

HISTORY, AUTHENTICITY, AND POLITICS:
TARIQ AL-BISHRI'S INTERPRETATION
OF MODERN EGYPTIAN HISTORY

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Introduction

Since the rise of Egyptian nationalism at the beginning of this century, historiography has been closely tied to political goals.¹ Every political current had its own interpretation of history, and in many ways the ideological struggle between these currents can be understood as a battle between different interpretations of history. This applies as much to the struggle between the Wafd, the communist movement, and the Moslem Brotherhood in the 1930s and 1940s, as to the efforts of Nasserist regime to eradicate its enemies from historical memory in the 1950s and 1960s.

With the establishment of a multi-party system ten years ago and the reemergence of Egypt's main political currents, the urge to legitimize oneself in historical terms has become even stronger. Having failed to fulfil the aspirations of the Revolution of 23 July 1952 the present regime has gradually relinquished its monopoly over the national historical image. In the ensuing struggle for Egypt's historical past the different political parties have tried to fill the vacuum.²

Undoubtedly Tariq al-Bishri is within this context one of the most interesting contemporary Egyptian historians.³ Al-Bishri's interpretation of Egyptian history merits a closer look for several reasons. Firstly, al-Bishri is one of the few Egyptian intellectuals who has presented a coher-

¹ According to Crabbs, the leader of the Nationalist Party, Mustafa Kamil (1874-1908) should be considered the first ideological Egyptian historian: Jack A. Crabbs Jr., "The Writing of History in Nineteenth-Century Egypt", The American University in Cairo Press, 1984, pp. 159-160.

² Gudrun Krämer, The use of History in Contemporary Egyptian Party Politics. Paper presented to the Conference "Commitment and Objectivity in Contemporary Egyptian Historiography, 1919-1952" organized by the Dutch Institute of Archeology and Arabic Studies from August 31 to September 3, 1987.

³ Tariq al-Bishri was born in 1931. His grandfather was Shaykh al-Azhar from 1900-1918. Tariq al-Bishri is not by profession a historian; he studied law, and has climbed the hierarchy as a judge to become mustashâr, member of the Egyptian Conseil d'État in the 1980s.

ent and sophisticated view of modern Egyptian history from the early nineteenth century to the present day. Secondly, his view has evolved over a long period of time, spanning two and half decades, rendering his work an important source for the study of ideological changes during that period. Thirdly, al-Bishri's work can be considered as an attempt to build a new political consensus based on a common concept of the past.

What makes al-Bishri's work particularly interesting is his gradual reinterpretation of Egyptian history from a predominant secular nationalist perspective couched in a Marxist terminology written in the 1960s and 1970s, to a predominant Islamic perspective acquired in the 1980s, based on a terminology derived from the discourse on the turâth (the Islamic heritage).

Despite al-Bishri's reinterpretation of history, it is my main contention that the basic themes in al-Bishri's work have remained the same. The themes unity, democracy, and independence run through all his work from the 1960s to the present.³ Their content, however, has changed in accordance with al-Bishri's shift in perspective, which is related to broader national political developments, as the rise of the Islamic movement in the 1970s.

In al-Bishri's theory of history the three basic themes, unity, democracy, and independence, are both an abstraction, as well as a historical reality. In its abstract form these themes present an ideal, embodied by the masses, while in their concrete historical form the themes

³ The most succinct presentation of al-Bishri's views on the subject can be found in: Târiq al-Bishri al-Dimuqratiyya fi 'itâr al-haraka al-wataniyya, published in the collection of Târiq al-Bishri's studies on democracy "Dirâsât fi al-dimuqratiyya al-misriyya", Cairo, 1987, pp. 143-149. The article was originally published in al-Ahrâm 15/5/1976. This collection of articles consists mostly of articles published in the 1970s and written from his earlier secular point of view on subjects as the Constitution of 1923, the struggle between the Wafd and the monarchy, etc. The fact that they have been reprinted with the addition of a few new articles in which al-Bishri expounds his new ideas, indicates that he has not repudiated his previous ideas completely.

are represented in an imperfect manner by the struggle of the democratic nationalist movement to fulfil the ideal. Once they merge in the right mix in a certain period the ideal of the democratic nationalist movement will have been fulfilled and history will come to an end. As Egypt is neither unified, democratic, nor independent, it is obvious history has gone awry. It is the task of the historian to determine how this came about.

Al-Bishri's historical analysis can therefore be read as an attempt to determine which political forces have contributed to fulfilling the ideal of the democratic nationalist movement. In his earlier period (which is dealt with in Part I) the criteria he uses to measure their contribution are Marxist, nationalist and secularist. History is seen as a pendulum swing between imperialism, the reactionary right, and absolutism on the one side, against the democratic nationalist movement on the other side, whose attempts to unite the three themes constantly eludes it.

In his later period (dealt with in Part II) al-Bishri believes that the main weak point in left-wing secular historiography is the elimination of the cultural, primarily Islamic component as contained in the turāth. In his attempt to reinterpret Egyptian history along these new lines he believes that one of the reasons why history has not fulfilled its promises should be ascribed to the deviation of the Moslem community from the Islamic path. Secular political currents during the past century have concentrated too much on achieving political and economic independence without paying due attention to cultural independence. True independence can only be based on an Islamic identity and allegiance. This cultural struggle is portrayed as the struggle between al-wāfid (that which comes from outside and is alienating) and al-mawrūth (that which is inherited).

PART I

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

The Rise of the Liberal Nationalist Movement

Tariq al-Bishri's believed in the second half of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s that Egyptian history was dominated by the nationalist struggle against foreign occupation and the democratic struggle against internal despotism (istibdād). For Tariq al-Bishri these two tendencies constitute an indivisible unity: independence without democracy is inconceivable, for the ruling elite will always try to compromise with foreign powers if the masses are unable to exert their political rights. He traces this development through modern Egyptian history, analyzing the successive phases and circumstances in which these two tendencies meet and separate as the basic pulse of history.⁴

The first instance of these two tendencies meeting occurred during the Urabi Revolution (1881) when it was expressed in the slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians". Egyptian military officers and notables associated the growing foreign intervention in Egypt with the despotism of the khedives Isma'il and Tawfiq. The British Occupation, however, terminated the first Egyptian demands for a parliament and independence.⁵

During the next stage of the democratic nationalist movement, at the beginning of this century, it was split into its two component tendencies. The Nationalist Party (al-Hizb al-Watani) gave priority to the nationalist struggle against the British, leaning on the Ottoman sultan

⁴ The most succinct presentation of al-Bishri's views on the subject can be found in: Tāriq al-Bishri, al-Dimuqrāṭiyya fi 'itār al-haraka al-wataniyya [Democracy in the Framework of the Nationalist Movement], in: "Dirāsāt fi al-dimuqrāṭiyya al-misriyya", pp. 143-149. The article was originally published in al-Ahram 15/5/1976.

⁵ Tāriq al-Bishri, Sa'd Zaghlūl... wa fikruhu al-siyāsī, al-Talī'a, 4 (1969) 3, p. 40; Tāriq al-Bishri, "Sa'd Zaghlūl yufāwidu al-'istimār", Cairo, 1977, p. 14; Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Dimuqrāṭiyya wa nizām 23 yūlyū", Cairo, 1987, pp. 44-46.

and khedive Abbas II, while the Umma Party depended on the British in its democratic struggle against the despotism of the khedive and the implementation of gradual reforms. The split is ascribed by al-Bishri to the class character of the two parties, with the Umma Party representing the large landowners who were tied economically to the British, and the Nationalist Party finding its supporters among the Egyptian middle classes who were threatened by British political and economic interests.⁶

The two tendencies of the nationalist democratic struggle merged again during the Revolution of 1919, the great national uprising led by the Wafd. Al-Bishri differs from most Egyptian left-wing historians in his positive evaluation of the 1919 Revolution. He believes that the 1919 Revolution marked an important step forward in achieving the goals of the nationalist democratic movement.

The most important accomplishment of the Wafd is that it established a national unity between Copts and Moslems, expressed in the slogan "nationalism is our religion and independence is our life" (al-wataniyya dīnunā wa al-istiqlāl hayātunā). This was a major setback for imperialism in its endeavor to divide Egypt into sects (tawā'if).⁷

The other important achievement of the revolution was the step it made to independence. Due to the tenacity of the Wafd and its leader Sa'd Zaghlul the British were forced to renounce the Protectorate and formally recognized Egypt's independence in the Unilateral Declaration of February 28 1922.⁸

However, by far the most important achievement of the 1919 Revolution was the promulgation of the Constitution of 1923. The installment of a parliament, the implementation of universal suffrage, the establishment of ministerial respon-

⁶ Tāriq al-Bishri, al-Dimuqrātiyya fi 'itār al-Haraka al-wataniyya, pp. 144-145.

⁷ Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimūn wa al-'aqbāt", pp. 101-126 and pp. 135-139.

⁸ Tāriq al-Bishri, "Sa'd Zaghlūl yufāwidu al-'ist'imār", pp. 182-183.

sibility, as well as the recognition of civil rights are highly praised. In addition, al-Bishri considers the freedom of organization, press and religion,⁹ as well as the separation of powers between the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary, as the basic elements of democracy.¹⁰

Tariq al-Bishri concludes that the responsibility for the failure of the liberal period cannot be attributed to the 1923 Constitution itself, but must be ascribed to fraudulent elections, corruption and other unconstitutional means of obtaining power.¹¹ This was made possible by the alliance between the king and the minority parties,¹² supported by the British who retained their extensive powers to interfere in internal Egyptian affairs.

The Wafd's huge potential as a mass movement to defeat these forces was severely reduced, al-Bishri believes, as a result of its own internal contradictions. On the one hand it rallied the masses behind its nationalist and democratic demands, on the other it was constrained by its political strategy of "peaceful legal methods" (al-turuq al-silmiyya al-mashrū'a) which tied it to the Constitution and committed it to the renouncement of force after the initial outbreak of the revolution in March 1919. Tariq al-Bishri partly ascribes this contradiction to the Wafd's petite bourgeois character. Incapable of overcoming its contradiction the Wafd never succeeded in defeating the reactionary forces, evicting the British from Egypt, enforc-

⁹ Tariq al-Bishri, Dustūr 1923 bayna al-qasr wa al-wafd [The Constitution of 1923 Between the Palace and the Wafd], in: Dirāsāt fi al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya, p. 45. Originally published in al-Kātib 9 (1969) 98 pp. 15-26.

¹⁰ Tariq al-Bishri, Dustūr 1923 sirā' hawl al-sulta [The Constitution of 1923; the Struggle for Power], in: Dirāsāt fi al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya, p. 56. Originally published in al-Tali'a 8 (1972) 8 pp. 48-59.

¹¹ Tariq al-Bishri, Dustūr 1923 sirā' hawl al-sulta, pp. 55-74.

¹² The so-called minority parties are the Liberal Constitutional Party, the Ittihad Party, and the Sa'di Party. Most of them had split off from the Wafd, or were established by the monarchy.

ing its interpretation of the Constitution, and taking control of the state. Instead the power struggle between the Wafd, the king and the British remained unresolved, and reached a stalemate. Consequently the Wafd was only in government for less than seven years during the whole liberal period.¹³

The Failed Revolution, 1945-1952

Tariq al-Bishri only refers to the period between 1924 and 1945 in passing. He notes the gradual decline of the Wafd as a result of its compromises with the British in 1936 and 1942, and the rise of its right-wing rivals, the Society of the Moslem Brothers (Djamā'a al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn), and Young Egypt (Misr al-Fatāt). Most of al-Bishri's attention is focused on the rapid decline of the liberal system between 1945 and 1952. This period he considers to be the pivot around which modern Egyptian history revolves. The crucial development in this period is the radicalization of the democratic nationalist movement, to the point that it called for armed struggle against both the British Occupation and the Egyptian ruling classes. This implied a rejection of the Wafd's limited goals of independence and formal democracy to be attained by "peaceful legal means" of winning elections and carrying on negotiations with the British.

Two important developments account for this radicalization: after World War II a severe economic crisis made itself felt, and Zionism began to pose a direct threat after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The economic crisis and the soaring inflation of the period after World War II undermined the social and economic base on which the political system of the Constitution of 1923 rested, a process that was enhanced by the attitude of the bourgeoisie who refused reforms, seeking support from imper-

¹³ Tariq al-Bishri, Thawra 1919 wa al-sulta al-siyāsiyya [The 1919 Revolution and Political Power], in: Dirāsāt fi al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya, pp. 77-106. Originally published in al-Kātib 7 (1967) 79 pp. 91-107.

ialism against the masses.¹⁴ The Zionist threat and the Palestine War of 1948 made Egyptians aware for the first time of their Arab identity and the international dimension of the struggle against imperialism.¹⁵

Tariq al-Bishri's major work "The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952" consists mainly of an analysis how the different political currents met the demands of this period conceptually and in practice. The thrust of his argument is that two tendencies of democratic nationalist movement after 1945 were again divided among different political currents, each adopting an aspect of, or contributing to its development. Their dissension and factionalism precluded them from carrying out the necessary revolution.

The communist movement is one of the currents Tariq al-Bishri regards as having contributed to the democratic nationalist movement. It is credited for having produced the theoretical framework for analyzing the contradictions of Egyptian society in this period. Its main innovation consisted of the notion that the struggle against imperialism should be directed against the British Occupation as well as the indigenous ruling classes. The landholding and the industrialist classes, had formed by the second half of the 1940s an alliance with imperialism against the democratic nationalist movement. In short, the communist movement contributed the idea that economic liberation is an inseparable part of political liberation.¹⁶

Otherwise Tariq al-Bishri's judgment of the communist movement is negative. In fact his criticism foreshadows the withering attack he made on the communist movement in his later book "Moslems and Copts within the Framework of the National Community", published in the 1980s.¹⁷ This nega-

¹⁴ Târiq al-Bishri, "al-Haraka al-siyâsiyya fi misr 1945-1952" [The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952], pp. 181-207.

¹⁵ Ibid., 233-274.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 76-79.

¹⁷ al-Muslimûn wa al-'aqbât fi 'itâr al-djamâ'a al-wataniyya. Dâr al-Shrûq, Cairo, 1982.

tive evaluation of the communist movement stems from his belief that "the communist movement was more apt than other political currents in finding a political formulation for determining its social goals and the means to realize them by applying its scientific concept of imperialism and social division of classes. But the determination of general political formulas is easier than executing them in practice and making their detailed evaluation in political life".¹⁸ He holds the foreign character of the movement responsible for this situation. This, and its inexperience isolated it from society and the masses: "The new, whatever change it might bring about, is bound to the general existing frame of reference and the general political ideological frame of reference in society. Innovation even if it is sui generis must be related...to the awareness of national customs, the historical heritage (al-turāth al-tā'rikhī), common values, that is, the special mixture of ideological and emotional attitudes of the masses".¹⁹

On account of its abstract ideas the communist movement made serious mistakes. In international affairs it exaggerated the danger the United States posed after the Second World War, neglected the opportunities of benefiting from inter-imperialist rivalry between the United States and Great Britain, while it confined its trust in the socialist block.²⁰ The communist movements most disastrous political step was its acceptance of the partition plan of Palestine, an inexcusable and a typical error, according to al-Bishri.²¹ In domestic affairs it tended to confuse issues by ascribing the policies of the different political parties exclusively to their class base, or worse, characterizing Young Egypt as a fascist party on account of its relations

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 161-162.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 262-264.

with the Palace.²² Like so many other aspects of the ideology of the communist movement, these serious errors stemmed from the habit of slavishly applying European concepts and analysis to the Egyptian situation.

The ideological rigidity (djumûd) of the communist movement was underscored by its organizational chaos, divided as it was in a multitude of small cells and splinters as a result of infighting and extreme secretiveness.²³ The only two groups for which Tariq al-Bishri expresses his sympathy are HAMITU (later HADITU)²⁴ and Talf'a al-Ummâl (The Vanguard of the Workers), mainly on account of their stronger relations with the labor movement, their more restricted ties with foreign intellectuals, and their willingness to subordinate themselves in a national front under the Wafd's leadership in the struggle for a national democratic revolution.²⁵

If the communist movement failed in the execution of its tasks but is redeemed for at least having made a crucial theoretical and an attempted practical contribution to the democratic nationalist movement, the Moslem Brotherhood is described in "The Political Movement" as woefully lacking in both theoretical finesse and democratic structure. Al-Bishri squarely puts the Brotherhood in the camp of the reaction. He believes the Brotherhood was the tool of the reaction in its struggle against the democratic nationalist movement, especially after the weight of the movement had shifted to the extra-parliamentary currents after World War II. In almost all the major political events of the forties, like the workers and student movement of 1946 and the national fronts at the end of the forties and the beginning of the

²² Ibid., p. 163.

²³ Ibid., p. 110 and p. 420.

²⁴ HAMITU stands for al-Haraka al-Misriyya li al-Taharrur al-Watani [The Egyptian Movement for the National Liberation]; HADITU for al-Haraka al-Dimuqrâtiyya li al-Taharrur al-Watani [The Democratic Movement for the National Liberation].

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 157-161 and pp. 222-223.

fifties, the Brotherhood either sided with the minority governments or took a neutral stand.²⁶ Even after the suppression of the Brotherhood in 1948 and the murder of its leader Hasan al-Banna, the Brotherhood stood aloof from the guerrilla warfare along the Suez Canal against the British, directing its strike forces to the holy battle (al-ma'raka al-muqaddasa) against cafés, brothels, and corruption.²⁷

Al-Bishri explains the contradiction between this political attitude and the immense following the Brotherhood acquired during the forties to the appeal of its backward looking salafiyya ideology for those classes which had lost out socially and economically and had nothing to expect of the future.²⁸ The obscurantism (ghumûd) of its ideology contained neither an analysis of society nor a definition of the organization's own character and goals. The Islamic system (al-nizâm al-islâmî) never was explained, except in the most general terms.²⁹ It seemed as if vagueness had become a goal in itself. The Brotherhood tried to define itself in statements as "the Brotherhood is a salafiyya call...a sufi tarîqa...a political organization...an athletic club... a cultural and scientific association...an economic enterprise...a social concept".³⁰ Where a clear social economic analysis was called for, the Brotherhood presented "religious enthusiasm" (widjân dînî) that attributed every problem society was afflicted with to "the wave of apostasy" (al-mawdja al-ilhâdiyya).³¹ Consequently the Brotherhood lacked a socio-economic program, though Sayyid Qutb and others were to incorporate socialist ideas in the fifties.³² If the Brotherhood did take a stand, this was

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 85-90 and pp. 108-109.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 373-377 and p. 530.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

³¹ Ibid., p. 44.

³² Ibid., pp. 377-381.

usually confused. Characteristically the Brotherhood analyzed the struggle against Zionism and Israel as a struggle of Islam against Jewry, thereby recognizing the imperialist division of the Middle East into sects (*tawâ'if*).³³ Moreover, the Brotherhood took advantage of other ideologies as Arabism for its own opportunistic purposes.³⁴

The Brotherhood's ideological obscurantism was matched by a dictatorial structure that demanded total obedience. Al-Bishri believes the foundations for the organization of the Brotherhood were laid during the congress of 1935 when a resolution was adopted demanding every Moslem to believe that the program of the Brotherhood embodied Islam, and that every diversion from it was an offence against Islam.³⁵ Besides giving free rein to the personal despotism of the leadership and unleashing the terrorist organization, the secret apparatus (*al-djihâz al-sirri*), this exclusive attitude ruled out any cooperation in a national front with other political currents.³⁶

On the other hand, when al-Bishri turns his attention to Young Egypt he is surprisingly mild. He rejects the leftist description of Young Egypt as a fascist party which cooperated, like the Brotherhood, with the Palace and the reactionary minority parties.³⁷ What seems to appeal to al-Bishri in Young Egypt is its extreme nationalist program of the 1930s. With approval he quotes the famous passage from Plan Qirsh: "Remove everything that is foreign in this country from the depth of your heart, and become fanatic in

³³ Ibid., p. 251.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 384.

³⁷ Rif'at al-Sa'id, "Ahmad Husayn, kalimât wa muwâqif" [Ahmad Husayn, Words and Opinions], Cairo, 1979; 'Abd al-'Azîm Ramadân, "Tatawwur al-haraka al-wataniyya fi misr min sana 1937 'illâ sana 1948" [The Development of the Egyptian Nationalist Movement from the Year 1937 to the Year 1948], vol. I Beirut, 1974, pp. 175-215.

your nationalism to the point of becoming mad".³⁸ Al-Bishri traces the tortuous route Young Egypt followed from a nationalist monarchist phase in the thirties to an Islamic phase in the beginning of the forties, finally ending up as the Egyptian Socialist Party in 1949, when it found the right balance between nationalist demands, a socialist economic program, and the invocation of Islam. Accordingly it had by that time dropped its old slogan "Allah...al-Watan...al-Malik" (Allah...the Nation...the King) in favor of, "Allah...al-Sha'b" (Allah...the People).³⁹ Especially in its regard for Egypt's cultural and Islamic heritage Young Egypt compared favorably with the communist movement. Thus most of the social and economic reforms were stated in Islamic terms as, "Islam forbids rent, therefore it forbids capitalism".⁴⁰

Nevertheless, al-Bishri is most severe in his criticism of Young Egypt's organization and strategy. As with so many other Egyptian political parties Young Egypt depended upon personal leadership (*al-za'ama al-fardiyya*), instead of patiently putting together a political organization by educating and training its cadre and the masses. This prevented the party from leading the masses at crucial events, as during the guerrilla warfare along Canal Zone and the spontaneous uprising of the masses during the burning of Cairo on 26 January 1952, which al-Bishri considers one of the rare historic opportunities missed for a real revolution.⁴¹ He holds all the political currents directly responsible for this lost opportunity to organize the masses into a revolutionary force.⁴²

³⁸ *Tāriq al-Bishri, al-Haraka al-siyāsiyya fi Misr 1945-1952*, p. 226.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228 and pp. 389-391.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 392-393.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 409-410 and pp. 520-531.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 523-530.

The Revolution of 23 July 1952 and the Failure of Dictatorship

In his analysis of the July Revolution al-Bishri poses the same question he addresses to each of the other political currents: did it comply with the demands of the democratic nationalist movement as they had evolved after the Second World War in its foreign, socio-economic, and democratic policy? The fact that al-Bishri analyzes the Revolution of the 23rd of July in these terms at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s proves that these issues still form an important part of his theory of history.

Al-Bishri carefully examines all three issues separately. He comes out in favour of the regime where its foreign policy is concerned, believing the regime completely fulfilled the demands of the democratic nationalist movement. The regime realized that Zionism had become the main threat to Egypt, and therefore solved the Sudanese crisis by signing a treaty with the British that met Egypt's economic exigencies and ensured its security on its southern flank.⁴³ Also the regime's pan-Arab policy was more in tune with the times than the Wafd's narrow Egyptian nationalist outlook.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the treaty it signed with Great Britain for the evacuation of its military forces along the Suez Canal fell short of the demands of the nationalist movement, by accepting a military pact for seven years. But it should be evaluated, according to al-Bishri, in view of the regime's subsequent anti-imperialist policy: the condemn-

⁴³ Tāriq al-Bishri, Thawra 23 yūlyū wa tatwīr al-haraka al-wataniyya [The Revolution of July 23 and the Development of the Nationalist Movement], in: Dirāsāt fi al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya, pp. 127-141. Originally published as Thawra yūlyū wa al-haraka al-wataniyya [The Revolution of July 23 and the Nationalist Movement] al-Hilāl, August 1984, pp. 11-19.

⁴⁴ Tāriq al-Bishri, Thulāth mulāhazāt ʿan al-haraka al-dimuqrātiyya fi misr [Three Remarks on the Democratic Movement in Egypt], in: "Dirāsa fi al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya", pp. 249-251. Al-Bishri states in this article that the liberation of the Arab nation is not possible without the abolishment of Zionism [p. 249]. For his other statements on Palestine: al-Muslimūn wa al-'aqbāt, p. 572, pp. 579-581, and pp. 587-588.

ation of the Bagdad Pact; becoming one of the leading unaligned nations during the Bandung Conference; making the Czech arms deal; and finally establishing its nationalist and pan-Arab credentials during the Suez War in 1956.⁴⁵

If the regime demolished the constraints on Egyptian foreign policy which imperialism had imposed, it did the same with the internal restrictions which the reactionary ruling classes placed upon economic development and social justice. In accordance with the insight of the democratic nationalist movement it realized that economic independence is a prerequisite for political independence. The land reforms and the nationalization of major industries and commercial enterprises the regime implemented should be regarded in that light.⁴⁶

However, the authoritarian manner in which the goals of the democratic nationalist movement were realized eventually jeopardized the whole enterprise. Whereas the democratic nationalist movement had always maintained that nationalist goals could not be attained without democracy, these two became separated in the mind of the general public once the regime's nationalist credentials were established. As a result, democracy became looked upon as an impediment for the realization of nationalist goals.⁴⁷

The regime's nationalist and economic policies coincided with the enormous increase of power of the executive at the expense of the legislative. In its aversion to the

⁴⁵ Târiq al-Bishri, Thawra yûlyû wa tatwir al-haraka al-wataniyya, pp. 134-137.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 137-139. For a summing up of the achievements of the Revolution of July 23 which al-Bishri calls "a national liberation revolution" (thawra taharrur watani): Târiq al-Bishri, "al-Dimuqrâtiyya wa nizâm 23 yûlyû" [Democracy and the System of the Revolution of July 23], Beirut, 1987, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 140; Târiq al-Bishri, Thawra 23 yûlyû wa gadiyya al-dimuqrâtiyya [The Revolution of July 23 and the Question of Democracy], in: al-Dimuqrâtiyya fi misr; rub' qarn ba' da thawra 23 yûlyû [Democracy in Egypt; a Quarter Century after the Revolution of July 23], 1977, p. 19. Published by the Center for Political and Strategic Studies of al-Ahram.

ancien regime the Revolutionary Command Council not only eliminated the monarchy and the large landowners, but also abolished the 1923 Constitution, the multi-party system, and all the civil liberties which the Constitution of 1923 had guaranteed before 1952. In its place it initiated poor substitutes. In the seven different constitutions the regime promulgated between 1953 and 1969 the legislative lost its independence and at times merged with the executive. The constitution provided no checks and balances. The president was elected by referendum, he appointed ministers who were responsible to him alone, and he could dissolve parliament at will.⁴⁸ The executive was enhanced by the successive political organizations which the new regime erected: the Nationalist Rally, the Nationalist Union, and finally the Arab Socialist Union, which never were invested with any political power. Rather than attracting the masses and including them in the decision-making process, these organizations were intended to keep them at bay. Real power was monopolized by the executive to which these political organizations were subordinated.⁴⁹ It stands to reason that within this context the independence of the judiciary was completely eroded.⁵⁰

The regime evaded the central issue of democracy by erecting different parallel competitive bureaucratic institutions. This development led to the rise of what later were called "the power centers" (*al-marâkiz al-guwâ*).⁵¹ As the power of the regular bureaucracy itself was gradually usurped by the proliferating secret services and the military establishment in the 1960s, politics became confused with security.⁵² The secret services took over such highly political cases as the Committee for the Abolishment of Feudal-

⁴⁸ *Târiq al-Bishrf, al-Dimuqrâtiyya wa nizâm 23 yûlyû*, pp. 104-111.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-132 and pp. 137-144.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152 and pp. 152-156.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

ism. Repression was applied where more democratic means could have tapped creative sources of criticism, as was the case with the repression of the communist movement in 1959-1960 and the Moslem Brotherhood in 1964-1965.⁵³ Fear and terror were instilled into the people by the regime's exaggeration of the threat external enemies posed for the revolution at a time when the revolution had already established its credentials, and its real enemies, like Sadat, were to emanate from the system itself, not from outside.⁵⁴

Finally the June War of 1967 brought the regime down and reintegrated the nationalist and democratic strains of the nationalist movement in the mind of the public. Al-Bishri draws the conclusion that: "The defeat of June 5 and its sequence had disclosed that even when it is possible to achieve independence without democracy, political democracy is necessary to retain national independence in its political and economic forms".⁵⁵

However, the defeat had changed the domestic and international circumstances in which this awareness could be put into practice. During the past two decades Egypt has increasingly lost its independence. To regain the Sinai Egypt had to relinquish its Arab plans for renaissances (nuhûd), independence, and political and social unity.⁵⁶ In its economic policy it sold out to imperialism by initiating the infitâh, while the implementation of democratic reforms have been cosmetic and an inducement to internal dissension. The "Permanent Constitution" of 1971 has confirmed the prerogatives of the president, precluding a shift of power in favour of parliament on the basis that the people are the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 170.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁵ Târiq al-Bishri, Thawra yûliyû wa tatwîr al-haraka al-wataniyya, pp. 140-141.

⁵⁶ Târiq al-Bishri, al-Dimuqrâtiyya wa nizâm Thawra 23 yûliyû, p. 186.

source of all power.⁵⁷ In an article al-Bishri wrote in 1981 he expressed his disappointment in the multi-party system, which only reproduced the division between the political currents as they existed before 1952. Democracy had become a goal in itself, whereas it should always be subordinated to economic, political and spiritual independence.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Tāriq al-Bishri, Thawra yūlyū wa qadiyya al-dimuqrātiyya, p. 22; Tāriq al-Bishri, Mulāhazāt hawl 'idā' al-dustūr al-dā'im [Some Remarks on the Preparation of the Permanent Constitution], in: Dirāsāt fī al-dimuqrātiyya al-misriyya, pp. 219-233. This article was intended to be published in al-Kātib in 1971, but was rejected by the censor.

⁵⁸ Tāriq al-Bishri, Thulāth mulāhazāt 'an al-haraka al-dimuqrātiyya fī misr, p. 249.

PART II
AUTHENTICITY IN HISTORY

A Definition of the Concepts al-wāfid and al-mawrūth

In the 1980s al-Bishri developed a pair of concepts which he believes have greatly helped him to understand modern Egyptian and Middle Eastern history. These concepts are al-wāfid and al-mawrūth, which can best be translated as 'that which is coming from the outside and is alienating', and 'that which is inherited from the ancestors'.

In order to situate the development of the two concepts better al-Bishri wrote in the introduction of the second edition of the "The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952" :

I only now begin to understand what I have not been able to understand during the 1960s when I was preparing this book, i.e. there exists a general and important principle in the delimitation of the social and political map of Egypt and the determination of the course of history of Egypt during the past century. This principle is that the course of the Egyptian history and the social movement in whatever period are not only determined by the struggle between the nationalist movement and imperialism, nor are they only determined by the social struggle between classes with different interests, but they are also determined by the ideological struggle (al-sirā` al-`aqā'idī) between al-wāfid and al-mawrūth.⁵⁹

What these concepts mean and how they relate to each other al-Bishri tries to explain in the following passage:

The turāth (the heritage) consists of values, organizations, ideas, customs, morals and culture which have

⁵⁹ Tāriq al-Bishri, Introduction to the second issue of "al-Haraka al-siyāsiyya fi misr 1945-1952", p. 42. This will be referred to henceforth as "The Introduction".

been bequeathed to the present society by previous generations. This definition of the turâth applies to every society, as long as its present is historically tied to the previous generations and is derived from it, and as long as the distinction between the turâth and the mu'âsira (the contemporary) is one of time in which the latter is derived from the first. But I can hardly maintain that what we call contemporary in values, organizations, and ideas, etc., has derived from our past, distinguishing itself only by a lapse in time; on the contrary, it has come from outside, assaulting us (innamâ wafada ilaynâ iqtihâmân) and rendering a rupture with that past.⁶⁰

For Moslems it is imperative to recover the turâth, for imperialism has tried to obliterate it, and without it true independence is unattainable:

The importance of this case is that our struggle with imperialism does not only have bearing on something outside ourselves. We as human community are the subject of the struggle, not just a part of it. Imperialism demands not only our land, devoid of us, but it demands [to control] us and what we possess. Any oppositional movement of ours can only be founded and developed on our strong distinctiveness (tamayyuz wathîq) in identity (huwiyya) and allegiance (intimâ'), in order that we become aware of our society in its specificity and its self-containedness (istiqlâl). This is unobtainable for us, unless we acquire a strong sense of our distinctive history and the awareness of the totality of ideological and cultural inheritance in us (mudjmal al-mawrûth al-fikrî wa al-hadârî finâ).⁶¹

⁶⁰ Târiq al-Bishrî, Nahnu...bayna al-mawrûth wa al-wâfid [We...between the Heritage and the Alienated] in: 'Ishkâliyya al-'ulûm al-'idjtimâ'iyya fi al-watan al-'arabî [The Problematic of Social Sciences in the Arab Nation], Cairo, 1983, p. 359.

⁶¹ Târiq al-Bishrî, "The Introduction", p. 41.

These quotations indicate that according to al-Bishri cultures are self-enclosed and mutually exclusive. Each has an independent development with a logic of its own. This does not necessarily mean that Islamic culture is superior to Western culture, nor that it cannot adopt different items from the West; it only means both cultures are basically different and can only adopt those aspects of other cultures which are not contradictory to it and can be absorbed. The difference, according to al-Bishri, between Western culture and Islamic culture is that Europe has never been threatened from outside and has developed "by interaction of its own elements" (bi tafâ`ul al-`anâsir al-dhâtiyya), whereas Islamic culture has been assaulted by Western culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the result that a dual (izdiwâdj) society has arisen with two sectors which exist side by side, a Western one and an Islamic one, both with their own school system, judiciary, statescraft, attitudes, values, etc.⁶²

Until very recently the struggle between these two sectors, between al-wâfid and al-mawrûth, had been dominated by al-wâfid, which employed all the Western ideological concepts and theoretical paraphernalia for the purpose of annihilating the turâth. Especially effective was the method of using the term "contemporary" (mu`âsira) with the connotation of progressive and modern for all things Western, while associating the remnants of the turâth with "backwardness" (takhalluf).⁶³ Similarly, all those political and social forces in Egyptian history which resisted the Western cultural onslaught were considered "reactionary" (radj`i) and out of place. Al-Bishri believes that this major flaw in the contemporary sociological and historical analysis of Egypt derives from the Western practice of rigidly associating certain political organizations and movements with a certain socio-economic formation. Thus religious movements are associated with feudalism and are therefore reactionary;

⁶² Ibid., p. 363.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 361-362, p. 374.

liberalism is associated with capitalism; whereas Marxism and socialism are associated with the working class and are consequently progressive. This attitude precludes an analysis which takes into account different circumstances and historical developments. Instead of looking at ideologies one should look at the programs and practice of these organizations.⁶⁴ If al-nahda is the goal, and the retrieval of the turâth one of its preconditions, than the concepts al-mawrûth and al-wâfid provide the key to understanding these forces and reclaiming them from the dust bin of history. These concepts show that even if al-mawrûth organizations, like the Azhar, can be considered politically reactionary, they fulfilled a progressive ideological function by holding on to the turâth. In addition, this pair of concepts shows that in a dual society economic and social interests can cut across ideological differences; reactionary and authentic forces can be found both in secular and religious circles.⁶⁵ Once this is realized, al-Bishri seems to suggest, the foundation is laid for mutual recognition of the authentic forces in Egyptian politics and the awareness of the necessity for a common struggle for the liberation of Egypt and the Islamic world from political, economic, as well as cultural subjection by the West.⁶⁶

The Application of the Concepts al-wâfid and al-mawrûth to Egyptian History

Islam and the Westernization of Egypt

Basic to the understanding of al-Bishri's theory of history is the idea that Islamic society has been left in tact until the nineteenth century, its unifying factor having been

⁶⁴ Târiq al-Bishri, Thulâth mulâhazât `an al-haraka al-dimuqrâtiyya fi misr, pp. 253-256.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 254-255; Târiq al-Bishri, "al-dimuqrâtiyya wa nizâm 23 yûlyû", pp. 34-35; Târiq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimûn wa al-'aqbât", pp. 648-650.

⁶⁶ Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", p. 48; Muhammad Murûw, "Târiq al-Bishri shâhid `alâ suqûl al-`ilmâniyya" [Târiq al-Bishri Witness to the Fall of Secularism] Cairo, 1985, p. 7 and p. 9.

provided by the shari'a. In view of the central role of the shari'a al-Bishri divides Islamic history into a period of foundation (ta'sil) and legislation (tashrif) during the time of the prophet and the rightly guided caliphs, and a period of application (tatbiq), which covers the rest of the thirteen centuries of Islamic history. According to this division, in the first period the Quran and Sunna laid down the principles (al-ahkâm) which are "unhistorical" (ghayra tâ'rikhiyya), not confined by time and place, while during the second period Moslems tried to interpret and apply these principles with various measures of success.⁶⁷

Closely connected with centrality of the shari'a is the political notion of the Islamic community (al-djamâ'a al-islâmiyya), on which the successive Islamic empires were founded. The last empire based on the shari'a was the Ottoman empire, which staved off the Western onslaught until the nineteenth century when it paradoxically became both the passageway of imperialist penetration and the defender of the Islamic community.⁶⁸

Al-Bishri cites the Tanzimât in the Ottoman Empire as an example of how Western concepts applied as "reforms" to a completely different environment in the end only helped imperialism. He believes: "The Tanzimât was but a Western cloak thrown over the body of a pure Eastern state" (al-tanzimât kânat mudjarrad thawb qharbi musi'âr `alâ djism dawla sharqiyya samima).⁶⁹ Al-Bishri calls the Western

⁶⁷ Târiq al-Bishri, Hal ghâbat al-shari'a ba'da `ahd al-râshidîn?! [Has the Shari'a Disappeared After the Era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs?!], al-Sha'b 7/7/1987, p. 6, and al-Sha'b 14/7/1987, p. 6; also interview Târiq al-Bishri with Muhammad Nûr Farahât, Hawl qadiyya tatbiq al-shari'a wa al-mawqif min al-ta'rikh [On the Case of the Application of the Shari'a from the Historical Point of View], al-Sha'b 22/9/1987, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Târiq al-Bishri, Hal ghâbat al-shari'a ba'da `ahd al-râshidûn, al-Sha'b 14/7/1987, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Târiq al-Bishri, al-Mas'ala al-qânûniyya bayna al-shari'a al-islâmiyya wa al-qânûn al-wad'i, [The Legal Question Between the Islamic Shari'a and Positive Law], in: al-sayyid Yassin ed., "al-turâth wa tahdiyyât al-'asr fi al-watan al-'arabi" [The Heritage and Contemporary Challenges

models for reform "the falsehood coming from outside" (al-wāfid al-dāll).⁷⁰

If Western reforms failed in resuscitating the Ottoman Empire, neither did the pan-Islamic policy of Abd al-Hamid II succeed in using the turāth as bulwark against Western penetration. Instead of uniting Moslems in the world against imperialism, the reawakening of the caliphate at the end of the nineteenth century was a device to subject non-Turkish citizens of the Ottoman Empire to Turkish despotism. In fact, al-Bishri believes, the racist and despotic character of the Ottoman Empire severely weakened the Islamic movement in its struggle against the West.⁷¹

In comparison, al-Bishri believes the developments in Egypt during the nineteenth century are decidedly more authentic. As a guideline for political practice and thought the concept of the Islamic community remained in tact and was not seriously challenged until the end of the century. In contrast to so many other Egyptian historians and his earlier opinion, al-Bishri believes that neither the destruction of the Ottoman empire nor the rise of Egyptian nationalism prompted Muhammad Ali's campaign in Syria at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its sole purpose was to strengthen the Islamic community.⁷²

Similarly, the Urabi Revolution represented the expression of an authentic democratic nationalist resistance against British imperialism. The slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians" expressed the idea of brotherhood (fikra akhwa), not an abstract nationalist model adopted from the West. As such it was not in contradiction with the more comprehensive concept (al-mafhūm al-ashmal) of the Islamic community which

in the Arab Nation] Beirut, 1985, p. 634.

⁷⁰ Tāriq al-Bishri, Nahnu...bayn al-mawrūth wa al-wāfid, p. 364.

⁷¹ Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimūn wa al-'aqbāt", p. 658.

⁷² Tāriq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", pp. 28-31; Tāriq al-Bishri, al-Mas'ala al-qānūniyya bayna al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya wa al-qānūn al-wad'i, p. 623.

the Ottoman Empire heralded.⁷³

Nevertheless, Egypt was subjected to political, economic, and cultural Western dominance throughout the nineteenth century, which gradually split society into a parallel (*izdiwâdj*) society. The foundations for its unravelling were laid during the Muhammad Ali period, when Western institutions were introduced next to existing Islamic ones.⁷⁴ Imitation (*taqlid*) of the Western models started in the sixties and seventies, under Khedive Isma'îl, when the "French disease" began to afflict Egyptian society. But even then it remained largely restricted to external features of life: clothing, houses, food, etc.⁷⁵ Only at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century, al-Bishri believes, did Western philosophical, political and social ideas acquire a hold over the minds of Egyptians and did the allegiance (*intimâ'*) to the broader concept of the Islamic community find itself gradually supplanted by a secular more narrowly based allegiance to the national community.⁷⁶

From that time onward the dialectical process of *al-wâfid* and *al-mawrûth* became manifest in its different and unexpected ways. The pivot around which this struggle was fought was the *sharî'a* and its increasingly marginalized position in Egyptian society. Al-Bishri believes its marginalization was not the result of its inherent rigidity (*rukûd*), for the *sharî'a* had by that time already been codified in the Ottoman *Madjalla*, which could have been applied. Rather its marginalization should be attributed to foreign political and economic interests, which intended to subjugate Egypt by annihilating its cultural defences and

⁷³ Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", pp. 30-32.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

separating it from the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁷ Having been pushed in a defensive position, those social and political forces which wanted to retain the turâth became conservative in religious and social matters, looking to the Ottoman Empire for support against the political and cultural onslaught by the West. On account of this attitude they were caught between Western reforms which did not take the Islamic heritage into account, and a strongly conservative immobilized Ottoman Empire.⁷⁸

This background explains the refusal of the 'ulamâ' to reform Islamic law and practice idjtihâd. Afraid to lose the very basis ('usûl) of Islam if they accepted reforms, they simply refused cooperation, even with seriously minded Egyptian reformers like Muhammad Abduh.⁷⁹ It also resolves the perceived internal contradictions of the Umma Party as the party of democratic but pro-British sympathies, and the Nationalist Party as the party with pan-Islamic and despotic tendencies. Once it is recognized that there is no logical connection between secular nationalism and progressiveness, and other issues as mass following are addressed, the Umma Party can safely be called a reactionary party on account of its elite status, the social base of the party, and its cooperation with the British. At the same time the Nationalist Party acquires a more positive image based on its retention of the turâth and its mass following, despite its

⁷⁷ Târiq al-Bishrî, al-mas'ala al-qânûniyya bayna al-shari'a al-islâmiyya wa al-qânûn al-wad'i, pp. 617-622; Târiq al-Bishrî, Hawl haraka al-tadjdîd fî al-tashrî' al-islâmî fî misr [On the Reform Movement in Islamic Law in Egypt], in: al-Hiwâr, 1 (1986) 1, pp. 98-110.

⁷⁸ Târiq al-Bishrî, Hawl haraka al-tadjdîd ff al-tashrî' al-islâmî fî misr, p. 104 and pp. 107-108; Târiq al-Bishrî, al-hidhr min al-tadjdîd wa al-di'âya al-siyâsiyya [The Caution for Reform and Political Propaganda], al-Sha'b 17/12/1985, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 100-103; Târiq al-Bishrî, Hal kânat djumûd al-fuqahâ' sabab al-'udûl 'an al-shari'a? [Was the Rigidity of the Islamic Jurisprudents Responsible for the Renunciation of the Shari'a?], al-Sha'b, 10/12/1985, p. 7.

support of the khedive and the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰

In final analysis, the religious and non-religious attitudes of different social and political organizations are determined by political and economic considerations within the prevailing circumstances in which these organizations find themselves.⁸¹ In this light the ambitions of kings Fa'ud I and Faruq I of Egypt during the twenties and thirties to acquire the caliphate had less to do with religion as such than with their international ambitions and their fear of the secular democratic nationalist movement represented by the Wafd. The support the kings received from the Azhar, similarly, derived from the weakened economic and social position of the shaykhs which they associated with the Wafd and secular nationalism.⁸² Conversely, the Party of the Liberal Constitutionalists, having always presented itself as the most enlightened secular liberal wing of Egyptian nationalism, used Islamic slogans against the Wafd, accusing it of being dominated by Copts, as soon as it felt threatened.⁸³

The Authentic in Political Movements in the Period 1919-1952

Al-Bishri recognizes only two authentic political organizations in the period 1919-1952: the Wafd and the Moslem Brotherhood. That the Wafd is deemed authentic seems strange, considering the final breakthrough of the concept of the allegiance to the narrow Egyptian national community under its helm. Nevertheless, there are several features of the Wafd's ideology and organization which have, according to al-Bishri, strong roots in the *turâth*. Foremost among these is the concept of national unity between Copts and Moslems. All through the nineteenth and the beginning of

⁸⁰ Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", pp. 35-36; Târiq al-Bishri, *Nahnu...bsayn al-mawrûth wa al-wâfid*, p. 256.

⁸¹ Târiq al-Bishri, *Thulâth mulâhazât `an al-dimuqrâtiyya fi misr*, p. 255.

⁸² Târiq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimûn wa al-'aqbât", pp. 275-312.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 198 and pp. 201-202

twentieth century British imperialism tried to split Egyptian society into sects (tawâ'if) in order that it could control Egypt better. The 1919 Revolution definitely frustrated this effort, which also ran counter to Islamic law.⁸⁴ Important also is the fact that the Wafd was the result of a broad spontaneous national uprising which prevented it from modelling itself after a Western example, and gave it a near religious unanimity by bestowing upon it the consensus of the nation (idjmâ al-'umma).⁸⁵ Similarly, the Wafd did not consider itself a party, but rather as the organization of the whole Umma (al-nizâm al-djâmi' li al-umma), of which it was the mandatary (al-wakîl). This was expressed in the structure of the party and the manner in which its members were chosen.⁸⁶ Finally, the Wafd and its ideology acquired legitimacy by conducting a revolution at a time when the Islamic movement, given the national and international circumstances, was incapable of performing such a task.⁸⁷ Secularism acquired as it were its historical role by default of the Islamic movement.

The most spectacular aspect of al-Bishri's new theory is undoubtedly his revision of his description of the Moslem Brotherhood. Al-Bishri reproves himself in his introduction to the second version of "The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952" for having completely misjudged the Brotherhood. In the past he had looked at it from the outside (al-nazar al-khâridjî), that is, through the eyes of secularism, and especially through the eyes of the communist movement. But he now understands "that the Brotherhood was

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 133-140.

⁸⁵ Târiq al-Bishri, Nahnu bayna al-mawrûth wa al-wâfid, pp. 370-371.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 371-372.

⁸⁷ Târiq al-Bishri, Bayna al-djâm'a al-diniyya wa al-djâm'a al-wataniyya fi al-fikr al-siyasî [Between the Religious Community and the Nationalist Community in Political Thought], in: "al-Sha'b al-wâhid wa al-watan al-wâhid: dirâsa fi 'usûl al-wahda al-wataniyya" [One People and One Nation: A Study of the Principles of National Unity, Cairo, 1982, p. 51. A publication of the Center for Political and Strategic Studies of al-Ahram.

not motivated by independence, the constitution, or the rejection of the existing system, but by the conviction that Islam is a total system for life". In that sense it is opposed to the secular camp which only pursues pragmatic goals (*ahdâf `amaliyya*).⁸⁸

Once the Brotherhood is situated within the framework of *al-wâfid* and *al-mawrûth* its whole attitude during the monarchy becomes understandable and logical, and the accusation of *ghumûd* (obscurantism) and lack of a program (*naqs al-barnâmidj*) evaporates.⁸⁹ Al-Bishri argues that the Brotherhood should not be judged primarily by its struggle for political and economic independence and social justice, but on its struggle for ideological and cultural independence, and the defence of identity and cohesiveness.⁹⁰ The Brotherhood did not reject the Wafd on account of its struggle for independence, but because it was a source of alien ideology (*al-fikr al-wâfid*) with regard to the organization, goals for the future and models for renaissances (*nuhûd*).⁹¹ The ideology of the Brotherhood was not, according to al-Bishri, reactionary, for its return to the *usûl* derived from its will to resist the Western onslaught, not simply as a means to divert attention from more pressing political and economic affairs.⁹²

Moreover, many of the Brotherhood's ideas are compatible with those of the nationalist movement as expressed by the Wafd or other secular organizations. The love for one's country is endorsed by Hasan al-Banna, who holds the view that it can contribute to liberation of the country as long as it does not divert from the broader goals and religion.

⁸⁸ Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", pp. 22-24.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹² Ibid., p. 56.

The same applies to Arabism.⁹³ In this regard the Brotherhood was even more advanced than the Wafd by adhering to the ideas of the radical movement after the Second World War when the Palestine War made Egyptians aware of their larger allegiance (al-intimâ' al-ashmal) toward the Arab nation.⁹⁴

However, in less polemical passages than those written in the Introduction, al-Bishri admits that the Moslem Brotherhood fell short of its own goals, even if one places it within the framework of al-wâfid and al-mawrûth. In a revealing passage in "Moslems and Copts" al-Bishri uses his familiar metaphor of the shop in which the customer has a choice between two categories of articles, the one al-wâfid, and the other al-mawrûth. Yet, this time he adds the element of taqlid (imitation) and tahdith (reform and renewal). It is obvious that the Brotherhood has chosen for al-mawrûth, but has it also chosen for tahdith? Al-Bishri's ultimate answer is negative. Al-Bishri states that in itself to choose between al-wâfid and al-mawrûth is not just a question of pointing one of the two articles out, and taking it home. The crux of the matter consists of developing a considered opinion consisting of a combination of articles, which will bring forth liberation, justice and prosperity.⁹⁵ Hasan al-Banna was incapable of developing a judicious opinion in this respect, too upset as he was by internal dissension of the country: "Instead of going forward out of curiosity, he recoiled in abhorrence and referred to everything as buried in hell".⁹⁶

Al-Bishri believes that to judge the Brotherhood in respect to idjtihād and djumûd (rigidity) is much more fruitful than accusing it of ghumûd (obscurantism), as he

⁹³ Târiq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimûn wa al-aqbât", pp. 475-476.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 587-588.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 478.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 478.

had done in the past.⁹⁷ Al-Bishri distinguishes between two currents of religion, the first which bases itself on idjtihād in order to make the shari'a again into an effective force in life, and the other which tries to retain it within the scholastic tradition of the last centuries, thereby eliminating its influence on real life. It is apparent from al-Bishri's account that he believes that the Brotherhood refused in general to find a modus vivendi (ta'āmul) with reality and lost with this mental attitude the possibility to influence reality.⁹⁸ This does not mean that it was unaware of the dilemma, but in the end it chose for the usūl, as all the other religiously inspired movements had done before it.⁹⁹ Thus, the Brotherhood never discussed how the shari'a should be applied.¹⁰⁰ Finally, most damaging of all, the Brotherhood and Hasan al-Banna never made any effort to integrate Copts within Islamic society and to reassure them that Islam posed no threat to their position, a very serious lapse because it endangered the national unity, the basis of all struggle for liberation.¹⁰¹ In last resort the Brotherhood's only real contribution seems to have been to point out the necessity of retaining the shari'a.

To what degree al-Bishri's perspective on Egyptian history has shifted, becomes even clearer when he reinterprets the role the communist movement played during the monarchy. The interesting aspect of his reinterpretation is that the communist movement has reversed positions with the Brotherhood. Whereas during the 1960s the Brotherhood had

⁹⁷ And so many other left wing or liberal historians still do: Rif'at al-Sa'id, "Hasan al-Bannā, mu'assis djamā'a al-'ikhwān al-muslimīn: matā..kayfa..wa limādhā? [Hasan al-Bannā, Founder of the Society of the Moslem Brotherhood: When..How..and Why?], Cairo, 1977; 'Abd al-'Azīm Ramadān, "al-'ikhwān al-muslimūn wa al-tanzīm al-sirrī" [The Moslem Brotherhood and the Secret apparatus], Cairo, 1982.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 480-481.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 482.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 484.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 486

been the villain in history, that role is assigned to the communist movement in the 1980s. The decisive factor is its international allegiance (al-intimā' al-'umamī) which in al-Bishri's new range of concepts has no meaning, because, unlike the concepts of the national or Islamic community, internationalism cannot represent authenticity.¹⁰² The basic theoretical assumption of the communist movement, that class solidarity is more important than national ties between classes, al-Bishri rejects, for the situation of the working class in the capitalist world is incomparable to the situation of the working class in the colonized world where the liberation struggle holds a preeminent place.¹⁰³

This point of view has serious consequences, because it implies that the whole communist movement in Egypt and its ideas were not only flawed, but also a ruse, a front, used for other purposes than those stated. In his search for authenticity it is not surprising that al-Bishri finds justification for this idea in the predominant role Jews played within the movement. He believes they established the movement in Egypt to protect their privileged position and to support Zionism. Neither the struggle against British imperialism nor the implementation of democratic and economic reforms nor the call for "Egyptianization" (tamsīr) were the driving forces behind the communist movement. Otherwise how can one explain the fact that the communist movement never really directed its forces against the British or the monarchy, and did its utmost to keep the leadership in Jewish hands, al-Bishri asks himself. The communist movement drew attention away from these issues by focusing it on one theme: fascism. It used this term against the Moslem Brotherhood and Young Egypt, both of which al-Bishri by now has recognized as authentic forces.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Tāriq al-Bishri, Thulāth mulāhazāt 'an haraka al-dimuqrātiyya, p. 249.

¹⁰³ Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Muslimūn wa al-'aqbāt", p. 630.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 603-639. Al-Bishri's ideas about Young Egypt have hardly changed during this period: Tāriq al-Bishri, Misr al-fatāt - khamsūn 'āmān [Young Egypt - Fifty

The Nasserist State and the Destruction of the Egyptian Past

In describing the July Revolution within the new paradigm al-Bishri refrains from going into great detail, but from the general remarks he makes it is obvious that he believes it is the lowest ebb in Egyptian history in the struggle between al-wāfid and al-mawrūth, despite its achievements in other fields. According to al-Bishri the July revolution, especially during its socialist phase in the sixties, was the high point in Western influence. In a caustic passage in "The Introduction" he describes how Western cultural penetration impaired our identity (huwiyatunā), our communal feelings (shu`ūrunā al-djamā`i) and our allegiance (intimā`). And how as a result, the struggle for independence and liberation were afflicted with disorder (khalal). Most important in this respect, al-Bishri states, were the attempts during the past decades to erase our past and our historical consciousness (wā`yunā al-ta`rikhī).¹⁰⁵ Despite the fact that the regime's experiment was based on political and economic independence, we had adopted our models for a nahda (renaissance) from the West, with disastrous results, ending in the the defeat in June 1967. Al-Bishri holds the intelligentsia responsible for this outcome, for its members restricted political debate to the choice whether a communist or a capitalist system was preferable, neglecting the struggle between al-mawrūth and al-wāfid.¹⁰⁶

This neglect for the ideological (al-'aqā'idī) and the cultural (al-hadārī) struggle between al-wāfid and al-mawrūth, becomes most marked in regard with the sharī'a. Al-Bishri reproaches himself as well for having thought in the past that Western law can provide better guarantees against despotism and the infringement of justice and freedom than the sharī'a. What we called the reform of the administration of justice and law was in fact a destruction of our own

Years] al-Ahrām 1/11/1983, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Tāriq al-Bishrī, "The Introduction", p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

laws. Generations of students have been sent to France to study Roman law, while the reform of the shari'a has been neglected. Eventually we have substituted the base (al-'asl) for the temporary (al-târi').¹⁰⁷

This neglect of the shari'a had grave implications for the development of different institutions in Egypt. Al-Bishri's attributes institutional chaos and arbitrariness in Egypt to what could be called the "disarticulation" between values and institutions. Western reforms have led to the cleavage of duties and values derived from Western law on the one hand, and cultural criteria and behaviour related to Islamic culture on the other.¹⁰⁸ Citing the Egyptian historian Ahmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karim, al-Bishri believes that Western reforms have destroyed administrative institutions without providing alternatives. If the original institutions had developed freely, they would have brought forth shûrâ (consultation) as a representative body, and Egypt would not have been obliged to adopt Western models. Egypt had known homogeneous and cohesive institutions (mu'assasât al-mutad-jânasa wa al-mutamâsaka) which had adjusted duties and rights harmoniously. Those institutions, like the extended family, the village, the neighbourhood, the guild, the mosque and the tarîqa have been destroyed by the introduction of new law systems (al-nuzûm al-wâfida), which individualize people and sever what is communal (bi al-djâm'iyya), while dissolving the internal cohesion of institutions. The concomitant feelings of solidarity have been replaced by Western abstract ideas which have no relation with the Egyptian reality.¹⁰⁹

Although this process had of course already been set in motion during the nineteenth century and had developed further during the monarchy, al-Bishri believes the July Revolution witnessed its most destructive phase. The main reason for this was that the functions and power of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ Târiq al-Bishri, al-Mas'ala al-qânûniyya bayna al-shari'a al-islâmiyya wa al-qânûn al-wad'i, pp. 634-635.

state expanded enormously. During the monarchy, the power of political parties had been relatively small. In addition to that, political organizations like the Wafd, or the Moslem Brotherhood, relied on traditional institutions in society, like the village, extended family relations, and neighbourhood structures for achieving their political purposes.¹¹⁰ After the July revolution had captured the state, the process of Westernization was greatly accelerated. All traditional institutions and parties were wiped out either for political reasons, or for ideological reasons. Thus the rise of modern despotism is related to the loss of selfgoverning traditional bodies and the feeling of allegiance (*intimā'*). Instead, a buréaucracy was installed which could not cope with its tasks, and political organizations established which had no *sha'bf* (popular) character. Society was further undermined by the loss of the relation between law and morals (*akhlāg*). The penetration of Western law not only contributed to the desintegration of society, and its diversion from the liberation struggle, but also individualized persons who internalized the struggle between *al-wāfid* and *al-mawūth*.¹¹¹ Al-Bishri feels that if the regime had been more flexible, it could have combined political and economic independence with the preconditions for a *nahda* by retaining a cultural authenticity (*'asāla hadāriyya*) and a feeling of national allegiance (*intimā'*).¹¹²

Contemporary Politics: Retrieving the Authentic Past

It is obvious from the above that al-Bishri's interpretation of Egyptian history has political implications. It forms the basis of a political program, which al-Bishri expounded more explicitly during the 1980s in numerous newspaper articles, interviews, and seminars. Most of his articles were written

¹¹⁰ Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Dimuqrātiyya wa nizām 23 yūlyū", p. 194.

¹¹¹ Tāriq al-Bishri, *al-Mas'ala al-qānūniyya bayn al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya wa al-qānūn al-wad'i*, pp. 636-639.

¹¹² Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-dimuqrātiyya wa nizām 23 yūlyū", p. 165.

for al-Sha`b, the party weekly of the Socialist Workers Party, of which his friend and comrade in arms `Adil Husayn became editor-in-chief in December 1985. The Socialist Workers Party, an offshoot of Young Egypt, formed the Alliance (al-Tahâluḥ) with the Moslem Brotherhood during the parliamentary elections of April 1987. But in accordance with his broad political program al-Bishri has tried and succeeded in keeping his lines open with all the other political currents, except the left wing Tadjammu` Party.

As in his historical analysis the basic elements of al-Bishri's political program consist of unity, independence, and democracy. This trinity forms the prerequisite for the struggle against imperialism and the flowering of the nahda. However, with the change of historical perspective the content of these three themes of the democratic nationalist movement have also shifted. Unity now means to close the gap between the two halves of the parallel society,¹¹³ the religious and the secular, which al-Bishri has decried as if they "both are on a separate star",¹¹⁴ estranged from each other "as sects" (shibh tâ'iff).¹¹⁵ Moreover, unity must be based on the sharī'a, for al-Bishri believes that Egypt's turâth is basically Islamic.¹¹⁶

One of the ways in which al-Bishri tackles the enormous task he has set himself, to overcome all the ideological, political, and religious contradictions between the different currents, is by stressing their historical relat-

¹¹³ Muhammad Murûw, Târiq al-Bishri Shâhid `alâ suqûṭ al-`ilmaniyya [Tariq al-Bishri Witness to the Fall of Secularism], p. 4 and p. 7; Târiq al-Bishri, al-Ta'rikh al-`arabi...ma zâla yastakhdimu li al-dî`ya al-siyâsiyya [Arab History...Continues To Be Used For Political Propaganda], al-Ahrâm 17/9/1987.

¹¹⁴ Târiq al-Bishri, Thulâth mulâhazât `an al-haraka al-dimuqrâtiyya, p. 254.

¹¹⁵ Târiq al-Bishri, al-`ilmâniyya gasamat al-`alâm al-islâmi [Secularism Has Destroyed the Islamic World], al-Ahrâm 1/10/1984.

¹¹⁶ Târiq al-Bishri, Bayna al-`urûba wa al-islâm: al-mawqif min "ghayr al-muslimin" wa min al-`ilmaniyya [Between Arabism and Islam: The Position of "Non-Moslems" and of Secularism], al-Sha`b 27/5/1986.

ivity (al-nisbiyya al-ta'rikhiyya). Only in this manner can the rigid barriers they have erected between themselves be broken down.¹¹⁷ The Marxist tendency to equate political Islam with reaction is, al-Bishri believes, a strong impediment to analyzing the contribution the Moslem Brotherhood made to the liberation struggle.¹¹⁸ Both the nationalist and the Islamic movements had the same goals: unity (tawhid) and liberation (tahrir).¹¹⁹ Only the historical circumstances in which they arose caused the two movements to perceive their differences as insurmountable. In fact nationalism was recognized in Egypt, in contrast to Pakistan, as a step, like Arabism, to a greater allegiance (al-intimâ' al-ashmal) of the Islamic community.¹²⁰

Paradoxically historical relativism serves as a means to achieve a consensus on political unity. Basic to al-Bishri's theory of history is his idea that every political current has only partaken in but never has monopolized the course of history as it is embodied in the masses. This applies as much to the phase when al-Bishri concentrated his attention on the democratic nationalist movement, as when he later on directed his attention to the cultural struggle between al-wâfid and al-mawrûth. Neither the Nationalist Party, the Wafd, the Communist movement, the Nasserist regime in the first phase, nor the Moslem Brotherhood during the second phase adequately reacted to the demands made upon them by the masses. Therefore al-Bishri severely criticizes

¹¹⁷ Although al-Bishri uses the expression "historical relativity" in the article he wrote for al-Ahrâm, he has elaborated on it in "The Introduction": Târiq al-Bishri, al-'ilmâniyya qasamat al-'alâm al-islâmî, al-Ahrâm 1/10/1984; Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", pp. 1-10.

¹¹⁸ Târiq al-Bishri, Thulâth mulâhazât 'an al-haraka al-dimuqrâtiyya fi misr, pp. 255-256.

¹¹⁹ Târiq al-Bishri, Bayna al-'urûba wa al-islâm: al-mawgîf min "ghayr al-muslimîn" wa min al-'ilmâniyya, al-Sha'b 27/5/1986.

¹²⁰ Târiq al-Bishri, al-Haraka al-islâmiyya wa mawgîfuhâ min al-haraka al-'arabiyya [The Islamic Movement and Its Opinion of the Arab (Nationalist) Movement], al-Sha'b 20/5/1986.

the tendency of contemporary political currents to appropriate Egyptian history for themselves, to the exclusion of all others. Al-Bishri seems to suggest that Egyptian history is the legacy of every Egyptian, whether he likes it or not.¹²¹ Reconciliation, the prerequisite for unity, should be based on concentrating on the assets of the other in history.¹²² Implied in this scenario is that once this has taken place mass-based political currents will amalgamate under the banner of economic reforms, democratic structures and cultural independence.

The central assumption in this political program, on which everything else hinges, is of course the acceptance by secular currents as well as non-Moslem minorities of the shari'a as the pillar on which society should rest. Al-Bishri tries to make this step as easy as possible. In itself the vagueness of the term al-turâth, which also includes the Coptic church and the secularist Wafd, is a means to build a consensus around. Another means of including other historical currents is by giving the shari'a the most liberal interpretation by practising idjtihâd. Al-Bishri distinguishes between on the one hand the God given and unalterable shari'a as the sources of law, and on the other hand fiqh as the science of devising principles from the holy sources, and idjtihâd, the interpretation and application of these principles to changing historical circumstances.¹²³ Idjtihâd in combination with the framework of al-wâfid and al-mawrûth leaves enough room for adopting Western ideas, as long as they are in harmony with the turâth and not in contradiction with the national and Islamic identity (al-huwiyya) and the feelings of allegiance (al-inti-

¹²¹ Târiq al-Bishri, Hal yumkinu iqtisâm al-ta'rikh bayna al-waratha? [Is It Possible to Divide the History Between the Inheritors?] Sawt al-'Arab 11/10/1987.

¹²² Târiq al-Bishri, Bayna al-'urûba wa al-islâm: fi muhâwila li ra'aba al-sad'; al-Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid...wa 'Abd al-Nâsir [Between Arabism and Islam: An Attempt to Mend the Breach; Sultan Abd al-Hamid...and Abd al-Nasir] al-Sha'b 3/6/1986; Târiq al-Bishri, "The Introduction", p. 23.

¹²³ Târiq al-Bishri, al-Mas'ala al-qânûniyya bayna al-shari'a al-islâmiyya wa al-qânûn al-wad'i, p. 642.

mā').¹²⁴ Thus a progressive and liberal Islam can guarantee equality between Moslems and non-Moslems on the basis of the principle "for them the same benefits as for us, and for them the same duties as for us" (lahum mā lanā wa 'alayhim mā 'alaynā), disregarding the discriminating taxes and measures against non-Moslems as historically superseded.¹²⁵ Also al-Bishri does not believe that Islam provides for a state. Islam is, according to him, rather a cultural value system held in place by the shari'a.

Finally, al-Bishri has reached the conclusion that within this new framework democracy, which has formed such an important aspect of his analysis of Egyptian society, does not necessarily have to be based on the Western idea of sovereignty of the people. Instead it can be based on a functional division of power between the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary as a system of checks and balances.¹²⁶ After the Nasserist state has become incapable of providing the necessary political, economic, and cultural independence basic for a feeling of allegiance (intima') and identity (huwiyya), the only hope for salvation of Egypt lies in extending the democratic rights of the people.¹²⁷ However, in the 1980s the regime has in fact divided the nation even further by playing the secular currents off against the Islamic currents. The latest example of this policy was the campaign the government organized against the

¹²⁴ Tāriq al-Bishri, Nahnu...bayna al-wāfid wa al-mawrūth, p. 361.

¹²⁵ Tāriq al-Bishri, Bayna al-djām'a al-diniyya wa al-djām'a al-wataniyya ff al-fikr al-siyāsī, pp. 57-65; Tāriq al-Bishri, al-Muslimūn wa al-'aqbāt ff 'itār al-wahda al-wataniyya [Moslems and Copts within the Framework of the National Unity], al-Musawwar, 16/3/1984, pp. 20-21.

¹²⁶ Tāriq al-Bishri, Bayna al-'urūba wa al-islām: al-mawqif min "ghayra al-muslimīn" wa min al-'ilmāniyya, al-Sha'b 27/5/1986; Tāriq al-Bishri, "al-Dimuqrātiyya wa nizām 23 yūlyū", p. 114.

¹²⁷ Proceedings of a seminar in which Tāriq al-Bishri participated called al-Dawla wa tahawwulātuhā wa mustaq-baluhā ff misr [The State and its Transformations and its Future in Egypt], in: al-Siyāsa al-duwaliyya, Oct. 1987, no. 90, pp. 136-137.

Islamic investment banks.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Having tried to define and overcome the basic contradictions in Egyptian society during the past two centuries, it seems as if al-Bishri has in the end succumbed to them and has become their embodiment. During the past two decades al-Bishri's works have increasingly become a highly intricate acrobatic juggling act of trying to keep as many political currents as possible in the air at one time. In the first phase he echoed the contradictions within the Egyptian Left, who tried to retain the democratic rights of the 1923 Constitution with the socio-economic "achievements" of the Nasserist regime. In the second phase he tried to solve the other major contradiction in Egyptian society, the one between secularism and Islam, which had split Egypt into a dual society. All these contradictions were subsumed under the holy trinity of Egyptian nationalism - unity, democracy and independence - which acquired an Islamic hue as time went on.

But as al-Bishri included more elements the act became more precarious. Nowhere does al-Bishri really make clear how all these currents and their ideologies can be integrated into a coherent whole. Al-Bishri's basic dilemma remains unresolved. On the one hand he rejects Western categories and concepts for interpreting Egyptian history and analyzing its socio-economic and political transformation. On the other hand he cannot do without these categories and concepts as tools for analyzing the past and devising a program for the future. The search for authenticity reflects the ambiguous character of al-Bishri's quest. Although al-Bishri is certainly correct in rejecting the rigid application of Western concepts to Egyptian history, the ambiguous application of the concepts al-wāfīd and al-mawrūth does not seem to present an alternative. If there ever was an authentic past, its destruction has pro-

¹²⁸ Tāriq al-Bishri, 'Asālib al-sirā` hawl tawzif al-'amwāl [Means of Strife in the Case of the Investment of Money], in: al-Ahrām al-'iqtisādī 18/7/1988, pp. 20-25.

ceeded to such an extent that retrieving it seems a hopeless task. It also has a conservative slant. Almost all the socio-economic and political historical elements al-Bishri describes as authentic are hierarchical. This conservative bias is underscored by his rejection of a class analysis. The only authentic heritage is the shari'a. But one wonders what remains of its authentic character once al-Bishri starts applying western concepts to reinterpret it. Nevertheless, al-Bishri remains interesting as one of the few Egyptian scholars who are aware of the complexity of the problems Egypt is suffering from.

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