is necessary to secure the rejuvenation of Islam and the means of its survival in the modern world.

After WWII, Ahmad expressed his distaste for Western civilization and an animosity to the West at large, though the effect was much mitigated, thanks to the publication of his book *al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, which called for a more humane civilization. In contrast, Husayn did not go along with his father’s anti-Western feelings. He had been rather busy fighting against the Islamists who were the most outspoken antagonists toward the West. Husayn has not uttered a word of criticism of the dictatorial regime of Mubarak, while Ahmad said he preferred a parliamentary republicanism, declaring that “[Nasser’s regime would] give way to a more natural system of constitutional and parliamentary procedure, and would revert to political life run by experienced politicians and freely-elected members of parliament.”<sup>270</sup> Husayn’s silence on the West and dictatorship is like a hidden land mine, ready to explode when the situation requires and when certain conditions are satisfied.

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<sup>270</sup> See note 248 in Chapter VII.

### Macrolevel

The next part of the analysis is based on a broad view. There is no question that the basic stance of liberal historian is the most salient legacy handed down from Ahmad to Husayn. One is probably able to cover the most vital facets as a liberal and a historian by employing the term “rationalism,” although this point has been taken up on several occasions and in various contexts throughout this study. Hence, let us now consider another aspect of the father-son legacy on a macrolevel.

When one considers the thought of Ahmad, it is quite impressive that he discussed most of his subjects in the broad context of Arab Islamic issues. His first major work was *Fajr al-Islam*, published in 1927. He continued his historiography of Islam and immersed himself in writing shorter articles in various magazines, including his own, *al-Thaqafa*. Throughout these writings, he never dealt with the topic of Egypt-first or Egyptianism as such, though he would not deny that he was an Egyptian and was an ardent student of nationalism in his youth, supporting both Mustafa Kamil and Sa‘d Zaghlul. At a later stage of his life, he also served as the Director of the Cultural Department of the Arab League. With this background, it would have been very natural for him to delve into the subject of Easternism and other Arab Islamic issues from an Arab rather than an exclusively Egyptian viewpoint.

This stance is in direct contrast with his son's work, whose principal focus is clearly on Egypt. Husayn took up the question of Islamic radicalism, but usually only as it related to Egypt; hence, even when he addressed the issue of the application of the shari‘a in general terms, his major antagonists were those radicals and extremists in his country.

Husayn did not take up Easternism itself.

Behind this overall change of outlook was, I believe, the major transformation of socio-political realities of Egypt, from an Arab-Islamic direction to an orientation towards the nation-state. It has been well studied by Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, who show that, after the lapse of the Egyptian “Renaissance” period in the middle of the 1930s, the tide had changed to supra-Egyptian Arabo-Islamism during the rest of the 1930s and 1940s. Gershoni and Jankowski emphasize the importance of the young professionals, *effendiyya*, many of whom came from rural areas carrying more traditional values with them, as well as world views which were Arabo-Islamic.<sup>271</sup> On the other hand, this was also the time of the development of so-called Pan-Arabism. Although the effect of Pan-Arabism coming from Syria and Iraq into Egypt does not seem to have been much incorporated by Gershoni and Jankowski in their conclusion to the book, it was nonetheless quite substantive.<sup>272</sup> Such major personalities as Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1964), leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists Party and the founder of the magazine, *al-Risala*, and one of the literati, Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890-1949) were among those who supported Pan-Arabism. The 1936 Arab rebellion in Palestine offered a concrete occasion to advance such views. The policy of Jamal Abdul Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s was the apex of the development of Pan-Arabism, though it was doomed to end with the collapse of his projects of unification with Syria and other Arab states.

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. op.cit., Israel Gershoni, and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining* -----.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213. Cf. Ernest Dawn, “The Formation of Pan-Arabist Ideology in the Interwar Years,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.20, no.1 (Feb. 1988): pp. 80-83.

By Husayn's time in the 1980s, it had become a well established fact that all Arab states exist as sovereign and independent, albeit with shared historical and cultural flavors and the existence of special ties among them. The nation-state has become the basic framework within which one is supposed to think and argue.

In Chapter IV of this study, when I described the paradigm shift between the two writers, I did so more on the basis of a consideration of their respective choices of subject. Now in this section of the conclusion, I ought to present here the large-scale paradigm shift between Supra-Egyptianism and Pan-Arabism to the nation-state as an essential background to the thoughts of both writers.

### **The Currents of Liberalism, Secularism, and Democracy**

Let us now look back to the thoughts of the two writers from the early part of the twentieth century down to its end, and evaluate them in the context of the currents of liberalism, secularism, and democracy: three dominant political and social questions pending in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East.

It should be stated from the beginning that neither of the two writers particularly worked to promote the cause of liberalism per se. This should surprise no one when one sees that even in modern European history, "Only perhaps in the nineteenth century did liberal political parties espouse policies directly derived from the political philosophy of liberalism;"<sup>273</sup> a philosophy that involves various principles, such as individualism,

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<sup>273</sup> Op. cit., Nigel Ashford (eds.) *A Dictionary of Conservative and Libertarian Thought* ---, p. 159.

rationalism, capitalism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, empiricism, and even agnosticism and, later, pluralism.

In the case of Egypt, liberalism or *al-libiraliyya* and liberals or *al-ahrar*, can be said to have two main features, while sharing many of the characteristics cited above. One is that they are regarded as being within the camp of Islamic reformism as against Islamic hard-liners, whether conservative Azharis or radical extremists. For Husayn, the foremost antagonists are the militant contemporary Islamic groups, while Ahmad was fighting against stagnant traditional trends in the broadest sense. Further, he was much concerned about retaining and rejuvenating religious belief as such, faced with the “onslaught” of science and secular rationalism. He emphasized the mode of thinking that espoused attaching the highest importance to reason, to the extent that it is maximized and then beyond that, relying on the benevolence and help of divine power. Husayn is most vehement in claiming a flexible interpretation and application of the shari‘a, as has been well documented in Chapter V. Both maintained that the essence of Islamic belief should be kept untouched and preserved safely against any encroaching rubbish and decay, while all other matters related to religion must be measured against the gauge of historical relativism.

The second feature of the two would be that *al-libiraliyya* worked to accommodate Western civilization and culture. This aspect was nonetheless more apparent in the case of Ahmad, since in his son’s time, toward the end of the twentieth century, Egyptians were already familiar with Western culture. In fact, so called Islamic extremists are often recruited from among young scientists trained in Western colleges and institutions.

However, a complication is introduced here, as the key point of the question shifts to

secularism. It may not be too hard to understand that Islamic radicals tend to equate the claims of liberals with those of secularists, meaning here more as nonreligious; but, as we saw, Egyptian liberals are not necessarily outright secularists since some, including Husayn himself, avowedly maintain their belief in Islam. Some liberals even cry out, “We are more Muslims than you [Islamists].”<sup>274</sup> On the other hand, it is also a fact that liberals commonly assert, for example, the necessity of giving equal rights to the Coptic minority, and of having diplomatic relations with Israel. The radicals, with their political ambitions, would not miss these points in order to gain some more favorable ground for their camp, and even start to call liberals “secularists,” while twisting the meaning of the term, secularism, making it equivalent to atheism and apostasy.

In modern times, Egypt has a history of several epoch-making cases of harsh criticism ending in excommunication on the basis of apostasy, starting from ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq in 1925 down to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in 1992-96. At times, the view of someone such as an Azhari shaykh might be taken as an official legal opinion, or *fatwa*, and might lead to direct action, as was the case with the assassination of Farag Fuda in 1992.<sup>275</sup>

Words often have their own power and destiny. Thus in the eyes of many Egyptians,

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<sup>274</sup> Op. cit., Ramadan, *Misr fi ‘Ahd al-Sadat* ---, pp. 293-303. The author, born in 1928, passed away in 2007.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. op. cit., Ami Ayalon, “Egypt’s Quest-----,” for the case of Abu Zayd. The issue of excommunication in Egypt in general, cf. Maurits S. Berger, “Apostasy and Public Policy in Contemporary Egypt: An Evaluation of Recent Cases from Egypt’s Highest Courts,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25 (2003): pp. 720-740. For the same question in Islam in general see. Rudolf Peters, and Gert J.J. De Vries, “Apostasy in Islam,” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, vol.17, Issue 1/4 (1976-77): pp. 1-25.



*al-libiraliyya* is seen almost as a synonym for apostasy or at least as a part of Western civilization and thus outside the Arab-Islamic heritage.<sup>276</sup> In fact, there is no denying that liberalism as a notion and a political idea did come from the West and admittedly it usually entails secularism and pluralism as its concomitant and essential components.

Democracy cannot escape from the same difficulty, in spite of its century-long argument and learning and a history of widespread public support in Egypt. It may be recalled that even the dictatorial statist, Abdul Nasser, was also a staunch supporter of *al-dimuqratiyya*. Like *al-libiraliyya*, democracy does not yet have a proper Arabic counterpart and both could easily be construed as a part of Western notions and civilization. Secularism is not much luckier, though it has the forcefully forged Arabic term *al-'almaniyya* or being this-worldly and mundane. It is now easily clothed in the garb of apostasy.

Husayn warns that the difficulty of liberalism is that it is often construed as entailing secularism by default and so gives an unavoidable impression of originating from the West. It often confines the realm of religious belief to the limited domain of the individual and her/his conscience. He criticizes the fact that “the cultured and liberal ones as often seen in any age and country, are only sitting down, and are keeping non-active and incapacitated, in spite of their happy enlightenment.”<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, he also accuses the ulama of not taking part in the Islamic debate since the nineteenth century, because their escapism and

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. op. cit., Fawzi M. Najjar, “The Debate on Islam-----,” pp.1-2.

<sup>277</sup>“*al-Ahzab al-siyasiyya wa qadiyyat al-tatarruf*,” *al-Musawwar* (4. 6, 1990): pp. 46-47, 65. (included in *al-Mawqif al-Hadari*) pp. 47, 65.

tactical silence provided a hot bed for the growth of coarse secularism in the country.<sup>278</sup>

It might not be too presumptuous to call a liberalism with such distinct difficulties and specific contributions to Egyptian society, “Egyptian liberalism,” and there is every justification for distinguishing it from its Western counterpart. Though the latter shares various ideological and economic bases such as Hellenistic philosophy, the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and the development of free trade, the fact remains that it is also discussed alongside a variegated group of liberalisms: British liberalism, Continental liberalism, East European liberalism, and American liberalism.

Furthermore, can “Egyptian liberalism” be expanded to be renamed “Muslim liberalism,” echoing the recent term “Muslim democracy”? Incidentally, this term refers to a specific mode of democracy prevalent in some Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia, where Islamic parties have won elections and assumed office.<sup>279</sup> It seems that the answer to the question above can be quite affirmative, with a view to ongoing efforts at “Islamic Reformation,” rather than taking the itemized approach of the Islamic reform of previous centuries.<sup>280</sup>

As examples of “reformationists,” reference should be made to the following names:

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<sup>278</sup> Op.cit., *Dalil al-Muslim* --- , p.264.

<sup>279</sup> Vali Nasr, “The Rise of ‘Muslim Democracy,’” *Journal of Democracy*, 16:2 (April, 2005): pp. 13-27.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought* (Den Haag: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). Abdou Filali Ansari, “The Sources of Enlightened Muslim Thought,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol.14, no.2,(April, 2003): pp. 19-33.

Muhammad Arkoun (b. 1929, Morocco), recently retired from teaching at the Sorbonne, who claims the new concept, “the social *imaginaire*,” to understand the prophecy from a synthetic view-point of history, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, et cetera; Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988, Pakistan), who asserted a theory of double movement (two levels, the moral and legal, in the word of God); ‘Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na‘im (b. 1948, Sudan) at Emory University School of Law, GA, USA, who calls for a primary role for civic reason in interpreting and applying the shari‘a; ‘Abduh Filali Ansari (b. 1946, Morocco), who works toward reviving the philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126-98), which has been traditionally rejected by Muslims as a dual truth (Reason refers us to religion since it cannot provide ethical guidance, but religious belief designates reason to enact ethics in this world ) but served in Medieval Europe as a basis for new insights; and ‘Abd al-Karim Soroush (b. 1945, Iran), who wants to make the followers of Islam more inwardly Muslim by enabling them to practice piety based on free adherence and personal commitment rather than custom, habit, and conformism.

Before closing, it might be appropriate to consider whether or not Egyptian or Muslim liberalism would be an effective tool of politics and a source of ideological innovation in the region. One of the initial sources of European liberalism was David Hume (1711-1776), who thought that nothing remains to a human being except his ability to use his or her senses. This ignited the incipient idea of individualism as well as a deep skepticism about human life, but this skepticism was saved by successive thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who asserted that reason should not be a slave to emotion, and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) who claimed that every opinion ought to have a hearing, so

that the best opinion will win out. Further, the market economy system and free trade as advanced by Adam Smith (1723-1790) were flourishing at the time. Muslim liberalism may be facing difficulties only to be surmounted by the great thinkers and ideologues who may appear in the course of the new twenty-first century.

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