Contending Intellectuals: State Formation and Cultural Transformations in Late 19th Century Egypt

by

Dina Fergani

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Dina Fergani 2014
Contending Intellectuals: State Formation and Cultural Transformations in Late 19th Century Egypt

Dina Fergani

Master of Arts

Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

2014

Abstract

The life and thought of the Egyptian intellectuals, Ali Mubarak and Abdallah al-Nadim, represented two intellectual trends that were emerging at the end of the century. They took shape at a critical time of history in which modernization projects gave rise to unprecedented social transformations and modern institution building. Although they both partook in the larger Arabic Nahda, and contributed in the formation of a public sphere that emerged at the intersection of state and culture, they had drastically different projects. Mubarak’s intellectual project was pinned on the state institutions’ intervention in educating the populace in order to achieve ‘national’ progress modelled on European ways. Nadim’s project on the other hand culminated in the need to build ‘national’ consciousness in order to sever the economic dependency on Europe, and to create politically autonomous ‘Eastern’ nations.
Acknowledgments

This thesis has been a challenging endeavor and would not have been possible without the productive environment provided by my advisor Prof. Jens Hanssen. I’m grateful for the help he provided through academic sources and useful comments. I would like to express my deepest appreciation for his continual guidance and support throughout the learning process. Both his enthusiasm for the research and his constructive criticism were essential for my intellectual growth and for discovering new channels of knowledge. His insights and expertise added considerably to my graduate experience.

A special thanks goes to the graduate administrator, Anna Sousa, for the help she provided throughout the period of the program.

I would also like to express my gratitude for all my colleagues. A special thanks goes to Hicham Safieddine for his continual encouragement and assistance, and for his helpful remarks that were inspirational in the process of writing. Additionally, a thank you to Ian Costa for all the stimulating discussions that were a continual source of inspiration, and to Amir Abdul-Reda and Zainab Coovadia for being understanding companions who greatly enriched my graduate experience.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my parents for the immense support they have given me on all levels.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. iii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1 Overture ................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

1.2 Ethnicity, Class Nexus, Political power and Intellectual formation ............................ 3

1.3 The State-Culture Dialectic .......................................................................................... 8

1.4 Elements of the Egyptian Public Sphere: From State Sponsorship to Popular control ... 9

1.4.1 The Theatre .............................................................................................................. 9

1.4.2 The Press Industry .................................................................................................... 11

1.5 Language: A Growing Site of Colonial Contestation .................................................. 12

Chapter 2 Ali Mubarak’s Thought: The State and the Intellectual ...................................... 15

2.1 The Life of Ali Mubarak (1823-1893) ........................................................................ 15

2.2 The Peasant and the Metropolitan Man .................................................................... 19

2.3 The East-West Dichotomy: Historic Reconciliation ................................................. 22

2.4 Ideology on Governance: The Benevolent Caliphate .............................................. 25

2.5 Progress: A Numerical Concept .................................................................................. 26

2.6 Language and the Bureaucracy: Towards a Merit-Based Social Mobility ................. 29

2.7 Theatre: Towards New Ethics of Modernity .............................................................. 32

Chapter 3 Abdallah al-Nadim’s Thought: Building National Consciousness from Below .... 36

3.1 The Life of Abdallah al-Nadim (1843-1897) ............................................................. 36

3.2 National Language and Anti-Colonial Consciousness ............................................ 41

3.3 Language and Political Independence ...................................................................... 43

3.4 The East-West Dichotomy: Colonial Contingencies ................................................. 47
Chapter 1
Overture

1.1 Introduction

In 1882, at the height of a political crisis instigated by an army revolt and the looming shadow of military invasion, a contention arose between two of Egypt’s most prominent public intellectuals of the time: Ali Pasha Mubarak and Abdallah al-Nadim. Mubarak chose to side with the Khedive and the British against the nationalist government that briefly came to power following the Urabi revolt, which aimed at “diminishing European economic and political influence, establishing consultative government domestically, and securing a fairer deal from the ruling Ottoman-Egyptians for the various groups and classes that supported it”.¹ Mubarak denounced Urabists as “selfish mischief makers” who dared call for spreading “the banner of justice and equality over both the powerful and the weak”. Nadim stood firmly behind the Urabists and decried Mubarak as a “traitor”.² But in the books of the pro-British government that replaced the nationalist one and in which Mubarak served as minister of public works, it was the Urabists who betrayed their country. Accused of affiliation with the Urabists and facing an arrest order, Nadim fled Cairo, the city whose urban space had been shaped by his newfound rival Mubarak. He would spend the next nine years hiding in the rural delta. The stark contrast between the two men’s political fates was not a simple matter of narrow political choices between the warring parties, but reflected a much larger ideological conflict that was waged in 19th century Egypt.

The life and thought of these two figures represented two intellectual trends that were emerging at the end of the century. They took shape at a critical time of history in which modernization projects gave rise to unprecedented social transformations and modern institution building. Both contributed in the formation of a public sphere that emerged at the intersection of state and culture. The state was modeled by the ruling classes, but the political elites had to engage with


the multiplicity of cultural formations in order to govern society. This tension prompted different reactions from Egyptian intellectuals. Taking Ali Mubarak and Abdallah al-Nadim as case studies, it becomes clear that some intellectuals prioritized state control over cultural formations, while others negotiated the political possibilities and pushed for different cultural projects and visions of the nation. Both Mubarak and Nadim were engaged in the formation of the “national” but through different projects. Both intellectuals participated in disseminating ideas in public through novels, journal articles, and - in the case of Nadim - play writing. Given the importance of these cultural productions in shaping different ‘national’ projects, the purpose of this research is to analyze their literary productions in order to understand the different intellectual ventures they represented.

Abdallah al-Nadim was the founder of Egypt’s first national popular newspaper, while Ali Mubarak was the founder of Egypt’s first unified national educational system. Both were at the centre of the struggle to create the cultural milieu of the modern state following Ismail’s (1863-1879) modernization projects. Mubarak and Nadim are both seen as figures of the Egyptian nationalist intellectual formation and as proponents of the larger Arabic Nahda. The two figures and their projects are interwined in historiography, including the influential work of Timothy Mitchell who portrays both figures as members of the same class of intellectuals in his seminal book Colonizing Egypt. According to Mitchell, this class was both perplexed by - and internalized- the powers of modernity and colonialism. If Mubarak’s colonial affiliation and connection to the ruling class was perhaps obvious, Mitchell claimed that other intellectuals of lower statures, such as Nadim, still shared similar internalized colonial ethics. He pointed out two factors that shaped the context of most of the 19th century intellectuals: their relationship to British colonization and their relationship to the crowds of lower classes. He noted that most intellectuals, who constituted the emerging middle class, belonged to families of officials, merchants or landowners who actually benefited from both the new economic structure and the societal order imposed by colonization. For them disorder, and not foreign occupation, was the main concern and specifically the disorder of the uncontrolled crowds on the streets.  

---

4 Ibid., 116.
milieu of these intellectuals, where knowledge was formed and diffused, were social and literary salons where, “they mixed with fellow government servants, magistrates, and prosecutors, with members of some of the country’s important Turkish families, with British officials, and with visiting Orientalist scholars.”

Mitchell considers Nadim guilty of colonial acquiescence by virtue of the latter working in the British telegraph company. According to that narrative, Nadim’s journalistic career was shaped by the colonial episteme since the institution of journalism was introduced into modern society as an extension of the telegraphic mechanism of codifying language. The institution’s aim was to consolidate truth and political power through the introduction of a mechanical language. However, this narrative of intellectual history glosses over the different complexities that were taking place. Apart from homogenizing the intellectual class and giving them one possible epistemic framework, the societal processes are de-historicized and reduced to an almost mechanical process dictated by the colonial power/knowledge nexus. Certainly, the intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century were working within the context of colonization and modernity, and the fragile space between them, but the story did not end there. The intellectual milieu in Egypt, I will argue, was not exclusively formed by internalizing colonialism, as it was also formed through the creative appropriation of its power relations. The current study examines other possible narratives that might explain the complex social and intellectual formation of this critical period. The textual findings can reveal that although intellectuals yielded to the institutional conditions of modernity introduced by both the Khedival state and the British colonization, there was a space to fashion them in different ways.

1.2 Ethnicity, Class Nexus, Political power and Intellectual formation

Mubarak and Nadim’s lives were affected and controlled by the power dynamics and reshuffling of the social classes along ethnic lines. Modern Egypt underwent a number of elite transitions. The first phase took shape starting the thirteenth century, when Egypt had been ruled by the

---

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, 143-144.
Mamluks and the Ottomans - two dynasties with Turkic speaking elites. Although the population spoke Arabic, the ruling classes came exclusively from Turkic speakers from various parts of the Ottoman Empire, and were distinguished from native Egyptians by privileges as they monopolized the high positions in the army and the bureaucracy. The situation remained the same until the late days of the reign of Muhammad Ali (1805-1849) when native Egyptians were gradually incorporated into the higher ranks of the army and the bureaucracy. Muhammad Ali’s ascend to power had been a result of the European defeat of the Mamluk’s power, particularly Napoleon’s invasion of 1798. Ali never forgot this fact, and as a result commenced building a modern military machine following the European methods. His biggest challenge was the lack of cadres and soldiers that can maintain such an army, especially with the limited numbers of Turks living in Egypt. He recruited European advisors and conscripted Egyptian peasants to the army. He also instituted training programs and schools, and sent students to be educated in Europe to fill the various needs of the army. Ali Mubarak’s intellectual life and public career, as I show later in more detail, was a product of this long-term project of institution building. He became the first native Egyptian to ever hold a ministerial position following the modernization of the state by Muhammad Ali.

The third phase of the social reconfiguration occurred with the advent of European powers both on the epistemological and physical levels. Deeper modernization of Egypt that started with Khedive Ismail was based upon the transfer of European knowledge and machinery. To acquire such knowledge and technology, the government had to make use of European technocratic power and moneylenders, which gave them an increasing political power. The bureaucratic changes reflected the epistemological changes. The traditional method of administrative

---


9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
recruitment based on loyalty to the ruler was challenged by one that privileged expertise. Scientific knowledge became a necessary requirement for administrative service, which privileged people with European education and languages. The structural changes in Egypt reflected similar regional transformation taking place through the Ottoman Empire that came to be known as the tanzimat. These changes gave rise to a new class of local and regional administrative cadres who began to view themselves as native representatives. In the new bureaucratic order, state education began to challenge ethnicity as the criteria for gaining high social standing. Native Intellectuals, such as Ali Mubarak, joined state institutions and rose to high standing thanks to their education. Groomed by the state in schools for the gifted, they were able to envision themselves as ‘citizens’ in the modern sense of the word and imagine themselves as equal subjects of the state, regardless of their social or racial background.

As early as Muhamad Ali’s reign, the new notion of merit-based social mobility was disseminated in a way that created a façade of equal standing between subjects, specifically between the Arabic speaking Egyptians and the Turks. When the Arabic-speaking Egyptians first became incorporated into the administration, some Turks refused to work with them, which made Mohamed Ali address them as follows,

I hear that some of you...have begun spreading rumors that the nazirs of qisms are [only] Arabs while "we are Turks"...you have asked how is it possible for Turks to be placed under the administration of Egyptians? Do you not know that many other Egyptians have had government office and done well?"

The fact that they owed their positions to their expertise, which made “do well”, might have given them a staunch technocratic mentality. This mentality made them see the world in the binary of problems and solutions. The solutions envisioned were bureaucratic in nature, meaning that they revolved around finding the right technique and achieving a harmonic order. The native bureaucrats were aware that their high status was acquired through a process of self-

14 Ibid, 281.
15 Hunter, "Egypt's High Officials in Transition", 284.
reform.\textsuperscript{17} This reform carried out through formal education had to be passed on the entire population allowing all to enjoy the state’s welfare. The divergence between the Turkish and the Arabic attitudes can be seen when Adham Pasha, a Turk, expressed utter surprise when Ali Mubarak started teaching lower rank soldiers reading and writing, a job that Adham considered as lowly.\textsuperscript{18} Mubarak explained that his motive was to educate Egyptians and show them the benefits of scientific knowledge transmitted within a bureaucratic framework.\textsuperscript{19} According to the intellectual trend he belonged to, Egyptians’ status would be improved by the ‘right’ education, which he saw as analogous to Egypt’s agriculture that would be improved by the ‘right’ irrigation system.\textsuperscript{20}

If Ali Mubarak’s European education allowed him to imagine himself as a ‘citizen’ of state, Nadim presents an example of the intellectuals who were excluded from the system of bureaucratic ‘equality’. Nadim grew up in a social milieu that was a product of the third phase of social fashioning, and in it Europeans and landed gentry constituted the upper classes. Most of the Egyptian lower and middle classes were distanced from power positions. He never managed to assimilate into the new state structure the same way Mubarak did. Those who did not have access to European education, like Nadim, envisioned the world through a different binary from that presupposed by the bureaucratic mentality. For Nadim and intellectuals of a similar disposition, the binary was between the exploited and the exploiters, i.e. the natives and their rulers, who were often non-natives. This difference translated into two projects, one focusing on reform through technocratic ways, while the other focused on the anti-colonial or anti-imperialist struggle.

It is hard to escape the impression that Abdallah al-Nadim and the entire intellectual trend he represented were affected by the anti-imperialist ideology of al-Afghani. Although Afghani’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 282.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 282.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 285.
\end{itemize}
anti-imperialist stance was Islamic in essence, Nadim broke with his religious ideology and labeled some of his beliefs as “heretic”, while at the same time praising his agitation of the people to revolt.21 Nadim also admired and followed Afghani’s belief in ‘the glory of the Orient’. Afghani’s political ideology adopted by Nadim stemmed from a need to set the East on the path to progress through achieving two political goals: fighting internal despotism and western imperialism. Within these projects there were certain concerns that both Nadim and Afghani shared. They both rejected the assumed western superiority that was expressed through historical narratives and manufactured the modern East-West dichotomy. They also shared the belief that most of western political ideologies and scientific advancements had Eastern or Islamic origins.22 And they both admired the concept of a strong central state with substantial political power, a power that both the old Islamic Empire and the modern European nations possessed.23 Nadim was also affected by Afghani’s despise for classifying people based on sects.24 Afghani generally conceived of a wide eastern unity that would transcend sectarian divisions, which he considered as a tool in the west’s hand to advance imperialism.25 It was perhaps this conception of unity that made Afghani’s Islamic anti-imperialist response transcend Islamic community. Many of Afghani’s disciples, were non-Muslim, coming from different eastern communities such as Jews, Babis, Christians and freethinkers.26 Nadim, just like Afghani, concentrated on ‘eastern subjectivity’ in his pursuit of the anti-colonial struggle.

The difference in attitudes between Nadim and Mubarak towards social transformation was thus both a matter of how the entire social formation of a colonized society was conceived (native versus non-native), and a matter of the ideal instruments of change (state institutions versus societal engagement). Mubarak saw the state as an apolitical institution that was capable of diluting the evils of subjective rule, personal desires and what he perceived as inequality. For

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 42.
23 Ibid, 41.
24 Ibid, 38.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 43.
him building institutions was the tool for national progress and social change. His perception of institutional building overlooked the complexity of the colonial context. He assumed that institutions were working in social vacuum, devising technical ‘solutions’ for societal ‘problems’. He did not critique the existing power relations under the colonial setting in relation to these problems. He took what Mitchell called “the state effect” at face value, and perceived the state as a structure of nonmaterial institutions and organizations that were separate from the “material world of the society”. Nadim on the other hand viewed society and its cultural productions as the agents of change. He defined societal problems in relation to colonialism and the larger imperial setting. For him, national progress was attained through building a collective political consciousness. This consciousness would strengthen native selfhood that would oppose colonial powers, and hence overcome the nation’s problems. Such a divergence does not imply the existence of a sharp distinction between state and society/culture as categories of analysis. It actually reasserts that overlapping of both and the active contestation of their boundaries by both intellectuals and their contemporaries.

1.3 The State-Culture Dialectic

It would be hard to pinpoint where state and culture intersected, but it will be impossible to treat them as separate categories especially with the manner of their development in Egypt at the turn of the century. What was first introduced as state based projects aiming to expand capitalism and articulate centralized rule carried with them cultural ramifications, which shaped in turn how intellectuals imagined ‘national’ projects. The institutions of the railway and the telegraph for instance had deep cultural repercussions. Apart from centralizing power and opening new markets, they created a physical connection between distant territories. For the first time it became possible for varied cultures, economies and languages to be exposed to each other in a direct and relatively facile way. The railway that connected the urban centers, the delta and Upper Egypt provoked an idea of a ‘national’. As historian of modern Egypt, Ziad Fahmy, put it,


perhaps the most important social ramification of this institution was the sense of increased physical connectness on the national level, which allowed an average villager to broaden his perspective from a regional to a larger national imagination. With the transmission of goods for the expansion of capital came the transmission of people and ideas.\textsuperscript{29}

Moreover, the state in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was impersonated in the khedive, and the sponsorship of cultural activities by him and his family members made them lie within the state’s control.\textsuperscript{30} These activities were carried out in both the public institutions introduced by the state into the urban fabric, such as theatres and the opera house, and through informal cultural salons. Understanding this is significant when trying to articulate the position of intellectuals who did not directly engage in the cultural planning dictated by the state through its official institutions. Intellectuals such as Mubarak were acting on behalf of the state especially through official ministerial posts; for example he had the power to set the form of the educational system, and send official recommendations on which theatrical plays to ban. Nadim on the other hand never held an official ministerial position, but engaged with cultural salons that were often sponsored by princesses from the royal family. Through this state-culture interaction, both Mubarak and Nadim subscribed to a project of manufacturing consent for a new imagined national. The cultural expression of this national formation was done through print (press and novels) and performing arts (theatre), and together they formed the emerging cultural public sphere.\textsuperscript{31}

1.4 Elements of the Egyptian Public Sphere: From State Sponsorship to Popular control

1.4.1 The Theatre

The theatre was a royally sponsored project as its expansion was linked to the public institutions created by the state. Khedive Ismail, aided by Mubarak’s planning, instituted among other things the Cairo Opera house, a circus and a small theatre in Azbakiyya garden.\textsuperscript{32} In 1870, Ya’qub

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 26.


\textsuperscript{31} Fahmy, \textit{Ordinary Egyptians}, 16.

\textsuperscript{32} Mestyan, “Arabic Theatre in Early Khedival Culture”, 119.
Sannu’ established Egypt’s first Arabic theatre company. The project was still under the umbrella of the state since Sannu’ was funded by Ismail, who also gave him the title of the ‘Egyptian Moliere’. Sannu’ even performed for the Khedive’s private stage in Qasr al-Nil. However, this amiable relation did not last long. The government banned the theatre’s activities in 1872, as the plays were heavily critical of the Egyptian ruling classes and the elites. In the same year, he established the organization of ‘The Circle of Progress’ with the aim of discussing politics. Because Khedive Ismail was heavily criticized in their discussion, the government banned the organization. Colonel Ahmed Urabi reportedly attended the meetings of the circle and participated in its discussions.

The relationship of the performing arts to the state lay in the realm of the “operatic state” or the “theatre state”. The newly created public spaces stood as symbol of the state’s political power and were used to legitimate it. Ali Mubarak shared in both the urban planning that positioned these institutions and was also a strong advocate for the theatre in his writings. The content disseminated through these buildings were conceived of as an instrument of civilization and progress, not a mere tool of entertainment. In a way it was a tool of public education and edification. Operas and theatres aimed at legitimizing an elitist conception of nationalism through a theatrical technique that mobilized a central historical event, be it a war or a myth, to evoke national pathos that was embodied by the rulers. Not only was the theatre introduced as an institution of state, but it also lay in the realm of cultural imperialism. The civilization mission it advocated derived its values from the western civilization. The ontology of state theatre itself was embedded in an assumption of western superiority. The theatres that were first built in the urban centers in Cairo and Alexandria were dedicated to amusing the European colonies and the Egyptian upper classes through performing European drama. By contrast, when the Arabic

---

33 Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 45-47.
34 Ibid, 47.
35 Mestyan, "Arabic Theatre in Early Khedival Culture", 120-123.
36 Ibid, 127.
theatre was established in 1870, it was not given priority, and its proponents were only given a chance to perform if no European alternative was available.

The story of the theatre does not end here, as the theatre discourse produced alternative forms of cultural expressions. Due to its anti-order contents, the Arabic theatre was frequently challenging the khedival state; so much so that Draneht, the superintendent of the European khedival theatre, put an end to the experiment of the Arabic theatre.\textsuperscript{38} The only time the Arabic troupe was officially promoted was during the short period of Urabi’s government, and as soon as nationalist government was defeated the Arabic theatre was banned again. The theatre of Sannu’ and the one play written by Nadim represented an alternative disposition that took this public institution a step further and attempted to use it for subversive measures. The theatre, which was under tight surveillance and saturated with policemen night and day would be a source of expression of anti-khedival plots.\textsuperscript{39} In his conception of theatre, Nadim viewed the carnivalesque street shows as the ancestors of the art of theatre. Ali Mubarak rejected this form of art and viewed modern theatre as its antithesis.

1.4.2 The Press Industry

The First Egyptian newspaper \textit{al-Waqai’ al-misriyya} was established in 1828 as a governmental publication circulating official reports. It was only under Ismail’s reign that private newspapers and publications were established for public consumption. By the end of his rule, eleven Arabic newspapers and sixteen European ones were established. Five years later, the number of Arabic publications increased to twenty-one, and in the 1890s they reached more than 163 periodical. Most of these periodicals were based in Cairo (78%) and Alexandria (9%).\textsuperscript{40} The formation of private journals was closely linked to the wave of Syrian migration to Egypt. In the second half of the century, a large number of Syrian intellectuals migrated to Egypt and boosted the press culture independently from the state. The founders comprised a new class of Arab intellectuals who graduated from the same institutions in Syria and shared similar worldviews. Egypt

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid

\textsuperscript{39} Mestyan, "Arabic Theatre in Early Khedival Culture", 121

\textsuperscript{40} Fahmy, \textit{Ordinary Egyptians}, 30-31.
attracted this educated class because it was out of reach of Ottoman censors. The functions of the postal office came to be closely linked to the telegraph and the press industry. Muhammad Ali was the first to introduce postal services to Egypt, and initially it was exclusively used for governmental purposes. By 1843, Poste Europeanne, a private company, provided postal service for the public between Cairo, Alexandria, the Delta and Upper Egypt. The Egyptian government bought the company in 1865 and renamed it “Egyptian Post office”. The post office fulfilled the needs of the growing press industry. On average almost a third of the mailed material consisted of periodicals, which mostly emanated from Cairo to the peripheries.41

Unlike books, periodicals and newspapers were at the intersection of print and oration. Many publications utilized the colloquial language and adopted the dialogical form that was well suited to be read out loud. This put the press at the centre of the public sphere and its social interactions. The printing technologies were introduced and proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century, when old practices of reading were still prevalent. The reading of the printed material was not only an individualistic act carried out by the literate members of the society, but also it was part of communal forms of reading. Reading rooms were found in various cities and villages in Egypt and Syria and several parts of the Ottoman Empire. In these rooms periodicals and articles were read aloud and discussed by various people.42 The publications were also available in public places such as coffee shops, barbershops, and shoe shining places. Such practices meant that the volume of readership was much higher than issue-based circulation figures. To quote Mikhail Sharubim (d.1854) and Egyptian chronicler: “If you walked by a workshop, a low class café, or a carriage stop, you inevitably see someone surrounded by a crowd, and reading aloud from one or more of these newspapers.”43

1.5 Language: A Growing Site of Colonial Contestation

New forms of social and cultural expressions such as theatre and the press triggered and were themselves transformed by debates and disagreement over the function of language in the

41 Fahmy, Ordinary Egyptians : 26-27.
42 Makdisi, The Eastern Mediterranean, 36.
43 Ibid, 35.
process of modernization and state building. The socio-political situation at the end of the 19th century brought certain linguistic issues to the forefront. Arab writers who encountered a colonial literary aesthetic were faced with new challenges and debates. The main issues were how to adapt the Arabic language to modern scientific progress, how to ward off the growing power of foreign languages and how to simplify language and grammar to suit the modern educational system and the emerging printing industries. These debates were part and parcel of the discourse of the Arab Renaissance, Nahda. In this discourse, language came to embody the nation, which would develop only when the language does. The press was the engine of this debate, especially its innovative techniques. Through the press, intellectuals realized and discussed the status of the Arabic Language and its future articulations. Nahda intellectuals, such as Ibrahim Yaziji, went as far as to suggesting to produce a dictionary exclusively for the language of journalism. Recreating both the nation and the language came together in the press industry.

Language was not just a debate aiming at building the identity of the nation but it was at the core of the colonial encounter and the dialogue with the West in general. In Egypt, this encounter took a more vital turn in the Willcocks affair of 1892. William Willcocks, a British engineer and advisor to the Egyptian ministry of public works, gave a speech at the Azbakiyya club delegating the absence of innovation among Egyptians to the stagnant status of their language. To overcome this obstacle, Willcocks suggested that colloquial Egyptian Arabic should be recognized and utilized as the official language instead of classical Arabic. Other western scholars took up this debate to the level of execution. In 1897, an American by the name of Fiske published “an Egyptian Alphabet for the Egyptian people” attempting to replace the use of classical Arabic with colloquial. Nahda writers were quite aware of this colonial dimension and the debate of


46 Ibid, 82.


48 Ibid, 89.
the use of colloquial versus Classical Arabic animated their journals. Yaziji argued that a simplification of Arabic script or use of colloquial would benefit the foreigners rather than the ‘nationalists’. This simplification would make the language more exclusive, as only a minority who has access to modern education will learn its grammar and syntax. Classical Arabic was more accessible in his view since the majority of the Arab populations learned it through their religious education.\(^4^9\)

Language was deeply rooted in the colonial episteme that encroached on the local intellectual sphere. Lord Cromer who was the defacto colonial ruler of Egypt was aware of the power of language in colonization. He ascribed the French’s successful control over the minds of the Egyptians- something the British could not do in the same manner- to the spread of the French language and thus its manners and practices.\(^5^0\) The colonial encounter on the linguistic level represented a form of cultural imperialism. The act of translation of European languages, texts and epistemes to Arabic were done on unequal terms.\(^5^1\) What was translated was not equivalent to the original, but the European languages of the colonizers held more power and appeal. Ali Mubarak’s intellectual engagement upheld this cultural imperialism as will be discussed in chapter two. He often translated Islamic history, Egyptian history, clothing, and customs into the European. Abdallah al-Nadim also invoked language as a factor in determining the degree of the political independence of a nation from colonial powers, as will be discussed in chapter three. Mubarak viewed language as a tool for social improvement, while Nadim viewed it as the essence of people’s sociability.

\(^{49}\) Ibid, 94.

\(^{50}\) Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming words : Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 152.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 13.
Chapter 2

Ali Mubarak’s Thought: The State and the Intellectual

2.1 The Life of Ali Mubarak (1823-1893)

Ali Mubarak was born in Birinbal al-Jadida, a village in the province of Daqahliya in the Nile delta away from the urban centres. His father held the position of the local Imam and his entire family came from the ranks of ‘ulama. Mubarak claimed in his autobiography that from an early age, he rejected his family’s mode of life and aspired to leave their ways behind. Although he was groomed to inherit his father’s position, he fled religious education in hope of joining the state bureaucracy. In his autobiography, he mentioned his desire to become a katib, a governmental scribe, since they enjoyed higher prestige among the people. Mubarak’s future aspirations were not necessarily financial, but always related to a kind of upward social mobility that would move him closer to the ruling classes. To put it in his own words, “I deliberately chose to not become a Faqih (a religious scholar). I decided to be a Katib instead since they are better attired, enjoy higher authority and are close to the rulers.”

As a scribe, young Mubarak helped governmental officers collect taxes and measure agricultural lands. When his boss failed to give him his salary for three month he deducted it himself from the money he collected; a decision that led him to jail. This incident had a huge impact on his life, not only because of the tribulations of imprisonment but also because he met Anbar Effendi. Anbar Effendi was a black police officer of Ethiopian origins who spoke “eloquent Arabic”. “I was amazed by how [the most wealthy and prominent of the village] obeyed him and were completely under his authority. It was my first time seeing or hearing such a thing. I had thought


53 Ibid, 5.

54 Ibid, 7.

55 Ibid, 8.
that ruling officials had to be Turkish”\textsuperscript{56}. After inquiring about Anbar, Mubarak learned that he was a slave who belonged to a royal princess, and was able to reach such a high position because she enrolled him in the modern al-Qasr al-Ayni school.\textsuperscript{57} The path of Education appeared to him to transcend racial boundaries: if a black slave could achieve social power, so could he. Anbar Effendi provided Mubarak with a model for his ultimate dream. For him, Anbar embodied a possibility that went beyond coming near the ruling classes; he opened for him the possibility of becoming an actual member of that class.

After being released from a short imprisonment for appropriating his employer’s money, Mubarak asked his employer for a vacation from which he never returned. Instead, he ran away in search of modern education. He managed to join Minyat al-Izz modern school. Soon after, his father found his whereabouts and brought him back home by force.\textsuperscript{58} The persistent Mubarak ran away for a second time to go back to school. In 1836, as a result of his dedication and hard work, he managed to join \textit{al-Qasr al-Ayni} preparatory school in Cairo.\textsuperscript{59} Being in the imperial capital helped bring him a step closer to the centre of power. Three years later he joined the \textit{Muhandiskhana}, a polytechnic higher institute where he stayed for five years and pursued the study of engineering. In the institute Mubarak expressed his admiration for the use of the printed texts in education. He reminiscenced in his memory that printing technology played a major role in improving his skills, as it helped him overcome difficulties he previously had with oral traditional education.\textsuperscript{60}

In 1844, Mubarak was faced with a tough choice; he had to choose between teaching at the polytechnic institute for a high salary, or accompanying the royal princes to France on a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Kenny, “Ali Mubarak”, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 38.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The scholarship was offered by Muhammad Ali Pasha to distinguished students. Mubarak chose to continue his education regardless of the small stipend, since he considered education as the key for personal merit and upward mobility. He spent two years in Paris in which he mastered French, two more years in the military institute in Metz, and a final year working with the French Army. His stay in Paris exposed him to the intellectual and scientific debates of post-revolutionary Europe. We know for sure that as a young scholar he was reading the geographical works of Conrad Malte-Brun (1775-1826), which might have been his inspiration for the topography of Cairo, along with Al-Maqrizi. In 1848, Mubarak’s educational mission was recalled to Egypt upon the ascent of Abbas Pasha to power. He was given the title of ‘Bek’ and was put in charge of the governmental budget. His main duty was to shrink the governmental expenditure on education and administration, a mission, which he fulfilled without complaints. In 1854, Abbas Pasha was assassinated and replaced by Khedive Said. Under him, Mubarak was sent as a military engineer to take part in the Crimean war, and during his duty he managed to master the Turkish language.

Mubarak’s essential contributions to the public life started with the rise of Khedive Ismail to power. In 1868, the Khedive who proclaimed, “my country is no longer part of Africa, for we are now a part of Europe”, assigned Mubarak the ministers of Education and Public work, and hence put him in charge of the major junctions in Egypt’s transformation to modernity. He returned to Paris for a second time to study its educational and sewage system. Mubarak who by now held the title of Pasha was commissioned by Ismail to modernize the urban fabric of Cairo. He drew a master plan of Cairo along the lines of Haussmann’s Paris, redeveloped the empty lands leading

---

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
64 AlSayyad, "Ali Mubarak's Cairo", 52.
66 Ibid, 56.
up to Azbakiyya, and supervised the building of the Ismailiya quarter.\(^6\) His work on Cairo’s urban fabric was so intensive that through his duty the number of the city’s squares increased from four to sixteen.\(^6\) He also supervised the establishment of the Opera House, Dar al-Kuttub and Dar al-Ulum.\(^6\) His urban interventions entailed breaking into the old city, which meant the demolition of more than 700 old buildings including houses, shops and baths.\(^7\) In the field of education, he was keen on introducing printing technology for publishing textbooks.\(^7\) He also devised a national system for elementary education that all schools, whether foreign or national, were obliged to follow. The purpose of it was to instill a ‘national element’ in education through making the teaching of the Arabic language and religion mandatory.\(^8\)

Mubarak’s stable career was shaken by the financial ruin caused by Ismail’s projects. After accumulating debt, the European powers decided to depose Ismail and directly supervise the Egyptian economy. Mubarak was part of the government appointed by the new Khedive Tawfiq, and accepted the dictates of the European powers.\(^7\) Once the Urabi revolt managed to form a nationalist government as a reaction, he withdrew to his village and strongly criticized the insurgent officers.\(^7\) He returned to Cairo and to his ministerial post only with the British army that took over the city. Such a movement was significant given that he attended a political meeting with Urabi upon the British invasion of Alexandria in 1882. In this meeting he was summoned by the nationalists to convince Khedive Tawfiq to support the continuation of the revolt. Instead, Mubarak switched sides and supported the British-led Khedive, leading Nadim to

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid, 57.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Kenny, “Ali Mubarak”, 47.

\(^7\) Kenny, “Ali Mubarak”, 50.

\(^7\) AlSayyad,"Ali Mubarak's Cairo", 57.

\(^7\) Ibid.
label him as a “traitor”. Mubarak took part in the two governments of Sherif and Riyad that were established under the British guidance. During that time, he worked under the supervision of British officials such as Lord Cromer. However, upon the resignation of Riyad in 1891, Mubarak returned to his village and stayed there until he was diagnosed with a bladder ailment. He travelled to Cairo for medical treatment where he died in 1893.

2.2 The Peasant and the Metropolitan Man

The metropolitan type of man develops and organ [intellectuality] protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart.

Ali Mubarak’s intellectual life and endeavors can be understood within this framework of a self-fashioned metropolitan man. His intellectual career was fixed around the European metropole as evidenced by his urban planning of Cairo, and his various writings on its history and development. He was an avid writer of many genres, publishing exclusively in Arabic; and his works varied from technical handbooks to journal articles, to a long treatise on the irrigation and the administration of the Nile. His two main works are a 21-volume typography of Cairo Al-Khitat al-Tawfikiya al-Jadida, and a 1,400 page fictional travelogue entitled, The Journey of Alamuddin. The city was the central point of his historical typography, and consequently the identity of Egypt. During his lifetime this identity was characterized by rupture, since his imperial capital, Cairo was often represented in Cartesian terms juxtaposing the traditional and the modern, and the east and the west.

75 Ibid.
77 Ibid, 49.
78 Ibid, 51.
his intellectual theory and was apparent in works such as Alamuddin. In this fictional travelogue, he narrated a journey between two seemingly opposing sites, Cairo and Paris; it was in the space between them that cross-cultural dialogues took place and the metropolitan identity resided.\textsuperscript{82}

Although Mubarak was a remarkable public figure who engaged with various policy-making decisions and bureaucratic affairs, the focus of this chapter is his literary productions. His literary works occupied a different space from his contributions to lawmaking, urban planning and educational polices. These works were not directed at governmental experts alone. They attempted to define, imagine, and intervene in the wider public sphere. In contrast to the Habermasian conception of the public sphere as a site of constant contestation between state and society, Mubarak imagined the state as an immutable and sacrosanct mediator between all social forces.\textsuperscript{83} People were rarely actors, but were depicted as the objects of cultural productions.

As an intellectual at the putative intersection of the traditional and the modern, certain problem spaces shaped Mubarak’s individual consciousness and conception of the nation. The first problem space was the manner in which Egyptian identity was defined according to the social position Egyptians occupied in the system erected by the state and its cultural intersection. The state that Muhammad Ali had built in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century defined native Egyptians as agriculture producers and taxpayers. Egyptian peasants provided surplus for the upper classes, but rarely joined their ranks. Even with the modern state’s social restructuring of classes, and the introduction of some select Egyptians to the bureaucracy and the army, peasants continued to be stigmatized. This was a problem for Mubarak who as the first Egyptian-born minister of modern Egypt, had to champion both the peasant and the state, two national positions that he saw in need of reconciliation.

Mubarak’s autobiography revealed a tension between the two modes of identification. He narrated that after his incident with Anbar he wondered: “Can one of the fellahin attend [modern


\textsuperscript{83} Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, ”The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” New German Critique, , no. 3 (1974): 49.
schools]” in hope of acquiring a similar respectable position? Mubarak in this instance of helplessness and inferiority identified with the peasants. However, in the same autobiography he vehemently dissociated himself and his family from the class of fellahin. He relate his family to the class of religious scholars, ulama, a profession which formed the main Egyptian middle class when Muhammad Ali first came to power. He mentioned that the ulama never toiled the earth or got humiliated like “peasants” The stigma of peasant identity accompanied Mubarak through out his life. As an exceptional Egyptian who managed to reach the position of government minister, he was often reminded of his origins by the khedive, who threatened to make him wear fellahin’s garbs if he refused to abide by his rules. Mubarak did not necessarily regard the fellahin’s garb negatively, but as a Khedival invective it threatened his hard-fought social status.

The disavowal of peasant identity helped him overcome perceived humiliation and cycles of poverty. If Mubarak’s family once managed to avoid being inferior as learned religious scholars who were exempt for burdensome taxation, the modern state brought with it novel sciences that devalued theirs. This created a conceptual dichotomy apparent in his writings, with peasantry and the traditional knowledge on one pole, and high positions and modern knowledge on the other. In the modern world, modern sciences were the tool for upward mobility and the only way to acquire them was through the state and its schools. The state as he saw it provided an institutional system that could guarantee upward mobility and elevate the humiliation that was waiting for the peasants or Egyptians in general. The way to reconcile “the peasant” with the “ruler” was for the categories of the “modern” and the “educated” to be added to the equation. Instead of depending on one’s family or ethnicity to achieve social eminence, one should depend on the state. Janet Abu Loghoud once described Mubarak as “brought up by the state”, and nothing can describe his life more accurately. Mubarak tells us that after running away from home in pursuit of modern education, his father visited him and begged him to return home. In a

84 Mubarak, Hayāti, 10
85 Ibid., 4.
86 Ibid.
88 Ibid, 52.
moving domestic scene, he stood unyielding in front of his crying father and chose the school over his family.\textsuperscript{89}

It is hard to escape the impression that the role Mubarak envisioned for the state was inspired by personal experience. Just as the state mitigated his personal social ailments, and his family’s resistance through education, he was sure that the state could do the same for all Egyptians. He envisioned a state that would take initiative in educating the peasants and instilling in their environments more modern and productive agricultural measures. In Mubarak’s autobiography, the state resembled a surrogate parent. Although he was aiming at improving the peasants’ conditions, he upheld their identity as solely agricultural producers. In doing so, he equated the life of peasants with the life of the agricultural lands. The peasant would progress socially, only when the lands of Egypt do through cultivating them to their full potential. He also crafted their position as passive creators of economic surplus with no social influence, describing them as “silent and serene, only mimicking their forefathers”\textsuperscript{90}. Since he did not perceive them as agents of progress, the state had to bear the responsibility of guiding them out of their misery through modernizing their surroundings. The distinction between the traditional peasants and their modern surroundings was perceived by Mubarak as part of a larger dichotomy pertaining to the technologies of the East and the West.

2.3 The East-West Dichotomy: Historic Reconciliation

The second problem space that occupied Mubarak’s thought was the articulation of the ‘self’ in relation to the ‘other’, in the context of the assumed East-West bifurcation. His successful careering through the ranks of state education led him to France, where he experienced the ‘European’ in a direct way. For him, the encounter with European sciences, languages and technology culminated into a desire to incorporate them as part of the ‘authentic’ self. The self he imagined had its roots in a linear history that started in the Pharoanic era and culminated in Islamic civilization. But in the modern era, this self stagnated and its historical progression stopped, causing Egypt to be severed from the technological and historical progress achieved in

\textsuperscript{89} Mubarak, \textit{Hayāti}, 12

Europe. He postulated that since the Egyptian nation had progressed in the Pharoanic and the Islamic eras, historical progression, and not stagnation, was the norm that should be regained. And given that the West stood for this progression, it should compose an essential part of the eastern self. As a result, he attempted to unify the perceived dichotomy of East and West in his historical narrative, in which he conceptualized the encounter between the self and the European mostly as one of harmonic dialogue.

In his written works, he discussed this encounter within a narrative of continuation. The new tools of modernity were not presented as a negation of the past but rather as a logical continuation of it, to quote Mubarak: “What our ancestors have left behind stirs in us the desire to follow in their footsteps, and to produce for our times what they produces for theirs.” 91 As the minister of public works he engaged with two major modernization projects: the industrialization of the irrigation system and the urban planning of Cairo. Through his historical writings, he located these projects on the linear history of Egypt. In his book *The Select Knowledge of administering the Egyptian Nile*, he invoked the history of the management of the Nile’s waters. He presented the industrialization of irrigation systems as part of the historical progress that was distinctly Egyptian, and not as something novel. For example, the Ancient Egyptians reached their “glorious civilization” through calculating the Nile’s surface area, studying its rise and fall, and building gulfs and extending rivers. 92 By stating that, he incorporated the modern European sciences implemented by the modern state through irrigation technologies in Egypt’s history.

Mubarak’s urban sociology followed the same narrative of harmony. His conceptualization of the urban space fit the prevailing nineteenth’ century epistemological position on the metropolis articulated famously by Georg Simmel: “The institutions, buildings, and technologies of the city seemed to be more than just physical structures. They were themselves a form of ‘spirit’ or ‘life’.” 93 Following this idea, planning a city like Cairo went beyond the immediate significance

---


of erecting buildings, as it involved a direct interaction with the historical process. The physicality of every building bore historical implications, and the management of the space was responsible for determining the next stage of the city’s progression. Mubarak acknowledged a duality between the old city of Cairo and the new one; for a ‘new’ building to be conceived, it had to be defined against the ‘old’. However, the ‘old’ should only remain in the realm of memory through historical writings and documentation, and the ‘new’ buildings should stand alone in the physical space. As a result, some of the old monuments had to be destructed. The old city had to be theoretically documented to show how the progress of time was manifested physically, and also to define the temporal historical stage that had to be surpassed and replaced. In a way, memory had to be retained for progress to occur. This memory had to exist only in the ruins of the past not in modern space. As Mubarak elaborated: “We no longer want to preserve such memories, we want to destroy them as the French destroyed the Bastille.”

The ‘traditional’ buildings had to be physically removed from the modern world, and transferred instead to the historical books that will invoke the memory of the old buildings in people’s minds. In effect, Mubarak harmonized the binary between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ by giving the former a conceptual existence, while giving the latter a material one. His conception of harmony extended beyond the urban planning, and transcended to his historical writings on the city. In his topography of Cairo, he presented the city as a homogenous non-divided entity with no distinction between the neighborhoods of westerners and Egyptians, while in fact the city’s urban space was fractured into quarters for westerners and others for Egyptians. Mubarak’s harmony and historical reconciliation involved a substantial restructuring of urban space, and of public policies. The only entity that was capable of intervening in the social and physical fabric of the nation and implement such changes was the state. Hence, it was important for Mubarak to theorize on governing in a way that would fit his ideological project.

94 AlSayyad, “Ali Mubarak's Cairo”, 60.
95 Ibid.
2.4 Ideology on Governance: The Benevolent Caliphate

Mubarak judged good rule as an expertise in managing the population; as he saw it, people were the objects of reform. His treatise on governance commenced with a social theory on the nature of human behavior. People, he wrote, are all born with universal human nature, but they were scattered into different nations due to various external factors such as geography, religion and politics. Controlling these factors was the key to governance. According to him, religion and government were closely linked since only a strong political will could execute religious principles through a strong legal system. He conceived of good governance as a product of the union between the moral principles that guided a nation and its political authority. 96

The link between moral principles and political rule was an extension of Mubarak’s conception of divine order and harmony. He derived this understanding from the Islamic notion of Caliphate. Divine order could not be implemented directly by God, but through the medium of earthly representatives who according to Mubarak could only come from the ranks of the rulers and the intellectuals: “There are two sects, if they are righteous the nation will be righteousness, and if they are corrupt the nation will be corrupt: The kings and the intellectuals” 97. He added that although they followed a divine order, “kings and leaders should be obliged to base their decisions on the laws laid out for them, be it customs, decrees or prohibitions.” 98 Following this logic, justice would be embodied in the rulers, but at the same time they had to be guarded by laws. Although his conception of governance was Islamic in form, he demonstrated a strong leaning towards modern European thought, especially the concept of ‘the rule of law’. ‘The rule of law’ served as an objective principle that neutralized the subjective rule of a king or a leader.

Following this conception, Mubarak claimed that Egypt was in a privileged position since it abided by Islam, which provided a harmonic balance between political governance and religion. 99 After declaring the potential as present, Mubarak gave his prescription to the nation’s

---

96 Mubarak, Tadbir Nil Misr, 171-172.

97 Mubarak, Alamuddin, 1041.

98 Ibid, 1040.

99 Ibid, 173.
progress, one that depended fully on the rulers. The rulers should lead the population, the objects of reform to their own good. To quote him,

The behavior of the government represents a school, whose role is to educate the Egyptians on modernity (civilization). The teachers of this school are the ruling princes and the wise officials… Through the people, the ruler would gain wealth, power and prestige and a high standing among other governments, while the governed would enjoy welfare and luxury and gradual social ascent.\(^{100}\)

The type of education Mubarak suggested was based upon a successful implementation of ‘the rule of law’. He introduced a hierarchy in which the legal principles occupied the highest position, followed by the rulers who embodied them and lastly the people who would follow “their superiors”. His political ideology centered on a figure of authority, be it a caliph, head of state or the state itself. In his prescription for national progress, the rulers were entitled to interpret and advocate the rule of law, while the people were given the role of passive imitators.

**2.5 Progress: A Numerical Concept**

In Mubarak’s world, ‘objectivity’ was essential, as it provided criteria for both assessing and displaying expertise. Governance was also an expertise that had to be assessed objectively. For a ruler or a minister to be an expert, they had to ensure the progress of the nation, and the criterion for measuring progression was statistics. In *The Select Knowledge of administering the Egyptian Nile* he demonstrated the rise and fall of the Egyptian civilization in terms of numbers. For example, Muhammad Ali’s modern state was successful in achieving progress as it increased the population’s number to 250,000.\(^{101}\) Khedive Ismail followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and ensured a population growth by a rate of 91 newborn for each 10,000 person\(^{102}\). Mubarak did not conceive of these numbers as mere signs, but they represented social progress that was felt materially. Following this logic, any social progress was a result of the intervention of the ruling classes. As a result, the royal family was credited with these numbers, by offering the population

\(^{100}\) Ibid, 174.

\(^{101}\) Mubarak, *Tadbir Nil Misr*, 180.

\(^{102}\) Ibid, 182-183.
better health care. Other than providing a measure for progress, statistical knowledge served as an effective political tool for ensuring welfare,

Computing the number of the subjects would make any ruler successful … it is a foundational step towards civilizing societies. Enlightened nations follow the norm of not only collecting statistics on the population… but also collecting statistics in the fields of commerce, industry and agriculture.\(^\text{103}\)

Furthermore, Mubarak utilized this statistical framework in his historical narration. He envisioned a cyclical history with repeated periods of progress and decline, which were measured statistically. He presented Pharoanic rule as a distinctive, sovereign era, out of reach of the vagaries of history. The cyclical history started with the foreign invasions of the nation. Under the Ptolemies the revenue of Egypt reached 14,800,015 ikos, a number unprecedented in the previous Persian dynasty. The reason for that was establishing urban centers and advancing the irrigation system through building canals. These projects were precisely the ones carried out by the khedival state, and supervised by Mubarak.\(^\text{104}\) In Islamic Egypt, the revenues increased from almost twelve million dinars under Amr Ibn al-As to fourteen million under Ibn Toloun, due to the implementation similar reforms. The periods of decline occurred due to the injustices of the rulers, such as al-Hakim’s reign that demoted Egypt’s revenues to only five million dinars.\(^\text{105}\)

Mubarak’s utilization of statistics served to create objective criteria that located welfare in numerical value. Accordingly, judging the quality of rule through the criteria of the ethnicity of the rulers or the nature of their domination fell within the realm of the subjective. His historical writings conveyed that the rise and fall of the Egyptian civilization should not be viewed through the lens of colonialism, but through the rulers’ ability to attain progress. In the above-mentioned historical introduction, he characterized the ruling classes as colonizers or invaders of the Nile valley; however, some of them brought about general welfare through justice and good

\(^\text{103}\) Ibid, 177.
\(^\text{104}\) Ibid, 9-10.
\(^\text{105}\) Ibid, 13.
management, while others brought decline. Mubarak did not view foreign rule or colonization as inherently bad, or as an abstract political system opposed to national aspirations. He pointed out that Islam, what was perceived as the native religion, entered Egypt through the invasion of Arabs who settled there.\textsuperscript{106}

These ideas influenced Mubarak’s view of the Urabists whom he described as:

fanatically partisan and filled with conceit. Ahmed Urabi, one of the regimental colonels on the former occasion, was their leader, and he persuaded the rest to conspire against the government. Their leaders presented a petition to the council of Ministers, in which they demanded the dismissal of the Minister of Defense, the formation of a National Assembly and other matters beyond their competence.\textsuperscript{107}

The basis of Mubarak’s denunciation of the Urabi movement was its representatives’ incompetence. Neither army officers nor nationalist agitators could create a functional government that would lead to progress. They merely disrupted the natural harmony of rule. This harmony that his ministry strove for, had only one meaningful centre- the rulers. He deemed the motives for political opposition as irrational. He explained:

The ministry was proceeding on its serious path, prioritizing the spread of justice and equality between the strong and the weak, and those of high stature and those of low. This kindled jealousy in the hearts of the opposition leaders, so they criticized and insulted the ministry. Also, many of them mingled with the army officers, who led them to believe that they had the right to issue laws and govern the ministry because they are the native inhabitants of the nation.\textsuperscript{108}

Through such statements, Mubarak resolved the conflict between the modern European ideals of justice and equality, and the khedive’s elitist politics. He presented modern political ideals in a positive light, but with a vision of justice and equality that was entrenched in the state and the ruling classes. As he saw it, the rulers were the only possessors of these ideals. He delegitimized other forces carrying the same banner. Not only did Mubarak utilize modern political ideals to

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 12.


\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 57-58.
legitimize the khedival social relations, but he utilized religious terminology as well. He called the Urabists, *Khawarij*, which was sect infamous for instigating civil strife, *al-fitna*, throughout Islamic history. As he put it, the British and French navies came to Alexandria with the purpose of “extinguishing the fires of *fitna*”.109

Mubarak expressed his dismay at the support Urabi found among the peasants and attributed it to the urabists’ terrorizing tactics. His utilization of Islamic history might have been in conversation with Nadim’s writings and oration, to be discussed in the next chapter, in which he related Urabi to Hussein. Evoking Hussein celebrated a moment of rebellion, sacrifice and opposition of ruling powers. The *khwarij* on the other hand were an insurgent group crushed by the triumphant rulers. Referencing them evokes the state’s role in ensuring social stability. Although progress for Mubarak was highly dependent on the state, society played an important role in his intellectual project. For him, cultural productions such as language and theatre were essential in serving the state and implementing its policies.

2.6 Language and the Bureaucracy: Towards a Merit-Based Social Mobility

Mubarak’s engagement with the subject of languages was an extension of his ideas of the ‘self’ against the ‘other’. This was likely a result of the colonial milieu that forced Arabic intellectuals to define their language in relation to European ones, namely French and English.110 In the 19th century, European encounters with Arabic were framed by a negative attitude; The Arabic language was presumed to be unscientific, so it had to be modernized or even outright eradicated. Mubarak’s response to this fit his schematic inclination towards ‘harmony’. He did not fully internalize the presumed deficiency of Arabic and downplayed the incompatibility between European language as a language of instruction and Arabic language as one’s native tongue. Nor did he view language as a basic element of a person’s, or a nation’s selfhood; language was rather a neutral tool to be utilized for upward social mobility, knowledge acquisition and overall national progress.

---

109 Ibid, 58.

110 Tageldin, *Disarming words*, 5.
Mubarak, the government educator, always encouraged teaching foreign languages in his schools. An examination of Alamuddin further explicated his ideological leanings in this regard. In a chapter entitled, “Learning and Education”, the reader is introduced to Alamuddin and his son Burhaneddin who pursued the study of the English language. Mubarak prefaced the story with two Islamic Hadiths that favored learning foreign languages. The first saying was, “He who learns the language of a people is safeguarded from their cunning”. The second saying related to how a Hijazi man lost his life for failing to understand the language of the Yemenis, a tragedy that made the Yemeni king decree mandatory knowledge of the local language before entering his territory. In sum, Mubarak related learning these languages to self-protection, which could potentially lead to self-improvement.

As Alamuddin’s story unraveled, Mubarak clarified what the English language would guard against: a destiny of dependency and humiliation. Mubarak in this section presented a different argument on the linguistic debates of his time, which regarded the spread of European languages as implicitly linked to colonialism. He argued that learning them would not jeopardize the Arabic language but on the contrary, “One who knows two languages, though one in countenance, is two in knowledge”. The benefit of learning a foreign language, however, was only realized if it is employed for one specific purpose, serving the state. This was not the case with Alamuddin as evidenced by a conversation about language he struck with the novel’s other main protagonist, a British man of letters. Sheikh Alamuddin who represented traditional thinking wanted his son to follow in his footsteps as a religious scholar and limit his knowledge of English to literary purposes. The Englishman appalled by this suggestion interfered to educate the Sheikh, “You have the choice between what would make your son a ruler and a leader, and what would make him dependant and enslaved”. The Englishman explained that English was not only a literary asset but was the main key to sciences that would open up the opportunities for young Burhan to study engineering, medicine, military tactics or any other modern pursuit that would turn him

111 Hadiths are reported teachings of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.

112 Mubarak, Alamuddin, 241.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid, 244.
into a leader. Literary knowledge alone, however, might doom him to a traditional role of dependency and enslavement. At first, the old Sheikh was hesitant to let go of his traditions and the profession of his forefathers, a decision Mubarak’s father had to confront regarding the education of his own son at a modern school. While Mubarak had to run away to pursue modern education, the son of Sheikh Alamuddin faced less resistance. The father’s desire to seek a higher social standing for his son had led him to heed the Briton’s advice that left the Sheikh with two options: “Either enrolling [his son] in a state school, or keeping him in London to be raised in one of our schools following our ways. Whichever you choose will free you from the burden of his upbringing”. In effect, the Sheikh’s “freedom” was freedom of absence from his son’s life, a form of disappearance no different perhaps than the erasure of the city’s old monuments pursued by Mubarak.

In the course of their conversation, the Briton, perhaps ventriloquating Mubarak’s thoughts, listed the merits of modern education. They opposed the traditional private tutoring, that was based on the whimsical and personal choices of the educator. Meanwhile, modern schools provided well-researched schemes carried out by the best of educators. Despite being religious scholars, the private tutors according to the Briton cared only about increasing their wage and possibly transferred their ill manners to the children. Moreover, the state’s educational system ensured equality between the rich and the poor since they both wore the same uniform and attended the same classes. It is worth noting that the Englishman, not the Egyptian Sheikh, echoed most of Mubarak’s life choices. The traditional figure in the person of the Sheikh needed to be part of the story, yet to completely dismiss his own ways and ideologies. In this narrative, young Burhaneddin who represented modern Egypt, was a descendant of the traditional Islamic Sheikh, yet one possessing a European mind.

115 Ibid, 248.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid, 250.
2.7 Theatre: Towards New Ethics of Modernity

Modern theatre is generally understood as a product of European culture, and 19th century Egypt was no different. It was perceived as distinct from other performative traditions prevalent in Arabic culture. Mubarak’s understanding of modern theatre upheld this distinction as his vision of European theatre was juxtaposed and contrasted with the street performances that were prevalent in Cairo. At the end of the century, the Egyptian urban milieu, and in some cases the rural, created their own form of entertainment staged within a household setting. Many middle and lower class households had a courtyard where people from the neighborhood would gather for live entertainment, be it street performances, poetry, singing or Quran recitals. The most theatrical of these local performances was the one conducted by the itinerant troupe of Awlad Rabiya (the sons of Rabiya), who travelled around various cities performing satirical pieces. Their performances were a source of discomfort for many Europeans as well as for intellectuals such as Ali Mubarak. For example, renowned British orientalist of the time Edward Lane described these acts as “low and ridiculous farces… scarcely worth of description: it is chiefly by vulgar jests, and indecent actions, that [Awlad Rabiye] amuse and obtain applause.” Other European travelers described them as rude and simple.

The themes of violence and sexuality that dotted the performances caused discomfort, but other motives might have lurked behind a perceived moral decrepitude. The subjects of the satirical act of Awlad Rabiya were mostly the ruling classes and Europeans. Such a criticism threatened the hierarchal social order. The upper classes were heavily mocked for appropriating lands, stealing flock, and subjecting the poor for unjust punishment ranging from violent flogging to execution. One of the skits featured a governor who sentenced a man to death out of sheer anger. In another scene, a man was hanged for stealing some poultry. The farcical performances in the 19th century seemed to have centered on criticizing and mocking dignitaries, and thus were always popular among the working and lower classes; farce was a tool for rebellion. Sailors were


120 Ibid, 23.
reported to imitate the troupe of *Awlad Rabia* and performed sketches depicting their overseers taking bribes.\(^{121}\) Moreover, during street processions of guilds, farcical troupes would accompany them and act out their professions.\(^{122}\) Many of the educated Egyptians shared the European discomfort and disapproved of these popular acts, calling them un-modern and demanding their banishment from the social scene.\(^{123}\) The Khedival theatrical project, and the urban project that accompanied it were part of a centralized policy explicitly designed towards that end.\(^{124}\) The urban development of the district of Azbakiya, supervised by Mubarak, was a physical manifestation of this intellectual opposition. Between 1868 and 1871 new buildings were erected in place of an older private theatre and the century-old public and street entertainment areas of Cairo where street performances took place.\(^{125}\)

Mubarak’s ideological stance on the art of theatre was also elucidated through a dialogue between the Englishman and Sheikh Alamuddin, in which the former was trying to persuade the latter of sending his son to see a play. After a short explanation of how the European theatres operated, Alamuddin expressed his relief that it was drastically different from what the troupe of *Awlad Rabia* did in Egypt.\(^{126}\) European theatre was defined in the travelogue as an educational activity that refined people’s manners. It was presented as an antithesis to *Awlad Rabia*’s performances that were overwhelmingly negative with rare instances of moral guidance. The Englishman explained:

> [Their performances] are based on debauchery, foolhardiness and immorality that the soul finds repulsive. They perform horrible acts and utter erroneous statements that those who have little sense, religious commitment, virtue, or purity would reject. Watching

---

\(^{121}\) Ibid, 21.

\(^{122}\) Ibid, 18.

\(^{123}\) Ibid, 24.

\(^{124}\) Ibid, 87.


\(^{126}\) Mubarak, *Alamuddin*, 403.
these acts might corrupt demure women, youth, children and men alike, making them stray away from the righteous path.\textsuperscript{127}

Mubarak’s comparison rendered the content of the eastern and western performances incomparable. \textit{Awlad Rabia} recreated some historical events and utilized music and songs as was the case with European theatre. But for the most part they performed fictional and nonsensical stories and their songs were composed of repetitious empty words devoid of any meaning or purpose. According to Mubarak, \textit{Awlad Rabia} sang exclusively for lust, ecstasy and love, instead of spreading worthy and beneficial ideals.\textsuperscript{128} Mubarak was careful to distance these performances from classical Arabic literature. Unlike these modern durations, the classics expressed very eloquent and elevated high moral values of chivalry and generosity. Thus, the contrast did not pertain to inherent difference between cultures but to the authors of these performances. As the Englishman explained:

\begin{quote}
The people whom you call \textit{Awlad Rabia} are devoid of good manners and proper knowledge. They come from the common and the foolish among people, which makes them non competent. On the other hand, the majority of people working in our theatres are well educated and refined in many sciences. The literature they perform is chosen based on its compliance with good manners and proper norms.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

Mubarak’s critique of street performances and his overall outlook on theatre echoed the didactic role envisioned by the state builders, as a tool for “progressing and modernizing the nation and increasing its wealth” as he put it.\textsuperscript{130} The rebellious and unruly themes of \textit{Awlad Rabia} did not fit this project. As Englishman pontificated, theatre should be a profession that lay outside the scope of laypersons given that the contents of the plays were chosen from the works of famous scholars. As opposed to the theme of social criticism of street performances, the theatrical themes Mubarak praised always centered on a historical incident –be it a battle, civil strife or a religious concept. All these themes emanated from a specific nationalist discourse linked to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid, 404.]
\item[Ibid, 405.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid, 406.]
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
ruling classes, as the genre of drama he advocated pertained to the fortunes and misfortunes of
princes and kings.  

Despite its apparent elitism, Alamuddin’s theatre represents Mubarak’s notion of the
egalitarianism of modern institutions. According to him, institutions as a whole provided a
systematic equality absent in personal social relations. He explained: “no one is excluded from
attending theatres. All can attend, the rich and the poor, those of high standing and those of
low”  

Mubarak never failed to remind the readers that modernity, as a step in historical
progress involved the demystifying of the true aspects of Islam and its rational elements. Theatre
was not abstractly modern, but it was still connected to linear history, especially that of Islam.
The Arabic modern theatre as he conceived it would uphold the concept of promoting virtue and
preventing vice, making it act in the service of Shari’a (Islamic Law), “Since theatre serves
Shari’a, promoting what it orders and demoting what it inhibits, it is the greatest of all
entertainment, and upmost care and attention should be allocated to it”  

In effect, theatre for Mubarak should serve as a sublime disciplinary tool that will give meaning to the “human-made
laws”. For a secular legal system to be effective the moral values of individuals must be in
harmony with those laws, and the art of theatre was one of the primary means of negotiating and
implementing this new ethics of modernity.

---

131 Ibid, 398.
132 Ibid, 402.
133 Ibid, 408.
134 Ibid.
Chapter 3
Abdallah al-Nadim’s Thought: Building National Consciousness from Below

3.1 The Life of Abdallah al-Nadim (1843-1897)

He who becomes accustomed to rest,
Detests travelling and the anguish of life,
Refuses to grapple with fate,
And limits himself to his country and the men of his epoch,
Becomes like a caged wild bird.  

Nadim’s short treatise from which the above excerpt is quoted best describes his volatile life; a life characterized by the flight from one place to another, one profession to the next and from mingling with one social class to its opposite. He was born as Abdallah Misbah in a village in delta province of Sharqiyya, but moved with his father to Alexandria at an early age. A son of a peasant baker, Nadim was groomed to join the ranks of the ‘ulama but left his formal religious education at the age of sixteen in pursuit of a less structured form of learning. The pre-modern religious education was based on a concentrated study of Arabic grammar, lexicon, Islamic Law and theology, while literary subjects were held as inferior for lacking structure and scientific rules. Nadim regarded the rigidity of religious education as an obstacle to fulfilling his intellectual passion, and replaced it with regular visits to literary salons and informal coffee shops where he listened to epics recited by local poets. Afterwards, he attempted to join al-Azhar school in Cairo but was appalled by the lack of political consciousness and the apathy of both the teachers and students. He explained that “every person working for al-Azhar neglects

137 Hadidi, Abdallah al-Nadim, 25.
138 Ibid.
the world and what’s in it. They do not read political or scientific newspapers and do not know anything about the kingdoms of the world!”

Nadim’s career was as unstable as his personal life as a result of his continuous refusal to be confined by structures and sedentary lifestyles. Before founding his two famous journals *al-Tankit w al-Tabkit* and *al-Ustad*, he held many positions in different cities that influenced his political and intellectual life later on. First, he worked as an employee in the British telegraph company in Egypt. He was however fired after a quarrel with his supervisor, a detail Mitchell fails to mention when he identified Nadim as a colonizing intellectual. Jobless, Nadim headed to the rural delta in search of a living. There, he worked as a private tutor for the children of a village head, a job that also did not last because of his fractious temper; so he moved to Tanta where he worked as a colloquial poet entertainer (*udabati*) at a Pasha’s house. This job required very high oral prowess and skillful spontaneous improvisation in front of large crowds, a skill that will define Nadim’s political role later on. After that, Nadim took the first step in his journalistic career by writing for *Misr* and *al-Tijara*, two journals founded by the Syrians Adib Ishaq and Salim al-Naqqash. The duo were also involved with the first Arabic Syrian theatrical troupe that performed in Egypt. Nadim then headed back to Alexandria to found the Islamic Benevolent Society and its affiliating school, where he taught Drama, Literature and Oration- subjects to which neither the religious nor the modern schools paid sufficient attention. He also formed a theatrical troupe with the students of the school, which performed

---

139 Herrera, "The Soul of a Nation", 3.


141 Ibid, 4.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid, 5.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.
in the famous Zizinia Theatre in Alexandria.\textsuperscript{147} However, this job was also short lived as he got expelled from the school following a political dispute with a high-ranking government official.\textsuperscript{148} Nadim’s early career shows that he was quite aware of the rigidity governing the modern world, and that he was trying - whether consciously or unconsciously - to transcend them. From an early age he refused to be caged and preferred to live the life of the wild bird.

On the intellectual front, he did not share the cosmopolitan trait of most of the \textit{Nahda} writers. Unlike most of them, he never learned a foreign language or traveled outside Ottoman lands.\textsuperscript{149} Just like his seeking of literary salons, he was equally drawn to political circles, especially that of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani who resided in Egypt from 1871 till 1879.\textsuperscript{150} Nadim was involved with al-Afghani’s political circle in Alexandria and the relationship evolved into a life-long friendship. Al-Afghani might have inspired Nadim to launch his own journals, since the former was known for encouraging his students to engage with the printing press.\textsuperscript{151} In 1881, Nadim launched his first journal, \textit{al-Tankit w al-Tabkit}, whose content was dominated by political satire and included articles in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. A couple of months later, the Urabi revolt erupted and Nadim took the role of its political orator. Following Urabi’s advice, Nadim changed his journal’s name to \textit{al-Taif}, utilized exclusively Classical Arabic, and used it as a mouthpiece for the revolt.\textsuperscript{152} The language of the journal was too revolutionary that Muhamad Abdu, who was in charge of the Press Censorship, banned it.\textsuperscript{153}

The Urabi revolt ended in 1882 with a British military invasion hailed by khedive Tawfiq whose rule it propped up. Under British occupation, the army officers and those involved in the

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
revolution faced military trials, while more than thirty thousand Egyptians were arrested. The only known person to have evaded this systematic crackdown was Abdallah al-Nadim. Upon his escape, the government sought to arrest him and offered a reward of one thousand Egyptian pounds to anyone who finds him. Additionally, any personnel who were proven to hide Nadim, along with their local mayor (Sheikh alBalad) or the head of his street (sheik al-Hara), would face severe, including capital, punishment. Despite the harsh punishment and the inciting rewards, Nadim was able to escape the authorities for nine full years travelling incognito in the countryside. However, he was arrested in 1891 and exiled to Jaffa for a short period before being pardoned by the new Khedive Abbas. He went back to Cairo and established his second journal al-Usthad, but was exiled again to Jaffa by an order from the British Authorities for his anti-colonial writings. From Jaffa, he tried to sneak into Alexandria and upon failing he went to Istanbul where he worked in the Press Bureau of the Sublime Porte, but fell out favor after a political clash with the Sultan’s chief counselor. As a consequence, al-Afghani provided his friend Nadim with financial support until the latter’s death from tuberculosis in 1897. Standing by his tomb al-Afghani eulogized him saying, “There are people whose memories end with the end of their lives, but this man on whose grave we stand, was a wonder of his time… [He] gave his soul to his nation and died as a martyr for its sake.”

Almost forty years after Nadim’s death, another young Abdallah al-Nadim would publish a collection of Arabic prose under the title of Hanin al-Nadim. The young writer had the last name of Moyal, and came from an intellectual Sephardic family. The son of Esther and Shim’on Moyal, his parents gave him the name of their friend. His father, Shim’on Moyal was a medical

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Herrera, "The Soul of a Nation", 7.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
doctor who occasionally published journal articles. He was acquainted with Nadim in Jaffa and Cairo. In Jaffa, Nadim introduced both Estehr and Shim’on Moyal to Jamal al-Din al-Afgani, and their relationship seemed closed enough for the couple to name their first child Abdalalh al-Nadim. Just like Nadim, Abdallah Nadim Moyal was fond of literary language. His collection included – among other topics- a biography of Maimonides written entirely in versified language.

Nadim’s friendship with Esther Moyal reveals an interesting intellectual connection. She was born as Esther al-Azhari in Beirut in 1873, and was a celebrated journalist, literary translator and feminist who engaged heavily with the emerging Arabic press. Although she operated mainly from Syria, while Nadim operated from Egypt, their intellectual projects converged in both the ends and the means. They both conceived of the ‘East’ as a political entity that needed to progress through fighting western colonialism. The meeting of Esther, Nadim and al-Afghani in Jaffa was a biographical manifestation of the conceptual contact these intellectuals had. Inspired by al-Afghani’s Eastern anti-imperialism, both Nadim and Moyal engaged heavily in journalism, with the aim of facilitating communication between the people. In the introduction of Esther’s journal al-Aila, she invoked the literary bond and communication between the women of Syria and Egypt. Their ideological similitude can be observed in the contents of their journals. In 1892, they published parallel articles expressing similar apprehensions; Moyal under the title of “Why we fail where the westerner succeed” and Nadim under the title of “Although we are all human, why did they progress while we regressed?” They also allocated a social role for the printing press, which would act as a tool for educating people who were denied access to the

161 Ibid, 236.
162 Ibid, 244.
163 Ibid, 1.
164 Ibid, 237.
165 Ibid, 253.
166 Abdallah Nadim, Al-Uztad (Cairo: Kutubkhana, 1985): 337.
formal schooling. Additionally, Afghani’s pan-eastern ideology was apparent in Moyal’s feminism, as she continuously warned her female readers from forsaking their “Arab Eastern” identity. Even if they did, she added, the condescending attitude of western women would remind them that they would never become a part of the west. The figure of Moyal is yet another manifestation of a separate intellectual trend that emerged within the Nahda discourse. This trend, which prioritized an eastern anti-colonialism contrasted with Mubarak’s project of cultural assimilation.

3.2 National Language and Anti-Colonial Consciousness

Written and spoken language acquired a central role in Nadim’s life. His chosen laqab “Nadim” signaled as much: it literally means a companion to converse with. For him, the vitality of language sprung from its political importance; language was not an empty vessel but rather a tool for the formation of individual and national consciousness. In his vision, linguistic productions such as the press, would serve as the primary tool of politicizing the populace. Good journalism served as a tool of building public opinion and personality. Nadim viewed language as a form of communication between social classes especially the literate minority with the illiterate majority. This communication was essential for his larger political project of struggling against western imperialism. Through his journals he advocated a concept of “nationalist responsibility” that would urge the literate classes to deliver to the illiterate information they did not have access to; a responsibility that had to be performed in a non-condescending manner. Nadim’s vision of an anti-imperialist struggle included all Egyptian classes. Language was thus more than a tool to access the sciences or enhance one’s career; it was both an identity marker and an anti-colonial tool. The act of communication in Arabic was a cultural bulwark against western attempts to divide and rule in Egypt. Nadim found that by claiming that conversing in western

---


168 Ibid, 257.

169 Hadidi, Abdallah al-Nadim, 30.

170 Nadim was also an educator and proclaimed that the teachers are the souls of the nations and responsible for creating its consciousness; See: Herrera, "The Soul of a Nation", 1-2.

171 Ibid, 63.
languages is the marker of a modern individual, the language of the colonized was effectively demoted into a secondary form that would ultimately wither away.

Nadim devised a form of language that he described as “an easy language that the educated would not look down upon, and the illiterate would not need an explanation for.” He was proud that no one needed a dictionary to understand his journals whose middlebrow language he described as “intimate…a language you can use in your conversations with friends.” Nadim achieved this linguistic middle ground between the “educated” and the “illiterate” through juxtaposing different linguistic forms and structures. In his journalistic writings, he transcended the fixed grammatical structures and used innovative forms of expression that cloaked the colloquial language with elevated prose structures. In doing so, he invoked a more formal fusha language that was at the same time comprehensible. He also toyed with linguistic structures in order to challenge the structural link between the social class and language register and attempted to dismantle it. He often made his educated and semi-educated characters speak in colloquial, while he made a village servant - the stereotypical agent of backwardness - speak in fusha.

Nadim was thus bent on subverting the structural link between class and language within Egyptian society. Another tactic of subversion was the rare use of satire as a form of journalistic writing. His satire played on what he considered the false objectivity of newspaper language. His style was metaphorical and poetic to invoke responses and agitate action. Writing satire, the author puts himself in a middle position between the text and the public; reading Satire can be liberating even as the text’s hidden hints and meanings raise awareness of censorship. As an

---

172 Nadim, Al-Tankit wa al-Tahkit, 8.
175 Ibid, 25.
act of criticism; satire draws the reader in through its play between lightheartedness and seriousness. It becomes a critical form of language that is both engaging and exhorting.

When the cause for political change presented itself to Nadim, he did not hesitate to oration to mobilize the people. While Urabi was standing in Abdeen’s palace during his historic stand-off with Khedive, Nadim was the outside the gates giving speeches that were “guarding the hearts of men against fear and hesitation” 177. Apart from his vocal support, he utilized oratory techniques in print to the full. During the political crisis, when the officers were clashing with the authorities, Nadim used his newspaper, *Al-Tankit w al-Tabkit*, as the official mouthpiece for the Ubabists. He changed its title to *al-Ta’if*, and printed it on a daily basis. The articles aimed at inciting the people against the khedive and encouraging them to take the side of Urabi. It also had a critical role in assisting communication between the revolting officers by publishing the movements and the tactics of the military, which Nadim received via telegraph on a daily basis. These measures were seen as acts of insurgency by the officials, which caused the government to ban the publishing of similar information. Nadim challenged the censorship by printing his journal at Urabi’s military camp, which was by then autonomous. Later, when Urabi was arrested and interrogated about permitting the print of anti-Khedive and anti-British articles he replied saying; “I had no right to prevent Nadim from writing” 178. Nadim’s regard for language as possessing a political function was a marker of his ideological project.

### 3.3 Language and Political Independence

If this invisible war lasts for a century or two, while the East is still in its slumber sloping down the stream of illusions, it will mark the death of the Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Indian, Mogul, Ethiopian and African nations. The East will be occupied by those who are European in language and religion, even if they were natives of Asia or Africa. 179

The invisible war that Nadim was referring to was being waged against eastern languages by the European colonizers. And the eastern illusion he warned against was the way in which the natives were “fooled in the name of education” into an arrangement that would result in the death

---

177 Gamie’e, *Abdallah Al-Nadim*, 411.

178 Ibid, 343.

of their own language. Nadim’s linguistic theory was in large based on his critique of the modern concept that tied progress and modern education with the utilization of European language. In a way, it was a critique of the intellectual trend adhered to by Mubarak. The linguistic debate was one directly related to the eastern identity, and for intellectuals like Nadim operating at the end of the century it was pivotal due the advent of European colonialism. Nadim had a broad definition of the East that encompassed the continents of Asian and Africa and lamented that; “There is no unity between the kingdoms of China and India, or those of Persia and Turkey…. And through this disunity Europe attacked…and they perpetuate the enmity between the easterners” He was aware of the advent of colonialism on the epistemic level even before the physical one that was ushered by the British navy’s bombing of Alexandria. He published an article one year before the British military invasion entitled “My Dear Literati” in which he expounded the importance of language in forming a national identity. In this article, Nadim subscribed fully to the scientific method of the 19th century, and tried to validate his arguments by appealing to rationality. In his introduction, he quoted eight Arabic and western intellectuals on language from Ibn Khaldoun to Lamarck, and presented this method as a proof that his analysis was “not biased towards a certain language or race, since the foundation of the research is diverse”. He defined language as the ultimate source of political independence and argued that the ability to acquire a certain language was not inherent to humans. They acquired it through a learning process. This process happened in a specific cultural medium that shaped both the physical and spiritual actions of every newborn. For example, if a European and an Arabic child were left with a deaf and silent educator, each would react according to their culture, which is “the material of their formation”. Therefore, the relation between language and culture for Nadim was a dialectical one. According to this logic, the culture in which a language was formed would be transferred through language to whoever is learning it. The political significance of language thus lay in its connection to

---

180 Ibid, 341.
181 Ibid, 347.
183 Ibid, 239.
cultural identity, a concept essential for the formation of a nation. He saw this process as vital since it was the source of all power and more importantly of political independence. To prove his point, Nadim gave the example of the Balkan region where the Greeks, Albanians, Romanians and others were able to gain independence because they preserved their languages and their distinct national identities. 184 Although they were previously in a position of weakness, their solidarity, al-assabiya185, was intact, and once the assabiya reached a high peak they gained independence. Hence, “the Loss of One’s Language is Self-Submission” as Nadim entitled one of his articles in which he warned against the linguistic invasion of Europe. What was at stake was the loss of one’s selfhood and cultural alienation.186

Stimulated by the looming shadow of eastern self-submission, Nadim wrote an article entitled “Although we are all human, why did they progress while we regressed?” The title clearly addressed the question of intellectual anxiety under the colonial setting.187 The first reason he gave directly related to the European apprehension of the political role of languages. The history of Europe, as he narrated it, was one of complete linguistic integration enforced by families of dukes and counts that crushed the autonomous aspirations of small communities. In countries like Germany, France and England large families took over smaller independent areas and formed unified kingdoms. Political unity was enforced through unifying the language in administration, education and communication.188 The second step after forging linguistic unity was consolidating it through centralizing authority. Nadim equated what the Europeans did with similar approaches to centralization within Arab history. What he labeled as the historic “Arab state” was able to centralize the power of the eastern nations, but it lost it when it left matters of governance to the subjected races with the rise of sectarianism, “al-jinsiyat”. However, the glory

184 Ibid.
185 A concept coined by Ibn Khaldoun in his Muqadima. All human societies are divided into “assaba”, meaning packs of people. These packs form the foundation for societal development and rule. For further information see Abdul-Rahman Ibn-Khaldoun, Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldoun (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam, 2006): 160.
186 Nadim, Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit, 53.
187 Nadim, Al-Uztad, 337.
188 Nadim, Al-Uztad, 340.
of the East was regained when the Turkish state reunified it under their central authority.\textsuperscript{189} Nadim thus saw central authority, “al-sulta”, as a problem only when the subject races were excluded from the national common identity.

For Nadim, the dichotomy between the East and the West was irreconcilable. The fact that the Arabs or the Turks would unify the East under one central authority was drastically different on the conceptual level, from when a European colonialism held authority over Eastern countries. When the Eastern countries were scattered into small communities, it became easy for the Europeans to attack and colonize them. Unlike the eastern powers, European ones would never move on the basis of creating centralized states, but rather on the basis of pure “greed” for the material resources of the East.\textsuperscript{190} In other words, when the East was fractured into various sects that insist on autonomous rule, “these races become the ultimate means through which Europe would interfere in their affairs and the affairs of the rest of the eastern kingdoms. The East became a playground for European men, where they manipulate the minds of the eastern people how they want.”\textsuperscript{191} To illustrate the dangers of eastern fracture into various racial and religious sects, Nadim gave the example of Syria where the Europeans incited sectarian strife and brought about destructions to its Muslims, Christians and Jews.\textsuperscript{192} Thus, he upheld the East-West dichotomy that Mubarak wished to transcend. For Nadim, only one type of interaction was possible between them: that of colonization. In his view, the result of the European unity and the Eastern disunity was that,

Whenever a European kingdom dominates an Eastern one…they drive millions of easterners with only ten men of them, while they would never allow a foreigner to rule them. You would never see a Russian in charge of the English army, or an Englishman acting as Russia’s minister of finance, or a Frenchman acting as Italy’s minister of education.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, 342-343.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid, 343.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid, 345.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, 342.
3.4 The East-West Dichotomy: Colonial Contingencies

The East-West dichotomy was perpetuated in the nineteenth century by Eastern and Western intellectuals alike. This dichotomy was one in which the west was superior, and acting as a teacher of civilization. For example Ali Mubarak, who in his didactic travelogue gave the Englishman the role of the educator on the history of the modern world, held such intellectual view. Nadim approved of this ontological dichotomy, however he did two things that differentiated him from the traditional view: first, he reversed the roles allocated for both, and second he explained how this duality was used to serve colonial ends. For example, he wrote in one of his articles, “The westerners produce many mythologies that even an eastern madman would not believe, but they get away with it because of the neatness of their clothes, the height of their top hats and the eloquence of their journals that accuses the east of every evil”\textsuperscript{194} Nadim here denied the orientalist trope of the east as irrational in opposition to the scientific and organized West. He negated the definition of the East as the receptacle of mythology and vulgar traditions, and insisted that such stories and traditions are a general product of all human cultures whether eastern and western.\textsuperscript{195} In another article he reversed the dichotomy further claiming that it was the West that was spreading myths in the East, precisely to create a sense of apathy and prevent easterners from being politically active.\textsuperscript{196}

Not only did Nadim relocate the east-west dichotomy, but he also explained how the division was loaded with political significance. He elaborated in his writings that these categorizations were mainly used to colonize the East, “If an Eastern nation was not ruled by Europeans, it will be called uncivilized and brutal”.\textsuperscript{197} In his opinion, the brutal party in this dichotomy was the west, whose civilization mastered the art of devising killing machines against the easterners who never attacked them except in self-defense.\textsuperscript{198} Moreover, the westerners who accused the

\textsuperscript{194} Nadim, \textit{Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit}, 95.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, 62.
\textsuperscript{197} Nadim, \textit{Al-Uztad}, 344.
\textsuperscript{198} Nadim, \textit{Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit}, 338.
easterners of being religious fanatics are the ones who wanted to impose their religion on all the other nations by force.\(^ {199}\) Eastern practices that were deemed uncivil by the colonizers were in fact a cry against slavery, confinement and the rigid thought they wanted to impose while taking over the lands of others.\(^ {200}\)

In a way, Nadim recreated the notion of civilization in order to challenge colonialism. Being civil should not be understood as leaning towards what he viewed as ‘alien’, and a source of decay, that was the west, but it should be dedicating one’s intellect to the nation, one’s money to the people, and one’s power to the native land.\(^ {201}\) In another article under the title of “A Medical Consultation to those afflicted with Westernization”, Nadim gave a metaphorical analysis of the political situation in Egypt in which he continued to invert the dichotomy.\(^ {202}\) He presented the nation as an ailing body– a body that was once youthful, strong and glorious but lost it all for a hypocritical companion. This companion -the ruling Khedive- was “preoccupied with luring foreigners”; he severed young Egyptians from their people and exposed them to all kinds of seductions. In this narrative, the Khedive and was the one in need of guidance, not the people. In fact, abandoning the people in pursuit of the “foreigners” halted the nation’s progress. Nadim presented the people, ahl al-belad, as agents of social change who embodied the “eastern ways”. These ways could be contrasted with the foreign ones. For the nation to progress, the people’s eastern consciousness, al-zat al-sharqiya, had to dominate the Khedive’s desires. To hold power over the Khedive, the political structure of the nation had to become more democratic.

3.5 Ideology on Governance: Democratic Shura

Nadim’s thoughts on governance were in dialogue with Mubarak’s. Nadim replaced the personified concept of the Caliphate with the more egalitarian concept of Shura. Just as Mubarak explained the Islamic concept of the Caliphate utilizing the European concept of the rule of law, Nadim explained Islamic Shura through the concept of European democracy. The

---

\(^ {199}\) Ibid.

\(^ {200}\) Ibid, 62.

\(^ {201}\) Ibid, 73.

\(^ {202}\) Ibid, 37.
theoretical contention between them highlights a larger conflict between the aristocratic and the bourgeois political ideals. In their social context, the ruling class favored the aristocratic ideals. Mubarak, who was part of this class as a cabinet minister, advocated for elite rule and upheld the superiority of princes. Nadim, on the other hand, opposed this political vision and aligned himself more closely with the bourgeois concept of constitutional monarchy. Both the state and colonial powers were keen on producing knowledge that would oppose the concept of constitutional monarchy. However, both entities harbored different epistemic roots that can be revealed through the nature of their opposition. The khedives were interested in preserving their hereditary monarchy, and thus privileged ideas that would ensure princely power. European countries like Great Britain on the other hand were governed by constitutional monarchy, which made it harder for them to criticize it. The nature of their opposition was instead based on the stereotypes about the incapacity of the Egyptian population to engage in democratic action.

In an article published in 1881, Nadim articulated his political ideology, and also exposed the intellectual arguments advocated by the state and British colonization. He structured the article in the form of a dialogue between himself and a young student.\textsuperscript{203} The dialogue took place in a school, an analogy of the Egyptian nation. In the analogy, the principal represented the khedive, the teachers represented the elite and the students represented the people. In the course of the dialogue, a student suggested that the student body assist the teachers in governing the school to aid them in “overcoming the obstacles in the way of progress”.\textsuperscript{204} This created conflict between the students regarding who would represent them, and they sought Nadim for help. As a solution, Nadim suggested electing representatives, a process he labeled as \textit{shura} and further defined as, “planting ideas in a soil of reciprocity, watering it with freedom, and nourishing it with moderation so it can blossom flowers of justice, equality and civilization”\textsuperscript{205}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid, 301.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
When this article was published, Egypt had had a house of representatives for over fifteen years.206 Khedive Ismail introduced this representative council in 1866, but Nadim made sure to distant himself it. For him, it was not a true representation of the populace and would never uphold their interests as long as it remained under the control of the elite.207 Using his metaphorical language he proclaimed that “the school encompasses all, the intelligent and the fool, the rich and poor… and if the elections were exclusive to the rich while neglecting those intelligent, the council would become a destructive force.”208 One of the students seemed surprised by Nadim’s proclamation and wondered how the rich elite could bring about destruction in spite of being the only ones with governing expertise and knowledge.209 Through the student, Nadim exposed and debunked the political views championed by Mubarak. He viewed the proposed argument as a fallacy, since the school was full of people with expertise and intellectual capacities. However, those people were excluded from the political process because they lay outside the sphere of the ruling classes. Instead, only the rich and powerful got elected through systematically terrorizing and manipulating the populace.210 The political motives of the ruling class brought destruction on the country. Being rich, Nadim explained, was not the main predicament but rather acquiring wealth through exploitation of people and their resources. The rich who were supposed to represent the people would never work for their welfare while their entire lives depended upon exploiting and enslaving the very same people they claimed to represent.211

After the arguments for the status quo were debunked, Nadim addressed colonial reason. The student raised the issue of widespread illiteracy and ignorance among the people, insinuating chaotic and mismanaged policies under a democratic setting. The result of this would not only be

207 The house of representatives was established by Khedive Ismail in 1866.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid, 303.
211 Ibid, 302.
a failed policy, but it would also reflect a civilizational deficiency and regression. The student added that this perceived deficiency could be abused by “other” nations, “we will be a subject of ridicule and they will say: Oh they are back to their barbaric and ignorant ways”\textsuperscript{212} To this Nadim replied that political proficiency was a process reached through trial and error, and would need continual changes and developments. And to the accusation of being barbaric, he replied that “our people” would never be more barbaric than the accusers.\textsuperscript{213} He reported to the student one of “their” historical incidents that happened roughly 200 years ago, in which three representatives were burnt alive inside “their shura lodge” for opposing taxations.\textsuperscript{214} Although he did not mention it explicitly, Nadim was referring to the East and the West in his discussions on the self and the other. These accusations show that ‘democracy’ always brought the issue of the ‘ignorance’ of the people to the forefront. Although Nadim talked of “trial and error” as a means of strengthening the people’s political consciousness, he conceived of a larger educational project for them. The people had to be ‘educated’ to be employed towards the anti-colonial struggle.

### 3.6 The Education of ‘the People’

Dedication to the anti-colonial struggle as perceived by Nadim required widely spread political consciousness. Preserving the integrity of one’s native tongue and pursuing the project of political unity required an education that would raise the political consciousness of national subjects, the people. As a result, the struggle defined by Nadim was two-fold: Fighting against colonial interests on one hand and diffusing intellectual knowledge on the other. As he put it, one of the main reasons for the West’s progress was the freedom allocated to its writers, a freedom that was the real tool for public education and was absent in the East because it threatened its rulers. Nadim introduced a dialectical formula in which progress would be achieved through the interaction between the ideas of the intellectuals, disseminated freely in the public realm, and the ideas of the populace. Through free contact with the intellectuals, ‘the people’ would be

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid, 304.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
transformed from a state of ignorance to the heights of knowledge.\textsuperscript{215} The medium of such encounter between the intellectuals and the public was the printing press and newspapers, which he conceptually linked to oration saying, “In the Islamic \textit{umma} oration served the role of the newspapers”\textsuperscript{216} This form of public education suggested by Nadim was in conflict with the state sponsored educational project suggested by Ali Mubarak. Nadim presented his model of the free exchange of ideas as more efficient since the state would find the right expertise “without spending a single dinar on [the people’s] education”\textsuperscript{217}

The category of ‘people’ as conceived by Nadim constituted of two elements: the urban and the rural. The peasants in Nadim’s writings were often connected to the emerging new economy that was completely dependent on cotton production. He presented them as the subjects mostly affected by the new irrigation projects and the trends of economic liberalization.\textsuperscript{218} On both the intellectual and the physical level, they inhabited a category separate from the urban dwellers. Due to the nature of the exploitation of the rural by the urban, the peasants were seen as deprived of knowledge that created an intellectual gap between them and their urban counterparts. Nadim defined the peasants’ problem in terms of the alienation that resulted from this exploitation. This alienation hindered the social solidarity required to fight foreign invaders and create an independent nation. Under the telling title of “Oh you modernized, you are neither yourself nor those you are trying to imitate”, Nadim produced a critique of the urban bourgeoisie in relation to the peasantry.\textsuperscript{219} The article argued that the disparity between luxurious urban living and the austere rural one prevented the urbanites from being in solidarity with their peasant ‘brothers’. Urban image, perhaps, was marked by beautiful scenery and well lit streets filled with amusement bars and cafes where city dwellers mingled with scientists and intellectuals. Such company and environment gave rise to a different consciousness aware of their privileges and the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} Nadim, \textit{Al-Uztad}, 347-348.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Nadim, \textit{Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit}, 271.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Ibid, 347.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Nadim, \textit{Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit}, 191.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Ibid, 189.
\end{itemize}
state-given rights to protect them, thereby making them averse to losing these privileges as a consequence of uniting with the peasantry.\textsuperscript{220}

This kind of urban consciousness as well as social mobility associated with it were not – as Mubarak claimed - a result of formal state education in anyway. Consciousness was acquired though engaging with the public, while social mobility was a result of the peasants themselves. Nadim argued that the urban luxury was not a result of any personal accomplishment on behalf of the city-dwellers, but it was rather built upon the peasants’ toiling. He expressed this to the urbanites through a witty metaphor, “Come look at the ladder that you used for your ascent, the core of your living and the source of your wealth. It’s the peasant, your brother; pardon me, I mean your servant.”\textsuperscript{221} This sense of servitude created remorse within the figure of the peasant, which served as the first layer of alienation. Moreover, the modern city alienated the peasants from the urbanites by excluding them from its technologies. When the peasants saw that the urbanites -who treated them as slaves - were also the exclusive owners of automobiles, the hatred and alienation intensified.\textsuperscript{222}

After exposing the problem, Nadim’s solution was for the urbanites to completely change their spirit by abandoning their condescending attitude and working to reunite with ordinary Egyptians. Once the duality of master-servant is forsaken for a unified identity based on nationalism, the peasants could acquire a new vibrant soul. This new soul would be full of energy, seeking knowledge, and improving the peasants’ way. The end result would benefit both the nation and its individuals, as the peasants would work on modernizing agricultural, and would become conscious individuals with an active role in shaping the historical process.\textsuperscript{223} The end result of the educational process as proposed by Nadim was different from Mubarak’s. Mubarak wanted the people to be educated in order to produce sufficient cadres that would carry about the process of modernization needed to catch up with the European civilization. On the other hand Nadim wanted the people to gain the political consciousness needed to sever the

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid, 191.

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid.
economic dependency on the west, and to create politically autonomous Eastern nations. Among the various tactics of consciousness formation, Nadim allocated a special role for public cultural productions such as theatre.

### 3.7 The Theatre of Public Education

Nadim’s intellectual occupation with the theatre can be divided into his perception of the art itself, and his practical engagement with Arabic theatrical troupes. In both cases, his engagement meant to disrupt the theatrical projects of the khedival state. Nadim followed the statist view of theatre as a tool of public education and modernization. His definition of theatre also resonated with the didactic line adopted by Ali Mubarak. Nadim wrote: “The art of theatre is based upon educating and culturing the nations… it takes the role of a teacher who educates his pupils”\(^{224}\) However, what made him different was that he brought in the context of colonialism, both in his conception of theatre and in his insight on the ends it should serve. He viewed the development of the art within the context of the East-West dichotomy, but once again he reversed the direction of the East-West interaction. He agreed with Mubarak that the European theatre was more refined and advanced compared to “eastern” street performances, but denied the educational benefit of western culture in a colonial context. “The art [of theatre] is an ancient one that the Europeans adopted from the Arabs when they encountered them in Andalucía and Syria.”\(^{225}\) Since the East was in a state of relative weakness, Europeans down on this art and viewed it solely as a source of cheap entertainment.\(^ {226}\) For the easterners to be educated properly through theatre, they had to take street performances seriously.

For Nadim, street performances such as those of *Awlad Rabia* were not a problem due to their foul language or perceived inappropriate contents, but rather because of the negative connotations the Egyptian middle class attached to them. Thus the educational content of the performances of *Awlad Rabia* should be kept, but the form of Arabic theatre should be transformed to correspond to its critical counterparts in the west for this education to be


\(^ {225}\) Ibid, 502.

\(^ {226}\) Ibid, 501.
successful. The public education suggested by Nadim was rebellious in nature, and aimed at educating the masses about oppressive social relations, a message that Awlad Rabia was proficient in conveying. Nadim gave an example of a valuable message:

In Egypt, Awlad Rabia take on the roles of the rulers and act out how they chain people in iron and with ropes, forcing them to work in corvée, how they would kill a man over 20 silver pennies or hang another because the police officer was angry, or how they take the farms and cattle away from the people.\(^{227}\)

The theatre imagined by Nadim was one that had to unearth injustices and subject them to criticism. Theatre should educate the people through explaining the forces that cause those deplorable incidents of oppression, rather than viewing them solely as comic skits.\(^{228}\) Thus, his vision of theatrical public education aimed at confronting the people with the roots of their troubles in order to create a meaning that would accentuate political consciousness. This education would in no way serve in legitimizing the Khedive and his projects. His play \textit{al-Watan} stood as an example of this ideology. The play was a critique of the tyranny of the ruling classes, whether be it the umdas or the Turkish officials. He also exposed the foreign interference in local politics and attacked the misrule that caused Egypt’s decline.\(^{229}\)

For the message to reach his audience, Nadim was eager to advocate modern theatre, but indigenous theatre.\(^{230}\) To show how Arabic actors were as competent as their European counterparts, he offered the opinion of his nemesis and staunch modernist Ali Mubarak, who according to Nadim, though that “they are more fit to perform in the opera than the others”.\(^{231}\) Unlike street performers like Awlad Rabiya, modern theatre performers were often university graduates who studied language and literature, and performed structured historical novels such as

\(^{227}\) Ibid.

\(^{228}\) Ibid.

\(^{229}\) Sadgrove, \textit{The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century}, 147.

\(^{230}\) See for example: \textit{Al-Uztad}, 22 March 1893 and \textit{Al-Uztath}, 21 January 1893.

\(^{231}\) Nadim, \textit{Al-Uztad}, 503
the autobiography of Queen Balquis and other figures.\textsuperscript{232} If Nadim left room for emulating European theatre, this indicates less the strength of colonial modernity that permeated the intellectual life of the colonized. This colonial call to modernity was suggesting that eastern populations were inherently incapable of replicating modern theatre. Nadim’s positioning of Arabic theatre as competent was an anti-colonial appropriation of European culture, which served in negating colonial claims. The subjects that Nadim chose to express this art went beyond the sharp dichotomy implicit in this colonial modernity and introduced a novel theatrical conception. Although he advocated for educated professional actors, he associated theatre with students and workers; and it is through the latter that his unique vision was expressed.\textsuperscript{233} In an article entitled, “The society of Kemal in Assiut”, he narrated a bizarre incident involving menial workers.\textsuperscript{234} The article situated the reader in the colonial context that created a dichotomy in the market between local and western products. Many local products in Assiut had been crowded out by foreign products that dazzled the public “regardless of its quality or strength”.\textsuperscript{235} As a reaction to this, a group of artisans who had become unemployed decided to gather every night after their daily shifts in a secret workshop, away from the people’s eyes. The people grew curious, especially after they saw them manufacturing clothes, swords and other wooden products. Some speculated that they were members of a Masonic lodge, while others suggested that they were simply working extra hours. To everyone’s surprise, it turned out that the workers were forming their own theatrical troupe. They spent their nights sewing costumes and building theatrical sets, as well as memorizing plays and educating themselves on the art of acting. Nadim praised their resilience that made them humble enough to pursue an education in another craft at such old age. He presented this troupe as a role model for eastern subjects,

\textit{It would be commendable if other people took their lead and worked on reviving an old industry, or learned a new one, so they would avoid poverty. They would also express the}

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid, 759

\textsuperscript{233} For more on the topic of students and theatre see: Sagradove, \textit{The Egyptian Theatre}, 145-146.

\textsuperscript{234} Nadim, \textit{Al-Uztad}, 333.

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
skill of the easterners and show that they are capable of catching up with the Europeans and their industries.²³⁶

Like other native intellectuals grappling with colonial modernity, Nadim insisted on his people becoming fully modern. However, his version of transformation to modernity was only possible through rupturing, and not recreating, the social and economic relation imposed by the colonizers. A modern East that was attempting to break away from the epistemological and economic hegemony of the West could not be equated with the khedival modernity that was dependent on the western powers.

²³⁶ Ibid.
Chapter 4

Concluding Comparison

4.1 Translating ‘the Nation’

In an era famously inaugurated by Khedive Ismail’s proclamation, “my country is no longer part of Africa, for we are now a part of Europe”, Egyptian intellectuals had to grapple with the consequences of ‘becoming’ European.²³⁷ Ali Mubarak and Abdallah al-Nadim both approached the cultural imperialism enunciated in this statement in different ways. Mubarak masked perceived historical differences between ‘Africa’ and ‘Europe’; becoming European turned out to be regaining the true Egyptian self. Nadim rejected this as a form of cultural assimilation, and deemed it an internalization of colonial tactics. In this paper, I have attempted to articulate the ideological leanings of both intellectuals through analyzing their literary works. It is through their writings that their ideological projects can be unraveled. Both intellectuals embarked on their careers in an environment shaped by Ismail’s ambitious modernization projects, and their colonial after-lives. In this context, they expressed of the cultural changes Egyptians faced at the hands of the colonizing khedival and British states. As Gramsci put it, the act of writing is always latent with political significance. In his prison notebooks, he designated a separate function for written language, differentiating it from other linguistic expressions. Writing will always be a political act, and more specifically a national one. The importance of studying the language of the intellectuals lies in what it communicates about their “nationality” and “popularity”.²³⁸ Through their written texts, Mubarak and Nadim were engaged in a sublime act of translation: translating experiences into language and more importantly translating the language itself into the national. But as I have demonstrated, both perceived of the national very differently.

²³⁷ AlSayyad, "Ali Mubarak's Cairo", 56.

From among the various social shifts they witnessed, language came to the forefront with the Nahda, and later with the colonizers’ efforts at linguistic manipulation. The linguistic debate bore high significance. As the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci put it:

> Every time that the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national popular masses, in other words to reorganize cultural hegemony.  

239  

The linguistic choices made by Nadim and Mubarak were manifestations of their projects’ disparity. The reaction to cultural imperialism on the linguistic front never translated into abandoning Arabic. Nahda intellectuals held different visions of ‘modernizing’ the language, but this modernity did not mean writing exclusively in French or English.  

Instead, an elitist tendency to understand Arabic culture through the lens of the European emerged. Nahda for elite Egyptian intellectuals, such as Mubarak, culminated into translating French and English into Arabic.  

His writings were an extensive translation of European knowledge, through restating the advances in European sciences in fields such as geography, Egyptology and engineering. He was mainly translating Europe into Arabic, pinning his intellectual project on European modernity and institutional organization. Nadim’s act of translation took a different turn. He was engaged in a more direct act of translation: translating colloquial registers into high Arabic and vice versa. Nadim’s use of several dialects and registers within one discourse of language is a manifestation of his idea of the national. His philology was compromised of a unity of difference. His unity was not a motionless solid entity but rather an amalgam—an amalgam of Arabic and an amalgam of the nation.

### 4.2 Writing and the State-Culture Dialectic

As Gramsci noted intellectuals are incorporated in systems of social convention and operate within it. This continual link with the traditional, would link the state and the civil society in a


240 Tageldin, *Disarming words*, 5.

241 Ibid.
dialectical relation that the intellectuals can reorganize to instigate change. The institutions of the state could be used as mediators for diffusing innovations that would challenge conventions. He located the sites of diffusing linguistic innovations in education, newspapers, theatre, and ‘conversations’ between the more educated and less educated, sites that Nadim and Mubarak engaged in.\textsuperscript{242} And as historian on modern Egypt, John Chalcraft, demonstrated, the more sites and subjects contribute to the making of hegemony the more it will open up spaces for re-negotiation, and shifts in the unbalanced power relations towards the interests of different actors.\textsuperscript{243} Therefore, we can say that Mubarak and Nadim were working organically towards the articulation of different hegemonies. The creation of the new public spheres created new sites for negotiating hegemony.

According to Gramsci, who described the philosophy of praxis as “living philology”, language can be seen as a metaphor for hegemony/counter-hegemony\textsuperscript{244}. Then the construction of a new hegemony, counteracting the old one, needed a reconstruction of language. Mubarak remodeled the traditional with no attempt to incorporate the popular languages and create a synthesis. He utilized traditional forms of language that obscured challenges. Nadim on the other hand was not only organically engaged with the people, but also organized and created cohesion. His organic contribution was primarily his interest in creating new institutions and innovative linguistic apparatuses.\textsuperscript{245} Linguistically, the reorganization of a new unified language would create a unified collective will needed for political action.\textsuperscript{246} Nadim attempted to recreate and reorganize the cultural milieu, working towards progressive hegemony. Mubarak on the other hand affirmed the Khedival power relations, working towards a bureaucratic hegemony.

\textsuperscript{242} Gramsci, \textit{Selections from Cultural Writings}, 169-170.


\textsuperscript{244} Ibid, 10.

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid, 45.

\textsuperscript{246} Ibid, 52.
4.3 The Peasants and the Conventional Social System

From the conventional systems that Mubarak and Nadim negotiated in their writings, the social system that deemed the peasantry inferior occupied a major space in their thoughts. They both conceived of the peasant as a ‘problem’, however this problem was part of a larger national complication that was being unraveled through the processes of modern state-building. The peasants perhaps helped exemplify the national complication, but they were neither the sole problem nor the source of it. As Michael Gasper remarked, starting the 1870s the peasants were the subject of the writings of the many of the published journals, perhaps due to the advent of communication that enlarged Egypt as a unit and connected its dispersed parts.247 In general, peasants were used by the writers to exemplify the negative effects brought about by the social transformation of the modernization projects.248 Mubarak saw the peasants as part of the fabric of the traditional structure that had to be remodeled and modernized. Their problems, just like the nations, would be solved with the proper reordering and organization. Nadim on the other hand saw them as part of a more complex national project. His project exceeded mere reordering of social structured, as it entailed a creation of new consciousness.

As I have shown in this paper, this consciousness would be reached through political education. Since traditional education was out of the picture, the class that should spread political awareness was a question of debate. Historian of modern Egypt, Michael Gasper, was right to point out that the intellectual disposition represented by Abdallah al-Nadim perceived the urbanites as the ultimate educators of a population (that were mostly peasants); However, I would like to problematize his analysis and take it a step further. It is true that Nadim and his intellectual counterparts expressed solutions and anxieties that were bourgeois in nature, but in the end of the nineteenth century in Egypt such ideas were not dominant. Viewing the intellectual history of the nineteenth century through the lens of the nationalist historiography that triumphed later and was marked by the intellectual domination of the bourgeois class would mask the developments and


248 Ibid, 77.
contentions that took place. Gasper noted that Nadim in particular presented “the peasant” as a subject of reform who was ignorant of the forces that controlled his life, since they lay outside the scope of both his village and his nation. In his analysis he presented Nadim’s portrayal as one that was gendered, feminizing the peasant and thus deeming him a controlled individual that needed to be patronized.

I have argued in the preceding chapters that Nadim’s intellectual project offered more than this one-dimensional view. The rural and the urban were involved in more than a linear relationship, in which the former intellectually presided over the later. In Nadim’s project, the people, the inhabitants of both the urban and the rural had to undergo a complex educational. In the course of this educational process they would interact with multiple forces. Through the medium of language and communication, the people would interact with cultural productions, including that of the urban intellectuals. Both the people and the productions would be altered by this interaction, and together they would create a unified national consciousness. The consciousness would unify the urbanites and the peasants, as they would act out of a politically informed collective self-interest towards serving the ends of the nationalist project.

### 4.4 Writing in the Colonial Setting

As an Arabic-speaking cast into a colonial context offered, Nadim offered a more nuanced perspective than suggested by Mitchell in *Colonizing Egypt*. The modern institutions of journalism and theatre largely shaped Nadim’s intellectual activity; institutions that were, indeed, the product of colonial modernity as Mitchell demonstrated. However, Nadim presents an example of an individual who rejected Mitchell’s truth imposed by the structure of colonial modernity, even if he often operated within its institutions. As I have tried to argue, he modeled journalism and theatre into his own tools of power. While Nadim could not escape the colonial condition of his life, he was not colonial leaning as Mitchell asserted. The fact that colonized subjects had to operate within the conditions and institutions of modernity should not be viewed as a triumph of a modernist episteme that negated local agency. The question should not be how

---

249 The 20th century nationalist movement was championed by Mustafa Kamel who was a student of Nadim, but the experiences of his generation were drastically different.

250 Ibid, 72.
to escape the overarching tune of modernity and colonialism, but rather how to navigate, and perhaps even supersede it; maybe then colonial modernity can cease to be a conceptual prison and become a launching pad for historical change and even resistance. Studying modernity through its epistemological shift presupposes the presence of two subjects, a native one and a ‘colonized’ other in the literal sense, an other who is a subject infiltrated by the colonizing powers and alienated from their native past. A close look at Nadim’s approach debunks the two presupposed rigid subjectivities, and instead presents a process of becoming. The subjectivity of the colonized should not only be understood as formulated within a triumphant modernist episteme, but also within a web of relations. Beyond epistemological domination, these relations are unstable and shifting, which gave Nadim albeit limited space to reverse them and use them for his own ends.

Although Nadim’s intellectual approach was unusually subaltern for the Nahda discourse of modernity exemplified more readily by Mubarak, he shared a mutual ground with Mubarak. Nadim and Mubarak harbored common intentions pertaining to the formation of a national project. The national project for both was based upon the premise of the need to modernize the nation. They pursued their projects in an organic manner. Both engaged with the institutions of state and culture, but while Mubarak espoused a top down approach, Nadim’s was more variegated. Their projects entailed total social transformation, which went beyond small and secluded intellectual initiatives. Although ‘the people’ had a central role in social transformation, they attributed social change to an entity larger than individual self-motivation. For Ali Mubarak, this entity was the central state, while for Abdallah al-Nadim it was a collective national consciousness leading to political independence. This research attempted to take the larger projects of both intellectuals as the point of comparison to elucidate the variety of intellectual responses that were present at the intersection of state building and the advent of colonization.
Bibliography


Baskerville, John Cornelius. “From Tahdhiib al-Aamma to Tahmiish al-Ammiyya: In Search of Social and Literary Roles for Standard and Colloquial Arabic in late 19th Century Egypt”. PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin,


—. *Nukhbat Al-Fikr Fi Tadbir Nil Misr.* Cairo: Wadi al-Nil, 1880.


