The Roots of Political Islam in 19th Century Egypt

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Abstract: Tracing back political Islam to the French Campaign that invaded Egypt in 1798, the article argues that political Islam emerged and developed from within the folds of the modern nation state in Egypt. The article conceptualizes three historical phases: from 1805 to 1849, 1849 to 1879, and 1879 to the mid-1920s. Each of these phases is centered around a common theme that characterized the discourses, knowledge, and structures of politics, the economy and “Islam”, as they encountered the West, which are, in order, technology, civilization, and ideology. The works of Hasan al-‘Atār will be explored as an example of the first phase, and the works of Rifā‘ah al-Tahtāwī will be the example of the second phase, where Islam, as it encounters politics, becomes the foundation of state nationalism. The third phase will start with a transitional period of undifferentiated discourses, but will quickly, after the British occupation in 1882, differentiate into three political Islams: liberal, represented by Muhammad ‘Abduh and al-Ummah Party; official, represented by ‘Ali Yusuf and the Reform on the Constitutional Principles Party; and extra-state, radical Islamism, represented by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Jāwīš, and the Nationalist Party. The article will explain the national and international political and economic contexts that surrounded and participated in the formations of political Islam in all its varieties. Against the popular academic conviction of rooting Hasan al-Banna’s thought in Muhammad ‘Abduh’s work, and rooting ‘Abduh in Jamāl al-Afghānī’s movement, this article will explain the rupture and contradictions between Afghānī and ‘Abduh, on the one hand, and the rooting of al-Banna’s ideology in ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Jāwīš’s thought, on the other hand.

Keywords: Islam; Islamism; Egypt; Muslim Brotherhood; Modernity; Political Islam; Islamic Reform; Afghānī; ‘Abduh; Banna; Jāwīš; ‘Ali Yusuf

1. Introduction

Numerous studies rooted the emergence of political Islam in Egypt—represented mainly by the 1928 foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood Group, MBG, in the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 and the assumed dramatic emotional and intellectual effects it had on Egyptian Muslims. Other studies explained this emergence as a reaction to the liberal and secular attitude which the Egyptian state took at that time. Intellectually, earlier studies put the founder’s discourse in continuity with two successive scholars: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897 CE) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905 CE). Without downplaying the significance of these events or those intellectual works, I argue, political Islam has to be traced back to the French Campaign against Egypt (1798–1801) and the consequent establishment of Mehmet Ali Pasha’s modern state in Egypt (1805–1842 CE). Intellectually, the discourse of political Islam is better understood as a continuity of other scholars, whose works were more integral to the earlier emergence and development of the modern Egyptian state, for instance, Hasan al-‘Atār (1766–1835 CE), Rifā‘ah al-Tahtāwī (1801–1873 CE), ‘Ali Yusuf (1863–1913 CE), and ‘Abdul-‘Azīz Jāwīš (1876–1929 CE). My argument, therefore, is that the discourse of political Islam emerged from within the formation of the state and not outside or against it. Its roots are to be traced back to the formation of the modern nation state of Egypt.

In my opinion, earlier scholarship that has attempted to analyze Islamism has fallen into three traps. First, it has mainly approached political Islam from a single angle, whether
cultural, economic, or political, and, therefore, has framed the phenomenon in terms of ideology, class conflict, or political competition. Second, it has contrasted political Islam to modernity and recognized it either as a modernist response or as a traditionalist reaction to modern social changes. Third, it has focused more on the unique formation of the discourse of political Islam, in terms of its concepts and structures, and less, if at all, on the genres and rhetorical strategies of the Arabic language, especially its local and contemporary societal use. In all these endeavors, scholars have proceeded by isolating political Islam in order to define and analyze it. In my view, these acts of isolation are artificial, arbitrary, and do undue violence to the evidence on the ground; they necessarily produce skewed and incorrect understandings of the development of political Islam.

Contrary to the above strategies, I advocate an approach that reconnects political Islam with its socio-cultural and political environment. Therefore, first, I recognize the emergence of political Islam, the foundation of the modern nation-state of Egypt and the unfolding of capitalism as the interrelated parts of one social and historical phenomenon. Second, I see political Islam—and the nation-state and the economy—as a good site to study the continuity of what earlier scholarship theoretically separates as traditional and modern.

Before tracing political Islam to its roots within the emerging modern state, I want to briefly categorize three different approaches to the study of the state. First, there is the trend that gives primacy and autonomy to the state. For instance, Colin Beck wrote “Regimes adopt religious symbolism and functions that legitimate the role of Islam in the public sphere. State incorporation of religion thus creates Islam as a frame for political action, with increased access to mobilizing resources and better able to withstand repression and political exclusion.” (Beck 2009). This is the same picture that had been adopted earlier in the famous work of Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 1998. Starrett’s thesis is that it is in fact the government that politicized Islam through mass education policies, and that it is this very strategy that is Islamizing society and creating a need for a specific form of Islam (Starrett 1998).

The second trend is one that recognizes the central role of the state but sees it as essentially contested with the society. Successful states are those that gain autonomy, and unsuccessful states are those that are constrained or dominated by societal forces. A representative of this trend is Robert Lee’s study *Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. Lee writes, “The State was needy, and religion responded to this neediness. It evolved in response to changing political opportunities, gaining influence and authority along the way. The state fought back by limiting and altering those opportunities, trying itself to exploit the pluralistic structure of Egyptian Islam, and the result was ever greater intermixture of politics and religion.” (Lee 2010, p. 115)

Whether hegemonic or contesting for its power, the state is recognized in these two trends above as an independent body. I am, however, in favor of the third trend that examines the state in its socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. A good example of this trend is provided by two studies by Nathan Brown, in which he reflected on the role played by both the elite and the general population, as well as the effect of local culture and traditional institutions in creating the modern state of Egypt. Brown analyzed the authority and intention of the state and argued that although the colonial power in early 20th-century Egypt affected the formation of the positivist laws, it was the Egyptian elite that shaped those laws to increase the administrative power of the state as a way to pre-empt the imperial intervention. He further argued that this shaping was influenced by the general population and their culture (Brown 1995). In a later study, he elaborated on the effect of the population and raised the curious question of why creating civil courts and laws did not elicit more substantial debate and turmoil in Egypt. He answered this question by arguing that Šari‘ah is derived, not from text, but from pre-modern institutions and practices, which both continued through modernity. Law, in this regard, was understood as commentaries, which are mediated by educational institutions. Instead of putting emphasis on the authority of the state to impose laws, he shifted the focus to the social process of the production of knowledge (Brown 1997).
Another important study in the same vein is *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen. He shed light on the crucial role played by another Egyptian social group, the ‘ulamā’, in the formation of the modern state of Egypt, arguing that “In their endeavour to serve the state, uphold the authority of high ‘ulamā and fight godlessness and secularization, the State Muftis were contributing to a reformulation of Islam as simple, rational, just and easily applicable—a vision of Islam that has been highly influential in the 20th century.” (Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, p. 29). Here, we find the ‘ulamā as an integral part of the formation process of the state.

In this article, I want to continue this line of research, though by going even further back to the 19th century, which witnessed the early emergence and formation of the modern state in Egypt. My objective is not merely to study the role of Islam in creating the Egyptian modern state but also to examine the articulation of the secular and the religious within the folds and spaces of the state. Here, I am drawing on the works of Talal Asad. The modern state, he argued, is not a cause but an articulation of secularization (Asad 2003a, p. 209). It gave birth to specific social spaces in which the secular grew. Asad argues that in those same social spaces, Islam too had to grow. The religious and the secular not only meet and interact but are also, and more importantly, redefined. In “Secularism, Nation-State, Religion,” Asad explains that Islamists had to be statists and engage with politics, because all spaces are now political and governed by the state (Asad 2003b, pp. 281–304).

In studying state and religion, Asad raises the question of how the spaces of the modern state, whether schools, courts, laws, or otherwise, display their power in configuring and redefining the religious and the secular in their relation to each other. Here, the state is neither autonomous nor a mere reflection of its context. The state is a capacity built into the architecture and mechanics of its spaces. Asad, however, never speaks about the early formation of these spaces themselves. It is my objective, therefore, in this limited work, to study the mechanics and architecture that created the early formations of the state, economy, and political Islam, arguing, as I will explain, that we can see common mechanics and architecture, a common grammar if you will, among these three formations.

In the following sections, I will explore these common mechanics and architecture within the emerging formations of the modern state in Egypt, the economy, and political Islam. I will examine them in three, arbitrarily divided, consequent historical phases: first, during the reign of Mehmet Ali from 1805 to 1849; second, from 1849 to 1879; and third, from 1879 to the mid-1920s, when Egypt won its independence and the Ottoman Caliphate collapsed. Each of these phases is centered around a common theme that characterized the discourses, knowledge, and structures of politics, the economy, and “Islam,” as they encountered the West, which are, in order, technology, civilization, and ideology. All these developments emerged as a response to the dramatic event, not of the fall of the caliphate, but of the French invasion of Egypt. I will briefly reflect on the French invasion of Egypt before explaining these three stages in three sections.

2. The French Invasion of Egypt

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821 CE) invaded Egypt—an Ottoman territory at the time, with 36,000 soldiers and 14,000 sailors. His army included 151 scholars and artists as well: mathematicians, geometers, engineers, chemists, geographers, geologists, doctors, physicists, zoologists, botanists, astronomers, Egyptologists, etc. The moral cover for the military invasion, therefore, was bringing civilization and democracy to the land. Unlike his predecessor, Alexander the Great, who traveled with philosophers as he invaded Persia, Bonaparte’s savants were mostly scholars of the natural sciences. The Enlightenment’s civilization, it seems, is universal and objective enough to ignore cultural and social historical differences as it advances its technology and scientific discoveries. Nina Burleigh wrote: “Besides accomplishing Enlightenment goals of categorizing and classifying, Napoleon also expected his savants to help administer the conquered territory, mapping the land, finding the water, befriending the leaders, and even negotiating with
the foe.” (Burleigh 2007, p. viii). What the French brought with them, then, which would change the course of history in Egypt, was mainly a new **technique of governance**.

There is a long line of scholarship that has argued that the cultural significance of the French invasion to Egypt was mainly the new ideas and values that the campaign brought to the country’s Muslim society. For instance, Bernard Lewis argued that the ideas of the French Revolution intruded into the Islamic world through the invasion of Egypt and had an impact on Muslim societies (Lewis 2010, p. 51). Similarly, Shmuel Moreh argued that “the French had brought ideas and concepts that were considered revolutionary among other European nations to Egypt, which had been stagnant for years, and that Napoleon had wanted to destroy Egypt’s socioeconomic structure and establish a new system based on the most up-to-date European model.” (Erol 2022). It is true that Napoleon, in his speeches to the Egyptians, announced that the French were in Egypt to liberate the Egyptians from the Mamluks’ tyranny, but he framed this intention within the tenants of Islam, the values of the Qur’an, and the tradition of the Prophet. Napoleon participated in and sponsored Islamic festivals and did his best to favor Muslim scholars. Even politically, he announced that France was an ally of the Ottoman Caliph (Cole 2007, p. 127).

Several authors repeated that the idea of democracy was planted in Egypt when Napoleon established al-Dīwān al-‘Ām, the General Assembly. Al-Dīwān consisted of 180 members, of whom 27 represented Cairo, with 18 for the al-Sharqiyya province, 18 for the al-Munīfiyyah province, and 9 for each of the other provinces. One-third of the representatives of each province represented its ‘Ulama’, one-third represented its businessmen, and one-third represented the people. The latter were usually town mayors and the chiefs of Bedouin tribes (Hanna 1970).

This argument too is flawed for two reasons. First, al-Dīwān was not, as Sami Hanna, among others, argued the first “parliament” in Egypt, for its announced function was merely consultative and its practical function was indeed administrative. It was neither elected nor legislative. Certainly, it would be difficult to reconcile the idea of laïcité with a council consisting of one third ‘ulama’. Second, three years prior to the invasion, a popular movement of resistance had succeeded in enforcing the mamluk leaders to sign a legal document that “defined, although vaguely, the ruler–ruled relationships.” Interestingly, this movement was led by the same handful of ‘ulama’, whom Napoleon appointed as a nine-member cabinet to be responsible for security, supplies, and health. Al-Dīwān, however, was significant, but not because it introduced the Egyptians to the ideas of freedom, justice, and democracy—it was important because it introduced them to a new technique of governing.

Two institutions, established by Napoleon during his campaign, are significant here: the Institute of Egypt and the printing press. In 1798, Napoleon created the Institute of Egypt. It seems that some of the savants saw the Institute as a vehicle to transmit French culture to Egypt. Napoleon, however, was clear about his intentions, as he raised the following questions: “Can the furnaces providing bread to the military be improved? Is there a replacement in Egypt for hops to make beer? How can Nile water be purified? Is it better to construct water mills or windmills in Cairo? Can (gun) powder be manufactured in Egypt? What is the situation with jurisprudence, and civil and criminal law in Egypt? How can it be improved?” (Cole 2007, p. 146). The focus on applied sciences in the Institute is apparent in its most important product, *The Description of Egypt*, an encyclopedic work that was published in 23 volumes from 1809 to 1818 and again in a second edition in 37 volumes from 1821 to 1837, where the authors documented their discoveries in Egypt. The second important institute that the French established during their campaign was the printing press. With its own printing press, the Institute “was soon putting out two publications that kept scholars and soldiers alike abreast of doings within the Institute throughout greater Egypt. Every ten days, the journal *La Décade Égyptienne* was published with selections from the reports read at the Institute’s meetings. A newspaper, *Le Courrier*, published more frequently, shared gossip and news from within Egypt … and, whenever available, news from Europe.”

Egyptian Azhari scholars were frequently and warmly invited by the French scholars to the Institute. The French aimed to impress them with their scientific instruments and the discoveries of modern science. They showed them their chemistry experiments, astronomical instruments, flying balloons, etc. Juan Cole wrote that "Niello Sargy was clearly impressed at how interested the principal members of the divan—sheikhs al-Mahdi, al-Fayuumi, al-Sawi, al-Fasi, and al-Bakri—were in the national printing press directed by M. Marcel. The French was far faster and more precise than the presses some of them had seen in Istanbul or at the Maronite monastery at Kisrawan." I must state, again, that the newness which the French brought to Egypt, the modern condition, if you will, was not a corpus of culture, ideas, and values. It was the techniques. In fact, as Cole argued, Napoleon’s approach to religion departed from the radical partisans of the Enlightenment philosophy of reason as he embraced an instrumental approach to religion. The use of religion to manipulate people is a statecraft.

3. First Stage: The Question of Technology

On 21 March 1801, the French army was defeated by the British in Alexandria Battle. Consequently, the French agreed to leave Egypt and sail back to France. Their departure was shortly followed by the arrival of an Ottoman force led by an Albanian officer, Mehmet Ali (1769–1849). The vacuum of power in Egypt and the destructive conflict between the Mamluks and the Turkish leaders paved the way for Ali, who sided with the Egyptians, as represented by a number of scholars, in order to seize the rule of Egypt.

Ali worked persistently and gradually to convert a medieval state, ruled by a foreign, tax-collecting, military elite, that was subordinate, at least nominally, to a pan-Islamic caliphate, whose Sultan resided in Istanbul, into a modern nation state. The newly emerging state had its own mighty army, into which the Egyptians were drafted by the late 1820s. Mehmet Ali established state control over the land, giving his government the power to determine what the peasants sowed; to supply their seed, tools, fertilizer, and irrigation water; and to set the prices it would pay for their produce. A new irrigation system came into being, enabling the peasants to raise three crops each year on lands where formerly they had grown only one. Cash crops, such as indigo, tobacco, sugar, and especially long-staple cotton, replaced those raised mainly for the peasants’ subsistence (Goldschmidt 1988, pp. 17–18).

The Pasha supported the agricultural reforms by an extending “network of barge canals, river ports, and cart roads, together with grain weighing and storage facilities, cotton gins, sugar refineries and other capital improvements.” He launched an industrial revolution of sorts, introducing modern factories for the manufacture of soap, paper, cotton textiles, warships, and armaments. A modern education system was also established. He founded schools of engineering, medicine, midwifery, languages, administration, and arts and crafts. An overarching bureaucracy was extended to administer and regulate all these state operations. Finally, by threatening and fighting the Ottomans, he forced them to reach an agreement, recognizing the hereditary rule of his family and clearer borders to his country.

It is important here to emphasize the centrality of the army in Ali’s project. It was the core, around which the project evolved. In fact, and as Tariq al-Bişr argued, there was no complete distinction between the military and civil service. It was one military-civil institution that gave the civil service a military character. Civil servants had to dress in military uniforms and acquire military ranks. In 1847, for instance, a midwife was hired in a midwifery school as a lieutenant (al-Bişr 1980, p. 21). This administrative and military project carried with it a number of profound transformations in Egypt.

In politics and economy, the emphasis was on using new techniques to centrally and scientifically administer scattered resources. In politics, there was the creation of extensive bureaucracy and the administration of population. The Bedouins had to settle down and to work either in the army or in agriculture. If Egyptian Muslims were to be conscripted into the army, the Copts were to be assigned the financial administration of the state. The
health and the education of the people was the business of the government that was also to be organized and administered centrally. Economically, the land had to be surveyed and rationally distributed. Cash crops were introduced and compulsorily administered by the state. Local industry was rationally founded and protected by tariffs and other measures of the state. In order to fulfill these political and economic objectives, Ali understood the need to import new European technologies and techniques, whether in governmental administration, medicine, schooling, industry, weaponry, etc.\textsuperscript{5}

Contemporary to Ali, and working with him, was a scholar from al-Azhar, whose name was Hasan al-‘Aṭṭār (1766–1835 CE). ‘Aṭṭār encountered the French scholars who accompanied Napoleon in his campaign against Egypt. After initially fleeing Cairo to avoid the French, he returned and approached them. ‘Aṭṭār learned the new European arts and sciences from the French savants in exchange for teaching them the Arabic language (Tamīmī 2007). Once the French left the country, he fled Egypt in 1802 and spent years touring Albania, Turkey, and the Levant. In 1815, he returned to Egypt to resume teaching at al-Azhar and became a consultant of Ali. In 1830, ‘Aṭṭār became the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar—a position he kept until his death in 1835.

Declaring that “Our countries must change their conditions and acquire the sciences unavailable to them yet”, he emphasized, once and again, the need to the sciences and technology that empowered Europe.\textsuperscript{9} Though failing to reform al-Azhar, in spite of being the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, he urged Ali to proceed in creating a modern educational system and to found a number of technical high schools, such as those of medicine, engineering, pharmacy, linguistics, etc. (‘Abd al-Ghānī 1993, p. 75). According to Muḥammad ‘Abdul-Ghānī Hasan, ‘Aṭṭār’s scholarship had two characters: an interest in precise definitions and being encyclopedic.\textsuperscript{10} In his commentaries on earlier works, he moved freely from grammar to logic, history, geography, literature, etc. Failing to convince al-Azhar scholars to teach new sciences, he had a group of his students with whom he read and translated French books. ‘Aṭṭār authored books in medicine and astronomy and wrote commentaries on a variety of scientific books, as he closely followed the European books that were being translated by Ali into Arabic or Turkish.\textsuperscript{11}

Two important projects, initiated by Ali, are worth mentioning here: the printing press of Būlāq and the translation project. Printing and translation were certainly at the heart of Ali’s modernization project as he aimed to import European technical knowledge to Egypt. Ali used different methods to import this knowledge and nourish it in the technical schools that he founded. Appointing foreign, mainly Italian and French, scholars to teach in these schools was one of these methods. He certainly needed interpreters to facilitate the communication between them and their students. He also instructed the technical schools to teach European languages, such as French and Italian. Special bodies for translation were established and supported by the government. Frequently, he had to reprint the books that had already been translated and printed in Istanbul. More importantly, however, was his education missions, as he sent Egyptian students to study in Europe. The pressure to translate more books made him assign these students to translate the books that they studied in Europe, not only after they returned to Egypt to start their academic careers, but even as they were still abroad. All these works were sent immediately to the Būlāq printing press to be published and distributed in technical schools, factories, and relevant government offices. A quick review of the books that were translated in his reign reveals an interest in technology and technical knowledge: chemistry, printing, ship building, military sciences, botany, astronomy, mathematics, geography, medicine, engineering, etc. Ali was also interested in political history and governance, for instance, The Prince by Machiavelli. Jamāl-al-Dīn al-Šayyāl argued that none of the translated books aimed to spread culture among the people, as they were circulated within the confines of the technical schools, except for two books, one on public health and the other on children’s health (al-Šayyāl 1951, pp. 205, 225).

At this stage, we cannot really talk about political Islam for either Egypt, as an independent and modern national state, nor Islam itself, as a reified and rationally systematized
modern religion that could be observed. In a conversation between ‘Atṭār and his friend, the famous historian al-Jabarti (1756–1825), the latter thought that focusing on legal questions and Šar‘i’ah sciences was better than concerning oneself with other sorts of knowledge. ‘Atṭār rhetorically asked him: “Why? Is not religion protected and observed?”

For both Jabarti and ‘Atṭār, there was no “Islamic” science opposed to non-Islamic science. Those were simply “Šar‘i’” sciences. For ‘Atṭār, astronomy came before Hadith, since it is the science that was badly missing. Like Ali, he was interested in importing European new technology and had a very utilitarian approach to the Western Civilization. In addition, like Ali, he was interested in organizing and administering scattered resources: Hadith, Qur‘ān, Fiqh, literature, astronomy, medicine, geography, history, etc.

It is also not possible to talk about Egypt at this stage in any national sense. It is a fact that the majority of the administrators and local and regional leaders of Egypt maintained their positions under the French rule. Napoleon repeatedly announced that he and the French were good Muslims, and he communicated this message even beyond the limits of Egypt as he wrote to the Šarīf of Mecca confirming his support, both financially and security-wise for the pilgrimage. It is also a fact that Egypt had not been ruled by an “Egyptian” since Queen Cleopatra, who was subject to the Roman Empire. Politico-military functions were seen as professional operations that could be or, even better, should be run by non-locals. Ali, an ethnic Albanian, did not speak Arabic, and his wars were typically against Arabs and other Muslims, whether in Arabia, the Levant, or Sudan. The aim of these wars was not to protect any assumed borders but to expand them.

The conscription of Egyptians into Ali’s army that began in 1822 did not create any sense of nationalism among the locals. Ali had to turn to the locals out of necessity. The locals were to serve for long years but without ever rising to the ranks of officers. Officers were exclusively Ottomans or Mamluks. In his study “The Nation and Its Deserter”, Khaled Fahmy eloquently and convincingly argued that Ali’s army could not nourish any feeling of nationalism among the Egyptian conscripts. In fact, the Egyptians’ response to conscription was mass rebellion, escaping villages, deserting the army or self-mutilation in spite of the severe punishment of the government for such acts (Fahmy 1998).

4. Second Stage: The Question of Civilization

In 1841, Egypt became an autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire with an army, bureaucracy, economy, and professional elite that could support its independence. Ali, however, “lost interest in his factories, schools, and estates and began turning control over to his surviving sons and his trusted aides.” (Goldschmidt 2008, p. 70). Egypt’s economy could not survive an increasing competition of European stronger economies. The Europeans decided to dismantle his monopolies and Ali’s mercantilism could not stand the power of the expanding European capitalism. The land was thrown into the free market and its cotton became subject to global market dynamics and the manipulation of private traders. The embryonic Egyptian industry could not fight back against European products. Economically, Egypt had to be integrated into a global and capitalist market, in which its position was definitely at the periphery (Hourani 1991, p. 273). In addition, Egyptian territory was opened to the European and especially the British–Indian trade. Rail lines were built and the Suez Canal was dug. Cash crops, especially cotton, and raw materials sent to European factories, became the core of the Egyptian economy. Between 1815 and 1850, British exports to the eastern Mediterranean countries increased by 800 percent. This was accompanied by a large European influx into Egypt. Professionals and entrepreneurs settled in Egypt, protected from local laws by special treaties and capitulations.

In addition, Egypt at this point was not merely seeking means of production from Europe—Egypt was adopting, and becoming integrated with, the European model of production. This came with acute contradictions. By 1878, Alexandria, Cairo, and all the new towns on the Suez Canal, along with the railroad stations, hotels, restaurants, and department stores came to resemble Marseille or New Orleans, if not Paris or New York. Proudly, Khedive Ismā’il (R. 1863–1879) announced that “My country is no longer in Africa;
we are now a part of Europe.” However, not everyone benefited from these economic changes. The new policies favored merchants engaged in trade with Europe, who played an increasingly important role in shaping the economy of the country and who were largely European merchants.17

The short reign of Ali’s grandson, ‘Abbās Ḥilmi I (R. 1849–1854) witnessed a reverse of Ali’s policies and a withdrawal from any European contacts except for awarding the British a concession to build Egypt’s first rail line that connected Alexandria to Cairo and cut short a four-month journey from Britain to India to only six weeks. Sa’īd (R. 1854–1863) opened up to the Europeans, but, unlike his father, Ali, he agreed to dig in the Suez Canal and to receive loans from European banks to finance this and other ambitious public projects. Along with flourishing European communities that Sa’īd encouraged to settle in Egypt, several Egyptians rose in power, whether by buying lands or by rising through military ranks. In 1863, Egypt’s debt, however, reached EGP 6 million (or USD 30 million). Ismā’il’s reign (R. 1863–1879) witnessed only an acceleration of Sa’īd’s policies. The American civil war gave a historical opportunity to Egypt to export cotton to Europe at inflated prices. Ismā’il built “public schools, bridges, railroads, cotton gins, sugar refineries, telegraph lines, and harbors.” He paid for the opera house, Egyptian Museum, the National Library, and the Geographical Society and developed a beautiful Cairo downtown. Today, there is a project underway in Egypt, The Khedive Cairo, to restore this downtown and all its marvelous historical buildings. Ismā’il’s opening of the Suez Canal was a spectacular international event. Unfortunately, in 1879, however, Egypt’s debt jumped to an astronomical EGP 93 million. European creditors and their governments put financial restrictions on Ismā’il and his government, controlled the Egyptian economy, and pressured the Ottoman Sultan to depose him, and install his son, Tawfīq (R. 1879–1892), in his place.

During the reigns of Sa’īd (R. 1854–1863) and Ismā’il (R. 1863–1879), “Egypt” was gradually turned both conceptually and politically into a concrete watan, homeland, and the seeds of nationalism were growing. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Rāfī’ī described Sa’īd as having a national attitude, favoring the Egyptians and their welfare, even before becoming the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt (al-Rafi’ī 1948). Sa’īd removed his father’s monopoly in agriculture, legalized the private ownership of land, reduced taxes and forgave those unpaid, and created a system for paying pension to the retirees.20 Judicially, Sa’īd gained the right to choose and appoint judges from the Ottoman Sultan—a right that had been kept by the Supreme Ottoman Judge and had not been exercised to the most integrous or transparent standards. In addition, he founded special courts to try foreigners, who had so far evaded being tried before Egyptian courts.21 As a former commander of the navy, Sa’īd found comfort in the company of the army. More importantly, Sa’īd strengthened and reformed the army; dramatically shortened the conscription time to only one year; and improved the conditions of the soldiers in terms of their food, health, comfort, and their treatment by their officers. In addition, Sa’īd spread conscription among all classes and religions instead of being restricted to the poor Muslims. He also promoted the children of Egyptian notables to the ranks of officers and accelerated their promotions within these ranks instead of restricting these positions to Turks and Circassians. In fact, Ahmad ‘Urābī (1841–1911) was among those who benefitted from these changes and quoted a strong nationalist speech by Sa’īd in his memoirs. ‘Urābī wrote that the speech stimulated his nationalist consciousness as Sa’īd announced that he saw himself as Egyptian, promising to promote and support the Egyptians against all others—a statement, which resulted in, ‘Urābī wrote, the happiness of the Egyptian attendees and the furiousness of the “emirs and the great ones”, alluding to the Turks and the Circassians (‘Urābī 2005).

Khedive Ismā’il financed the earliest newspapers, set up government schools, convoked the first representative assembly in 1866 and established the Mixed Courts to try foreigners in Egypt. These changes nurtured a class of educated Egyptians that came to be involved in the political life of the country. Furthermore, those Egyptians found their way to positions as army officers and state officials and eventually formed Egypt’s first
nationalist movement. Juan Cole summarized three forces in Egypt in the third quarter of the nineteenth century: capitalism, population growth, and the state. Sa’id’s nationalism might have been motivated by his suspicion of the Turk and Circassian military, who assassinated his predecessor in his bed. ‘Urabi, among others, might have found refuge in nationalism to protect themselves in an environment fueled by ethnic conflicts and competition. Cole, however, investigates deeper socioeconomic factors that nurtured nationalism among the masses. He asks how the economy changed the lives of the non-elite Egyptians: the rural population, the urban guilds, and the intelligentsia? Cole argues that the rise of private properties after 1858, the abolition of forced labor in 1860, the marginalization of the traditional urban guilds in addition to the growth of population—which resulted in price inflation, estate fragmentation, and an increase in competition in the labor market—all led to the rise of a capitalist market and the fall of the labor wage. Cole adds that petitions were increasingly flowing to the government, not only from villagers, but also from white collar graduates who could not find an employment in the government or were sent away to unfavorable places. It was these mass grievances, resulting from dramatic socioeconomic changes, that nurtured a strong sense of nationalism (Cole 1993, pp. 53–83). These grievances were paralleled with and made worse by an increase in foreign intervention in Egypt’s affairs. As Hourani put it: “Behind the merchants and ship-owners of Europe stood the ambassadors and consuls of the great powers, supported in the last resort by the armed might of their governments.”

The financial crisis and the huge debt made the Khedive accept a British–French “Dual Financial Control” over Egyptian state revenues and expenditures.

It was in this politico-economic context that Tahtawi (1801–1873) wrote his works. A disciple of ‘Attar, he was recommended to Ali by ‘Attar himself to be commissioned as a religious guide and imam for the select group of army cadets who had been dispatched to learn the French sciences and acquire modern military technologies. Neither spiritual guidance nor technologies seemed to be the interest of Tahtawi in France. He was interested in and acquired “a precise knowledge of the French language and read books in ancient history, Greek philosophy and mythology, geography, arithmetic and logic and, most importantly, as Hourani emphasizes, the French thought of the 18th century—Voltaire, Rousseau’s Social Contract and other works.” In his famous book about the description of Paris, he recorded the customs and manners of the French people. Tahtawi was not writing about French technology; his concern was the French civilization. He wrote about the French philosophes, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, and translated and commented on pieces of the French Constitution in his book.

Tahtawi was aware of the serious contradiction between the urgency to adopt a new mode of life and the necessity to maintain culturally essential values and structures. To solve this problem, he set out some rules and tried some techniques. Tahtawi aimed at translation in its general sense. He found out analogies between Islamic and European civilizations and used shar’i terms to express French concepts. For instance, he wrote about the similarity of French civil law and the rulings of fiqh, stating that “what we call ‘ilm al-usul, or the science of foundations (of the law,) they call natural rights. Those are rational principles of knowing the good and the ugly on which they base their civil rulings. What we name furu’ fiqhiyyah, legal topics, they call civil rights. What we name ‘adl wa ‘ibdan, justice and grace, they call freedom and equality.” (Al-Tahtawi 2002, p. 124). In his cultural translation, Tahtawi translated “law” into Shar’ah instead of qanun and “the people” into ummah instead of sha’b. He would sometimes elaborate or omit phrases to fit the translation to the cultural and political context of Egypt. For instance, in translating “in favor of the poor against the rich,” he omits “against the rich.” More interestingly, as Mustafa Riad showed, he translates French “la police,” which refers in its original passage to cleaning the road, providing water supply, building public restroom in the city, and the spread of culture and arts publicly, into dabt, rabt, and hisbah, Islamizing the civil concept, and adapting it to the Egyptian political and legal context. In a different passage, he translates
“paix et la bonne police des peuple” into “quiet, comfort and tranquility and issues of firm empowerment, such as ḏabṭ, ḥabṭ and iḥtisâb, as well as tarbiyat al-ahālī wa naṣr al-ādāb.” (Riad 2018). Ṭaḥṭāwī, who was the director of the School of Languages in 1835, reconciles reason and revelation instead of importing their inherent contradiction in French writings and writes that “both šārī‘ah and siyāsah are built on reasonable wisdom.” He announced the essential harmony between cosmic laws and the rulings of Šārī‘ah. Admitting that Šārī‘ah was his abiding limit and that reason should not precede revelation, Ṭaḥṭāwī also writes about the significance of ijtihād and ta‘wīl or interpretation. Cleverly, Ṭaḥṭāwī was able to secure the support of both al-Azhar and Ali for his works.

Ṭaḥṭāwī did not hide his interest in politics. He translated the French Constitution and included its publication in his book on the description of Paris in 1934. In 1867, as he was persecuted and sent away to Sudan by ‘Abbās I, he translated The Adventures of Télémence, which outlines the good characteristics that a political leader should acquire and published it in Beirut in 1867. In his translations of new political concepts, Ṭaḥṭāwī either utilized traditional Islamic concepts to indicate the new meanings or coined new concepts to express them. For instance, he created new Arabic words to translate concepts like citizenship, which he called muwattānah. He also used the same root in waṭan, country, and waṭanīyyah, nationalism, to cleverly root nationalism in the land not the people. More interestingly is his careful conceptual translation of freedom. Instead of using hurriyyah, he used ‘ādil, justice. He justified this choice by writing: “What they call freedom, and motivate people for it, is exactly what we call justice and fairness, ‘adl wa insaf, for the meaning of ruling by freedom is equality before rules and laws. Thereby, the ruler cannot do injustice to anyone. They are the laws that rule and be considered.” Here Ṭaḥṭāwī is fully aware that he is translating, not two pieces of text, but two civilizations. He understands that the functional value of freedom in European civilization should be related, not to hurriyyah, which merely marks the difference between the free and the slave in Islamic literature, but to ‘ādil, justice. He does not deny the value of freedom, for he elaborates on it in his book and writes, among other things, about religious freedom and freedom of expression. He simply anchors freedom in justice to bridge two different cultural structures. He cleverly avoids the trap of laïcité. He aimed to anchor freedom in a concept that is rooted not merely in reason but in revelation as well. If Ṭāṭār was willing to import the techniques but not the civilization, Ṭaḥṭāwī was willing to import the civilization but not its foundation. As John Livingston argued in his article on science in the thought of Ṭaḥṭāwī, “Tahtawi, like Ghazali before him, rejected the philosophical substructure of natural science without rejecting the physical and mathematical logic of nature, which was still subject to divine alteration at any moment.” (Livingston 1996).

The contribution of Ṭaḥṭāwī to political thought was not limited to his translations. With no exaggeration, he could be considered the founder of the ideology of Egyptian nationalism. Ṭaḥṭāwī reinterpreted millah, which had previously referred to religious affiliation, to mean nationality or citizenship, redefining the ground of social identity. His new definition of millah ignores the religious element of social identity. He defines it as the bond that identifies the group of people that live in the same country, speak the same language, have the same morality, share the same traditions, and usually obey the same laws and the same state (‘Imarah 1984b, p. 192). Ṭaḥṭāwī did not deny religious identity. However, he, interestingly, made it a special identity within the larger and more general identity of nationality.

In addition, he was clear in emphasizing the equality in rights and duties among all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. This is a dramatic change from any premodern system of rights. Within the one national society, all have equal rights in exchange for their equal duties. Here, Ṭaḥṭāwī does not ground nationalism merely in romantic notions of history or culture. Civil rights, including religious freedom, are earned by civil duties—a French model of social contract that avoids national or religious rhetoric.

As “Egypt” was politically and economically reified, Ṭaḥṭāwī devoted much of his work to reifying it conceptually and ideologically. Central here is his work on the history of Egypt. As Youssef Choueiri wrote, “Ṭaḥṭāwī was perhaps the first Egyptian to write
and publish a history of ancient Egypt, this being in 1868–1869.” (Choueiri 2017, p. 8).

The work that was published by Muhammad ʿImārah in two of the five volumes of the complete works of Tahtāwī encompasses about 1400 pages. It starts with ancient Egypt and reaches to the last Roman ruler of Egypt. Then, the work moves to describe the Arabs—their history and good character before Islam—and ends with the history of early Islam, describing not only the biography of the Prophet but also, and more importantly, the social, legal, political, and economic institutions that were established during this time. The work was praised by both Khedive Ismāʿīl and Šaykh Muṣṭaфа al-ʿArūṣī, the rector of al-Azhar from 1860 to 1870. Tahtāwī centralizes Egypt globally, not only because of its geographical and historical significance but also because, he argues, of its essential and eternal relationship with civilization and the capacity of its people to absorb all the surrounding civilizations and cultures, as they produce theirs, and spread it back to the world. Interestingly, Tahtāwī connects the past with the present by creating the narrative of Egypt: if Egypt in the past could positively encounter the Hellenistic culture in spite of its military defeat, it certainly could—and should—positively encounter the European culture in the present, regardless of its military weakness.

Arab nationalism too was theorized and celebrated in Tahtāwī’s writings. Four unities contribute to Arab nationalism: unity of land, of language, of morality, and of traditions. A fifth unity, unity in constitution and state, was certainly desirable—if not available at the time. Arab nationalism is deeply rooted in Arabic language and culture. Two points are to be emphasized here. First, this discourse was implicitly and explicitly deployed as an anti-Turkic. Second, removed from this discourse is the ethnic dimension of Arabism—whoever embraces the Arab civilization is an Arab, regardless of this person’s ethnicity or race. I want to repeat here what ʿImārah correctly stated—that Tahtāwī was clear in his anti-Ottoman motives, blaming the Ottomans of the cultural and scientific stagnation that characterized all the societies that they ruled and favoring the Arab culture as the way out of the current civilizational crisis, including his explicit support to the Egyptian military confrontations with the Ottomans. This anti-Caliphate motive is important as we trace the roots of political Islam.

The fact that Tahtāwī was unquestionably anti-Ottoman, or that he did not consider Islam as the ground of modern political identity, does not mean that he ignored Islam altogether or that his discourse was secular or anti-religious. On the contrary, Islamic law and principles were used by Tahtāwī to legitimate and normalize Egyptian and Arab nationalism. For instance, the equality of all citizens in rights and duties, including the conscript of the Copts into the army, was justified by al-Nawawī (631–676 H./1233–1277 CE). Nationalist sentiments are grounded in prophetic tradition, where the Prophet expressed his longing to Mecca, after being forced to migrate to Madinah. “Egypt” is presented as the pivot of Islamic lands, the seat of the Šarʿah and the frontline of its defense throughout history. In addition, the history of Egypt is connected with the biography of the Prophet, where emphasis is put on prophetic institutions. Choueiri wrote, “He equally describes in detail the political, religious, military, social and economic institutions which the Prophet built for the welfare of the Muslim community. His meticulous, and sometimes original historical reconstruction of the early period of Islam invests his subject with a timeless significance functioning as an exemplary model for all ages.”

Tahtāwī, in all his nationalist and political writings, writes unapologetically as a Muslim scholar. Abdul Azim Islahi wrote an interesting article on the economic ideas of Tahtāwī. In no place is Tahtāwī disengaged from “Islam” as he moves to elaborate on concepts and structures, such as labor, industry, trade, competition, equal opportunities, production relationships, saving, taxes, public borrowing, insurance, banking, etc. (Islahi 2012). In his writings we see the reification, the definition, and early emergence of “Egypt”, “Islam”, “economy”, and “politics” as concrete and interacting subjects. Islam and politics were emerging next to each other, opposite each other, as newly defined objects and as new modern structures. They are, as ʿImārah wrote, distinguished but not separated.
by far the earliest appearance of what would develop later to become political Islam. As a statesman and an al-Azhar scholar, Tahtawi must respond to the new questions of modernity and articulate in his writings new needs, such as the need to reform the educational institutions, to reform the judicial system, to have a representative and consultative body, to write a constitution, to emphasize new values of equality and liberty, to centralize the planning, to produce new laws, to regulate and support the economy, to select the suitable legal responses, to legitimize new works of ijtihad, to define a national identity, etc. This work that defines and include Islam and politics is conducted from within the spaces of the state as a part of its formation and development.

More important than his work as a translator, Tahtawi’s professional career developed as an educator. In his writings, we see the appearance of a new concept—tarbiyah, which is related to education but not a synonym of it. This is the concept that has remained central in all nationalist and Islamic discourses in Egypt until now and became the most significant and identifying concept for the Muslim Brothers. Subsequent ministries of education in Egypt were called the Ministry of Tarbiyah and Education. Though education is included in tarbiyah, the later concept expands to include other meanings, such as to grow, to raise, and to develop and refers to identity formation and character building as well. Briefly, tarbiyah refers to the production of a new subjectivity—the modern, civilized, religious, nationalist citizen. Building modern Egypt, creating the modern strong nation, could not be an institution or a system-centered process. It had to be a human-centered process, and it followed the only path possible: tarbiyah. To explain and present this concept, Tahtawi authored al-Murshid al-Amin li-al-Banat wa al-Banin, or the honest guide for girls and boys, a roughly 800-page book on tarbiyah.

Tarbiyah brings us to the topic of education and its centrality in the formation of modern Egypt. Though this is not the place to explore or evaluate education in late 19th century Egypt, it is important to state, at least, that education and its institutions and programs were at the heart of creating the state and, hence, using Islam in a political and national project. I want to especially refute the repeated, though false, argument that Egypt witnessed two kinds of education: one secular and one religious, and the, again false, assumption that secular education was created to fight, or even to compete, against the religious education of al-Azhar. Ali’s purpose of education was to train students to work in the military or in a military-related projects. Until 1836, education was administratively a part of military department. In that year, Ali created a high commission to review the organization of education—a commission that included Tahtawi in its membership. The Commission divided schools into three levels: primary, preparatory, and special. Only primary education was meant to “spread knowledge among the public”—an objective that remained lacking for decades to come (‘Izzat ‘Abd al-Karim 1938). The first two levels were truly meant to send the better students to the special schools. The stated purpose of the special schools was “to provide employees to serve in the civil and military different administrations.”

The list of the special schools included seven schools: Languages, Engineering, Artillery, Knights, Infantry, Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine. The Pasha decided to form a committee to supervise the implementation of the Commission recommendations and to report back to the Department of War. Next time there was an order to reorganize education was in 1841. After the peace with Turkey in 1840, there was no need to maintain a big-sized army. Consequently, producing educated employees who could not be employed became undesirable. The reorganization of education aimed specifically to limit education to the production of a small number of military officers, engineers, medical doctors, veterinarians, and translators. The empty objective of spreading knowledge among the public was completely removed. One wonders how researchers could argue that Ali founded secular education in order to marginalize the religious education of al-Azhar.

It is also necessary to check the curricula of the primary schools. ‘Abd al-Karim wrote: “Children were learning reading, writing, the four basic mathematical operations, and read the principles of Arabic grammar and religious duties. There was a concern to memorize the Qur’an, and to read some Azhari books in Arabic grammar and theology. They may add
Ali noticed that learning and memorizing the Qur’an was too central in these schools to leave enough space for other subjects and wrote to the administrators to limit the time that was spent memorizing the Qur’an. His instruction fell on deaf ears and was completely ignored. Even during the reign of Ismā’il, we find a report that the army could not wait for students to finish their preparatory education and took them in to join its military schools, which resulted in an acute shortage of students who could be sent to the other civilian schools. In fact, the number of students in the preparatory schools from 1863 to 1882 reveals the significance of these modern schools next to al-Azhar. The number varied from a maximum of only 700 students in 1866 to a minimum of 178 in both 1875 and 1877, with an average of 308 students in each year. The curriculum of these schools did not include social sciences, liberal arts, philosophy, or literature. It was limited to Arabic and other languages, mathematics, algebra, geometry, chemistry, physics, geography, and history. In 1874, a plan was put in place to establish a law school. It is interesting to read the table of lectures of the different subjects that were taught in this school during its five year program. Šar‘ah was taught in six lectures weekly and was taught in all five years of the program. The Civil Egyptian Law was taught in two weekly lectures in the second and third years of the program. Natural Law was taught in three weekly lectures during only the third year. The Egyptian Commercial Law was taught in three weekly lectures only during the third and fourth years. The Criminal Law was taught in three weekly lectures during only the fifth year. We find a surprising emphasis on languages: Italian, French, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic.

One wonders where the argument came from that political Islam emerged as a reaction against the modern secular education of the modern state.

Before moving to the next stage, I want to highlight the foundation of Dār al-‘Ulūm in 1872. Today, the published mission of this school reads, “The College of Dār al-‘Ulūm works to prepare graduates who specialize in Arabic Language, and its literature, and Islamic Studies. They are able to implement and teach the Language: reading, writing, listening and speaking, and are qualified to conduct research in their specialties, to research social issues, and treat its linguistic, literary, Šar‘, intellectual and historical problems.” The project started as an auditorium, joined to the central library, where scholars of different specialties would give public lectures. Azhari and non-Azhari scholars, Egyptians and French, gave lectures in fiqh, hadith, tafsīr, Arabic literature, astronomy, physics, history, botany, railways, architecture, and machines. French lectures were instantly translated into Arabic. Azhari students were encouraged to complement their studies by attending lectures in mathematics, engineering, physics, geography, general history, and chemistry. The Azhari students who attend regularly could take an exam that qualified them to teach outside al-Azhar. The new school was not meant to compete with al-Azhar, for, first, both its regular students and its scholars were Azharis and, second, its graduates were few and Azhari graduates remained the main source of teachers in non-Azhari schools. It seems that the school was founded to improve and complement, certainly not to replace, al-Azhar. It seems also that it was an experimental school. For instance, physiology was later added to the curriculum. In 1885, the school of languages was included into Dār al-‘Ulūm; and Muhammad ‘Abduh was asked later to teach the principles of sociology as presented in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406). In 1886/1887, pedagogy was added to the curriculum so that the future teachers would be exposed to non-traditional methods of teaching. It was only in 1882 that an education school was founded. The new school was meant to gradually be responsible for supplying teachers of subjects other than Arabic and Islamic studies, leaving these two specialties to Dār al-‘Ulūm. Nonetheless, this shift took about two decades to materialize, and the new school also included in its curricula Arabic and Islamic studies. Dār al-‘Ulūm, a state project that came to be the focus of ‘Abduh’s hopes and dreams, produced graduates such as Jāwīsh, al-Bannā, and Quṭb.
5. Third Stage: The Question of Ideology

This stage started with the removing of Khedive Ismā‘il from power in 1879 as a result of the economic crisis and encompasses the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, ending with the first World War in 1914. This is a stage of differentiation and splits. It is in this stage that we can see not only a political Islam that grew within the folds of the state but also the earliest forms of Islamism—ideological political Islam—that grew within the state as well as around it and in its external sphere. However, before reaching a moment of clear differentiation and acute splits, there was a transitional phase that accelerated these developments.

The transitional phase had already started during the final years of Khedive Ismā‘il and would last until the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. It started with the spectacular economic failure of Ismā‘il. By the mid-1870s, Egypt became bankrupt. The Khedive pledged all his collateral, offered to forgive Egyptian landowners half their taxes in perpetuity if they paid him six years’ land tax in advance, sold Egypt’s shares in the Suez Canal Company to Britain, agreed to set up the Dual Financial Control by Britain and France to control state revenues and expenditure, and added a French and a British minister to his cabinet and appointed an Armenian as its premier. All these measures could not solve the fiscal crisis. Ismā‘il, who won more autonomy to Egypt, changed his title from viceroy to Khedive, and made the heir stay in his family, rather than the family of his grandfather was forced to step down and be replaced by his son, Tawfīq in 1879.

Punishing Ismā‘il could not obviously solve the economic crisis.

Khedive Tawfīq (R. 1879–1892) is portrayed in both nationalist and Western literature as a weak ruler who sided with the British against his own people. Arthur Goldschmidt, for instance, writes that he chose Europe over the nationalists and appointed the autocratic Riyad Pasha as a premier of his cabinet so he would restrain Egyptian nationalism. A careful reading of the events that preceded the reign of Tawfīq as well as his early steps as a ruler of Egypt would prove otherwise. The main challenge at that time was neither a challenge of European technology nor European civilization. It was a challenge of being a part of European and international capitalism—free markets in terms of economy and liberal democracy in terms of politics. Egypt lacked a strong and competitive industry or a strong and capable army. What we witness in the 1870s is not just a bad fiscal policy but an expected failure of the state. What Ali could achieve was the social and economic reorganization of Egypt around and within the political structures of the state and its bureaucracy. These structures could not carry the economic load of integrating Egypt peripherally into a network of international capitalism. The waning, and sometimes collapse, of these structures spoiled ideas, movements, activities, etc., outside the organization of the state. Tawfīq inherited not just fiscal crises but a disintegrated state. The deterritorialization of a state that could not control, coordinate, or even accommodate its people’s activities resulted in economic, cultural, political, social, and ideological flows that were loosely networked around a number of nodes. This argument is important in order to understand the early appearance of political Islam outside state’s structures. However, I first need to explain the emerging transient and loosely nodal structure.

Juan Cole, in Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East, explores the ideologies and social outlooks of specific groups in Egypt before the ‘Urābī’s revolt in 1882. The study he provides is sound and informative. However, I must place emphasis on the flows of individuals and people, who were loosely attached to each other around certain transient nodes, and not on a theoretical classification of those individuals and people into concrete socioeconomic groups or classes, such as the elite, the notable, the intellectuals, the ‘ulamā’, etc., as Cole did. In fact, a careful look at Cole’s statements would make them acceptable only with generous generalization—statements such as “most of members of the native elite dropped out of the revolutionary coalition when politics became polarized in the spring of 1882.” As we see, Cole himself had to insert two disclaimers: one at the beginning, “most”, and one at the end, “spring of 1882”. In times of transition and fluidity, classic sociological theory is hardly useful. The nodes I am proposing here are unnecessarily functional in logic.
They are merely meeting the points of people, pieces of knowledge, ideas, projects, dreams, etc. Classifying these nodes according to some rational logic of class, political affiliation, group interests, etc., would change their arbitrary and fluid nature.

The examples of these nodes are the multitude of informal cultural salons, secret societies, masonry chapters, and regular meetings at different coffeehouses. It is futile to classify these loose organizations according to their membership or even agenda. Notables, members of nobility, young army officers, students, scholars, government employees, etc., floated around in these gatherings. It was not uncommon for a certain individual to be a member of more than one organization. Religious and ethnic affiliations could be significant sometimes, but they were irrelevant most of the time. For instance, the secret group Young Egypt, in Alexandria, had Muslims in its leadership but many Christians and Jews in its ranks and files. Nor were there specific agendas for these emerging nodes, except for the general national agenda of fighting against European intervention and the ruler’s despotism. What facilitated the mobility of the flows among those nodes were modern means of transportation and means of communication: the postal service, printed journalism, the telegram, trains, etc. In addition, the presentation of European discourses of revolution, republicanism, and parliamentarism, as well as the inspiration of Ottoman constitutionalism and the ideas of the Young Ottomans, fueled national discourses of equality, liberation, democracy, and independence.

In this environment, we find an interesting development: a reliance of the state itself on this loose network of nodes and flows that we can see in the three following examples. The first example is when Ismā’īl, in February 1879, instigated riots against the government to rid himself of the British cabinet officer, Rivers Wilson, and the Armenian premier, Nubar Pasha. Four hundred armed officers stormed the government building and briefly arrested these two men to protest putting 2500 army officers on half-pay. Second, as the heir, Tawfīq joined the National League, a secret society led by Afghānī, and collaborated with Mason chapters. Third, Širīf Pasha, who was removed from the premier position by the new Khedive, Tawfīq, in 1879, worked against the new government and the foreign intervention in Egyptian politics and economy by forming the Hilwān Society, a secret political society that moved to the suburb of Hilwān to avoid the government’s spies.

As I said above, it is in this context that we see extra-state political Islam, spilling out of the state’s structures, much like other activities, ideas, discourses, etc. This is political Islam neither as a distinct discourse nor as an ideology of Islamism. By political Islam I here refer to political arguments that are based on religious texts; nationalist motivations stimulated by the history of Muslims; and moral, legal, or theological statements thrown into conversations and debates concerning the nation, civilization, or the future of the state. Islam also becomes political when it provides a critique of cultural traditions and their appropriateness in modern life; for instance, the critique of al-Azhar education and its usefulness in building a modern nation-state. In other words, as long as “Islam” is referenced in political and national debates, movements, projects, etc., it becomes political Islam.

It was this new, undifferentiated form of political Islam that we can observe in the statements and actions of al-Afghānī. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897), a Sunni scholar from Afghanistan, lived in Egypt for eight years, from 1871 until his deportation in 1879. It is not uncommon, in both Arabic and Western sources, to find him portrayed as the first Islamic modernist, an exaggeration that plagued Western academia without having any roots in reality.

Afghānī’s ideas, activities, and modes of organization were not dissimilar to the circulating ideas, activities, and organizations in Egypt during the 1870s. The general umbrella agenda of resisting European intervention in Egypt’s politics and economy and the Khedive’s despotism was shared by all nodes and comprised the heart of al-Afghānī’s politics and statements as he met with his group at a coffeehouse in downtown Cairo. Like other intellectuals, politicians, and activists, he joined at least two of the Freemason chapters in Egypt. He was also a member, or perhaps a leader, of a secret organization, The Free National League, that included both civilian and military members. Some authors find
the proposal of an “Islamic League,” al-Jāmi‘ah al-Islāmiyyah, to be his most significant contribution to the national debate. This could not be further from truth. The notion of an Islamic League as a loose framework of a decentralized organization that includes all Muslim countries and would support them in their fight against European imperialism had been entertained by a long list of authors during and after the 1870s. Afghānī’s use of this concept is not exclusive. He used it as he advocated for Arab nationalism as well. We need only to examine the names of those who attended his meetings to know that Afghānī’s teachings were not seriously different from the ideas that were circulating in other circles in the 1870s—undifferentiated new knowledge that had yet to split into the differentiated discourses and ideologies in years to come. Among these, we find Azhari students, such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh; Nationalist journalists, such as ‘Abd Allāh al-Nadīm; Christian intellectuals, such as Salīm al-Naqqaš; a Jewish playwright, Ya’qūb Ṣannū‘; army officers, such as ‘Urāb; and, not least, royalty, such as Tawfiq.

The above assessment does not remove all significance from Afghānī. On the contrary, Afghānī was energetic, intelligent, and encyclopedic in his knowledge. In addition, he had layers of international experience that enriched the national dialogue. Afghānī’s unique contribution, however, and as far as political Islam is concerned, is his use of religious rhetoric and arguments to legitimize extra-state and anti-state actions, paving his path with a strong pragmatism that would influence the Islamism that had yet to emerge in the decades to come. Margaret Kohn wrote: “In spite of his frequent references to the Qur‘ān, Afghānī’s critique of secularism and heterodoxy is pragmatic and political rather than theological. For Afghānī, whose orthodoxy was a matter of some controversy, Islam is a necessary source of unity, identity, and mobilization against imperialism.” (Kohn 2009)

Afghānī’s novel contribution was to pursue a shortcut to reform by conquering the state. Among other actions, he pursued two radical ideas: a military coup and the assassination of Ismā‘īl if removing him were not possible.

The removal of Ismā‘īl and the ascension of Tawfiq to the position of Khedive in 1879 had some significant results. Tawfiq was determined to absorb all extra-state activities, include extra-state groups within the folds of the state, and re-establish the state as the hegemonic framework of nationalism and progress. The new Khedive quickly deported Afghānī, not in spite of, but because of what he witnessed firsthand of Afghānī’s persistent work to remove his father by all means possible and installing Tawfiq in his place. Though Tawfiq is typically portrayed as the ruler who betrayed the nationalist movement and encouraged the British to occupy Egypt to keep his throne, I see this as shallow, false, and problematic. Relying on Salīm al-Naqqaš’s (D. 1884) nine-volume chronicle of the first years of Tawfiq’s rule, Miṣr li-al-Miṣriyyīn, Egypt for the Egyptian, we can obtain a different picture (al-Naqqaš 1884). This point is important because conventional wisdom is that political Islam was born outside and against the state because, at least from the perspective of political Islam, its corruption, rejection of Islamic culture, and adoption of Western traditions and politics. This argument is typically grounded in the animosity between Khedive Tawfiq and ‘Abduh, assuming the first to be the symbol of the state and the second to be the father of political Islam. This is the false narrative that has dominated our scholarship for nearly a century.

It is first important to know that Naqqāš was not an enemy of ‘Abduh, Afghānī, and the nationalist movement. In fact, Naqqāš, a Lebanese immigrant, was a close disciple of Afghānī, who attended his meetings, joined him in the Masonic organization, published newspapers to support the nationalist movement, and was Afghānī’s confident interpreter as the latter daringly visited the French Embassy to ask the Ambassador to push for deposing Ismā‘īl. In his detailed and documented work, Naqqāš reminds the reader of the first weeks of Tawfiq’s rule. Tawfiq refused to rule Egypt until Turkey sent not just a letter to install him but also a statement ensuring that Egypt would retain its administrative autonomy. Tawfiq rejected a limitation regarding signing international deals without approval from the Sultan and changed the phrasing from “receiving his approval” to “informing him.” Decisively, he removed the European members of the cabinet, and
appointed Šarîf Pasha, the pro-nationalist liberal figure as his prime minister. Since the country was in financial crisis, Tawfîq reduced his own budget and salary. In his letter to the government, he declared that his governance would be šûrî and consultative and that he aimed to support and reform the judiciary, educational system, administration, and agriculture. He stated that he also supported free trade. Later, Tawfîq prohibited any forced labor and removed or reduced most taxes.

The new Khedive’s beginning was not an easy one. He had to engage in tough negotiations with European powers and creditors. He resisted some of their proposals and offered alternatives. Doing his best to reduce European intervention in his government, he had yet to accept Anglo-French supervision of the government’s budget. Yet, he limited the authority of this supervision to writing reports to the Khedive himself, removing any direct authority over his ministers. The Europeans refused the appointment of Širîf Pasha and pressured the Khedive to appoint Nubar, who they believed would support their financial demands. It was only then that Tawfîq removed Širîf and replaced him with Riyâd Pasha as an acceptable compromise. The most difficult crisis in his reign, however, did not come from the Europeans but from his own army.

Provoked by the ethnic discrimination from their high-ranking Circassian and Turkish officers, a number of Egyptian officers were mobilized to sign petitions and protest against the War Minister, ‘Uthmân Rifqî, and several new regulations that Rifqî had introduced and the Egyptian officers saw as unjust. Because most of these regulations were financial in nature, dictated by European supervisors over the Egyptian budget, for instance, decreasing the size of the army and lowering the salaries of the officers, nationalism was an appropriate framework for the officers’ movement repertoire. It seems, however, that the leader of this movement, Ahmad ‘Urâbî (1841–1911), a disciple of Afgânî, had already organized several officers into a secret organization, which Naqqāš calls al-Hîzb al-‘Askarî, or the military league. It also seems that ‘Urâbî and the other members had gained popular support in their home villages and other peripheral regions where they served. In fact, the military protest had already begun in the reign of Ismâ’îl in February 1879.

Avoiding the historical details, we can see here that against the state strategy of re-inclusion, and because of the daily foreign intervention and ethnic conflicts, an extra-state nationalist movement which was mainly military, succeeded in establishing a parallel political power that challenged the authority of the Khedive and his government. In a sequence of protests, ‘Urâbî succeeded in removing the government of Riyâd, reconvening the Representative Council, increasing the size of the army, appointing friendly figures in several important positions, and, not least, removing the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar. All Tawfîq’s steps to include ‘Urâbî in the state by promoting him, bringing him to Cairo, and appointing him as the Undersecretary of the War Ministry and then the Minister of War failed to reconcile the conflicts and bring the extra-state movement into the folds of the state. Simultaneously, European intervention became more aggressive, weakening the Khedive further. Eventually, in 1882, Britain deployed its troops in Egypt and defeated ‘Urâbî and the Egyptian Army to support the Khedive, end the chaos, and re-establish order. Soon, Riyâd Pasha became the prime minister again, and he made sure that any extra-state activism was either included within the state or oppressed.

Most historians, nationalists or Europeans, frame the sad events of 1882 as a confrontation between the people and their representative nationalist movement on one side and the autocratic ruler and the European imperialists on the other. In this context, ‘Abduh, the assumed father of political Islam, is seen as in the heart of ‘Urâbî’s movement. This picture ignores several facts. For instance, Sultân Pasha, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, sided with the Khedive against ‘Urâbî. Šerîf Pasha refused to be the prime minister while ‘Urâbî was the Minister of War. Prominent politicians as well as bureaucrats had been dismayed by ‘Urâbî’s aggression and constant attack against the authority of the Khedive, especially when they learned of the intentions of the Europeans to defend their financial rights. The Ottomans rejected ‘Urâbî’s movement and probably learned of his agenda to turn Egypt into an independent republic. Alexandria celebrated the defeat of
Urabi as its citizens saw him as the cause of the destruction of their city by British fire. On the other hand, many viewed the Khedive as their hero since he refused to flee the city during the attacks. Even Urabi’s officers ended up disobeying his orders to fight from within Cairo, arguing that such a battle would destroy the capital the way Alexandria had been destroyed. Thus, the British entered Cairo peacefully and arrested Urabi and the small circle around him.

For this article, however, what matters the most is the emergence of political Islam from within and without the folds of the state to side either with the Khedive or with his opponent, Urabi. Some of the remaining supporters of political Islam leaked out of state structures and clustered around several nodes backing Urabi and his movement against the authority of the Khedive. Prominent was, of course, Abduh, but other Azharis too, who preached jihad against the Christian British aggressor. This transient phenomenon quickly disappeared through the failure of the Urabis and would not return again until the end of the Second World War. What is more significant, therefore, is political Islam that spoke from within the folds of the state. Here, we see a new development: the early differentiation of state political Islam into two discourses—one that represented the state’s regime and one that worked from within state’s structures without identifying with the regime. Naqqash copies two articles of Hamzah Fath-Allah (1849–1917), an Azhari scholar, defending Tawfiq and vehemently criticizing Urabi. His main argument against Urabi is the latter’s disobedience to the Caliph and his deputy, the Khedive, to start a war that would destroy Muslims’ lives and properties. Fath-Allah published his articles in two newspapers that appear to have been financed by Tawfiq himself. Fath-Allah is clear that Urabi was wrong for both a religious reason and a rational reason. Religiously, he must not disobey the authority of the Caliph and his deputy. Rationally, it was impossible to fight the British and defeat them. If al-Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet, was defeated because his military power dwarfed next to the Umayyads, why would Urabi be victorious?

The second voice of political Islam that sided with the Khedive was even more significant. Here, we see the maturation of a political discourse of Islam that speaks from within the structures of the state, but still keeps a distance between itself and the regime. There are several examples and al-Mahdi al-Abbasi (1827–1897) is prominent among them. Abbasi studied in al-Azhar from 1839, and in 1848, Ibrahim Pasha, Ali’s son and the ruler of Egypt at the time, appointed him as the Mufti of Egypt. Abbasi’s position did not stop him from opposing the next ruler, Abbasi Hilmi I, as the latter wanted him to issue a fatwa that gave him authority over the ‘Ali’s family’s properties. Later, Ismail appointed him as the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, making him the first Hanafi to sit in this chair and the first scholar to combine the two positions of the Grand Mufti and the Grand Sheikh. This new position did not stop Abbasi from prohibiting Ismail from combining private and public endowments under one authority. Ismail had to convene a meeting with Abbasi and other scholars who initially supported Ismail but gave in to Abbasi’s strong arguments as they debated him in front of the Khedive. Abbasi worked from within the state’s structures to reform education in al-Azhar, so as to accredit those who would be qualified to teach in this institution—a choice that, on the one hand, would give state’s power to al-Azhar faculty but would also, on the other hand, cease the traditional autonomy of this institution from the state. Firmly, Abbasi refused to support Urabi and supported the authority of the Khedive. Urabi used his recently gained political power to remove him in 1881, but Abbasi was reinstalled to his position in 1882 once the Khedive regained his authority.

Abbasi, who opposed Ismail’s efforts to protect the state’s property, opposed Tawfiq as well. In Abbasi’s house, intellectuals and politicians used to meet and discuss state’s business and other cultural and social issues. Tawfiq reproached the Grand Sheikh for this behavior, so Abbasi immediately resigned from his two positions, refusing the authority of the Khedive over his political interests and activities. Tawfiq returned him to the position of the Grand Mufti, which he kept until his death in 1897, leaving behind eight published volumes of fatwas that he had issued throughout his long career.37
Scholars, such as ‘Abbāsī, ‘Arūsī (1798–1876), and Nawāwī (1839–1925), who worked from within the structures of the state and clashed with the state’s regime, established, through their academic, legal, and administrative works, the foundations of an Islam that is both modern and political—modern because it encounters the daily problems of modernity and political because it speaks from within the political structures of the state, using its political power. These scholars are usually ignored by researchers, who take the easy route of Afghānī-‘Abduh-Banā. When they are rarely remembered, they are quickly framed as a part of religious traditional and conservative opposition to the emerging modern and secular state. What is missed here is an understanding of the significant role that political Islam played in the formation of a state that was becoming increasingly institutional, differentiated, and inclusive. The few good studies that acknowledge the works of these scholars, such as Nathan J. Brown’s “Law and Imperialism: Egypt in Comparative Perspective” and “Sharia and State in the Modern Muslim Middle East” or Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen’s “Defining Islam for the Egyptian State” usually frame these scholars as a group of ‘ulamā’ who defended their values and perspectives as they served the state with their special technical and legal knowledge. Missing here are two facts: First, this framing removes them from their wider distribution in a variety of political, cultural, social, and economic spaces and discourses to re-cluster them into an assumed group, ‘ulamā’, that stands viz-à-viz the emerging structures of the political state. Second, this framing as ‘ulamā’, encompassing religious scholars, ignores the fact that al-Azhar graduates made up the vast majority of the literate Egyptians. Azhar graduates, in addition to being ‘ulamā’, dominated the institutions of the judiciary, education, and journalism; served in all positions of the state’s bureaucracy; and were in the center of all political and intellectual forums.

Tawfīq’s reign continued until his death in 1892, when he was succeeded by his son, ‘Abbās Hīlī II, who ruled until his removal in 1914. These thirty two years, from the British occupation in 1882 to the removal of the last Khedive in 1914, witnessed three centers of power around which Egyptian nationalist movements and politics grew and formed their discourses: the Khedive, the British occupation, and the Ottoman Empire. No matter how each movement played its politics, there is no question that all of them aimed basically at two objectives: ending the British occupation and establishing good governance. Briefly, we can see three movements that grew gradually differentiated from each other, and after the death of Tawfīq, they spread their discourses via three newspapers, and engaged in politics via three political parties. The newspapers and their discourse historically preceded the emergence of the political parties. Political Islam, blended with nationalism, can be observed in all three of the movements, for indeed they all branched out from undifferentiated mobilization and discourses that had emerged in the 1870s until 1882.

The first of these three nationalist movements could be seen in al-Jarīdah newspaper and the Ummah Party, UP. Lord Cromer (1841–1917), the diplomatic representative of Great Britain, as well as Raṣīd Riḍā (1865–1935), Abduh’s most prominent student, called the Ummah Party the party of the followers of ‘Abduh (Ramādān 1998). This statement is extremely significant, since the UP is widely conceived and described as a secular and liberal party that cooperated with the British. It is equally significant to know that the party that is described as radically nationalist and Islamist was the Nationalist Party, NP, which was led by those who received civil and Western education, and, unlike the founders of the UP, were never students of al-Azhar. I will come to this point later on as we trace the plurality of political Islam and the later emergence of Islamism. Before exploring the UP, we must briefly review the thought of ‘Abduh.

Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) came to Cairo in 1866 to study in al-Azhar. In 1871, he met with Afghānī, attended his lectures, befriended him, and cooperated with him in a variety of political activities, including joining the Masons and founding the underground Free National League. After the deportation of Afghānī, ‘Abduh was removed from teaching in al-Azhar and Dār al-‘Ulūm and, in 1880, was appointed by Riyāḍ Pasha, in the process of inclusion that I explained above, as the editor of the official newspaper of the
state, al-Waqā’i’. ‘Abduh, however, joined the ‘Urūbī movement, so after its defeat in 1882, he was jailed for three months and was then banished for three years, only returning to Egypt in 1888. From 1883 to 1885, ‘Abduh edited an underground editorial with Afghānī, “al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqa”; wrote directive letters to a pan-Islamic underground organization; and traveled secretly to meet and organize its members (‘Imārah 1988, pp. 27–35). This revolutionary journey of ‘Abduh was short and ended with his dispute with Afghānī as he argued that without social reform, political activism would be futile and a waste of time and energy. The conversion was communicated with the government and Khedive of Egypt, but it was only Lord Cromer who secured and guaranteed his return in 1888.

‘Abduh’s biographers, as well as all historians and researchers have a consensus, that the Imām regretted his earlier thoughts and actions and that the thought and method of reform that represents ‘Abduh was what he produced after his return in 1888 until his death in 1905. During this period, ‘Abduh repeated in different forms and contexts that social reform is the foundation of the progress of any nation. Building on Taḥtāwī, he wrote: “Those who have good intentions for the country should focus on tarbiyyah. Only after achieving this, they can find all what they want for their country with no effort or stress.”‘Imārah argues, correctly, that the revolution was Afghānī’s method, while in ‘Abduh, it was iṣlāḥ, reform. Thus, while Afghānī was interested in fair elections, ‘Abduh’s interest was reforming the laws. In fact, ‘Abduh had already argued in a meeting with the ‘Urūbīs days before they challenged Tawfīq against republicanism, stating that it is the social reality of a specific society and it is the level of progress and education that prescribes the political framework of governance. This attitude of ‘Abduh explains two observations. First, we see ‘Abduh working from within state’s structures, as a judge in 1883, the Grand Mufti from 1899 until his death, a member of the Legislative Council in the same year, and on an administrative board that he persuaded the Khedive to create to reform al-Azhar in 1895 (Hourani 1983, pp. 134, 135). In fact, ‘Abduh was on good terms with the British and would ask Cromer to persuade the Khedive to introduce certain reforms. It is not that he did not mind the British occupation, but as he explicitly stated, social reform comes first. Second, unlike other nationalists who joined Afghānī in the 1870s, ‘Abduh’s audience remained the intellectual elite as he steered away from populist discourses and strategies.

From within the structures of the state, ‘Abduh’s voice was inevitably a voice of political Islam. For ‘Abduh, there would be no progress in Muslim societies without acquiring European sciences and, more importantly, changing the institutions of Islamic societies—legal, educational, and governmental administration. ‘Abduh called for a unified system of education, so that schools were not divided into Islamic, missionary Christian, and public, arguing that one system of public schooling was what the country needed. He had the same objective regarding laws. The mixture of modern European laws with Šar’ī’ah laws did not make a solid foundation of the legal system in the country. There was a need to create a unified modern system of law. As the Grand Mufti, ‘Abduh tried to introduce two laws: one to prohibit polygamy and one to approve only court-issued divorces. ‘Abduh’s project of unity was the typical project seen in newly emerging modern nation-states. Therefore, he writes clearly that the moral unity among Muslims does not preclude the national unities of their states—unities that find their locus in the country not in the religion of its citizens.

The main objective of ‘Abduh’s intellectual project is the creation of a new form of Islam—Islam that is modern and friendly to the secular structures of the modern state and responsive to its needs. The theological foundation of his project was Islamic rationalism that followed, as ‘Imārah correctly argued, the school of mu’tazilah. By limiting the scope of what Muslims must believe in and practice, ‘Abduh left all social, cultural, legal, economic, and political spheres subject to human reason and the interests of the society. Hourani wrote that “The key to his defence of Islam, indeed to all his thought about it, was a certain conception of true religion: a distinction between what was essential and unchanging in it and what was inessential and could be changed without damage.” Echoing the rupture
that modernity invites when faced with tradition, ‘Abduh called for a new interpretation of the Qur’ān that moved away from older interpretations and proceeded forward armed with reason, science, an understanding of the historical context of the Qur’ān, and knowledge of certain linguistic tools. 68 ‘Abduh clearly rejected the existence of any religious authority in Islam and emphasizes that the nature of political authority is certainly civil, madaniyyah. 69

Understanding the thought of ‘Abduh explains how it came to be the foundation of the liberal nationalist party that worked to support civil and constitutional life in Egypt, even through cooperation with the British authorities. It allows us to understand how faulty the conventional argument is which sees ‘Abduh as a continuation of Afghānī and al-Bannā as a continuation of ‘Abduh. How could this be correct when ‘Abduh cooperated with the British, defined political authority as civil, did not aim to gain political power and saw it as secondary in significance, and worked himself from within the folds of the state and not against it? How could this be true when we see ‘Abduh framing progress as national and civil and framing Islamic unity as merely moral and hardly apolitical?

In 1906, a dispute between Turkey and England over Taba, a small port on the Western side of the Gulf of Aqaba, erupted. The Nationalist Party supported Turkey, so a group of intellectuals and notables founded a newspaper, al-Jarīda, in March 1907, and in September of the same year founded a political party, the Ummah Party. They were provoked by the position of the NP and defended the British claim, since it would naturally mean the protection of Egypt’s territory from being taken by the Ottomans. Like ‘Abduh, the UP distanced itself from the Ottoman Empire and Turkish politics to the point that its president, in 1912, proposed to Khedive ‘Abbās that Egypt should announce its independence from Turkey and ‘Abbās would become a king not a Khedive. 70 The leaders of the UP did not mind cooperating with the British in matters that benefitted the country. Their political agenda emphasized independence from both the Ottomans and the British. They saw, however, that the road to independence must pass through modernity and progress in all areas: education, agriculture, industry, science, laws, etc. Individual freedom was emphasized, especially in the writings of the President of the UP, Ahmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid (1872–1963), the leading Egyptian figure of liberalism at the time. The UP saw constitutional rule as central to progress to protect the country against the autocracy of the Khedive and to regulate the relationships between authorities and institutions in Egypt. ‘Abd al-‘Azīm Ramadān correctly saw the UP as the founder of Egyptian Nationalism. 71 Ramadān acknowledged, however, that Egyptian nationalism would remain weaker than the pan-Islamism of the Nationalist Party until the end of the First World War, when a prominent figure of the UP, Sa’d Zaghlūl (1859–1927), who was trained very closely by ‘Abduh, would emerge as the leader of the nationalist movement in Egypt and the founder of the al-Wafd Party, which would remain the most important political party in Egypt until the eruption of July 1952 revolution. 72

The second movement during these years that preceded the First World War was the al-Muw‘ayyad newspaper, which was founded in 1889, and the Reform on Constitutional Principles Party, RCPP, founded in 1907. Before the Taba affair in 1906, the resignation of Cromer in early 1907, and the foundation of the three parties, al-Muw‘ayyad served as the platform for many nationalists, who later led both the UP and the NP. It maintained strong anti-British policy that would diminish only in 1908. It is important to mention here the strong support and direct stimulation the national movement received with the ascension of ‘Abbās II to the position of Khedive in 1892. The young Khedive, in 1893, removed Muṣṭafā Fahmī and his government and appointed Husayn Fakhrī in his place. The move provoked Cromer, since Fahmī was known to be the British man and Fakhrī was known for his anti-British sentiments. Cromer asked Great Britain to send more troops, and the conflict was solved by reaching a compromise: appointing Riyād Pasha. In 1894, ‘Abbās provoked Cromer again by commenting negatively on the preparedness of the troops at the southern borders, which were under British command. These challenges inspired the nationalist movement that saw in the young Khedive a unifying force against the British occupation.
The Khedive went far beyond publicly challenging Cromer by directly engaging in financing al-Muw’ayyad and sponsoring nationalist leaders, such as Muṣṭafā Kāmil (1874–1908). It was in a cultural salon that the Khedive met with Kāmil and ‘Alī Yūsuf (1863–1913), who would later become the NP and the RCPP leaders. As the UP and the NP stepped away from the Khedive, the RCPP remained the party of the Khedive through the ups and downs. The RCPP called for a constitution and a representative assembly that had legislative authority and authority over the government. It also called for free basic education, making it equally accessible to all sectors of society, and for the exclusive use of Arabic in all schools. The RCPP waged campaigns to support employing Egyptians in place of foreigners in state’s bureaucracy (Sāliḥ 1990, pp. 142–45).

Sheikh ‘Alī Yūsuf, the founder of both the RCPP and al-Muw’ayyad was an Egyptian from a village in Upper Egypt, who moved to Cairo to study in al-Azhar in 1881. Though he did not meet with Afghānī, he had a strong friendship with ‘Abduh. Without finishing his studies, Yūsuf quickly joined several newspapers and preferred journalism to other professions. He mingled with the intellectuals and the elite in cultural salons and was easily able to gain their friendship, likely because of his intelligence, diplomacy, and pleasant personality. He became to be very close to the Khedive, and their friendship remained solid until Yūsuf’s death in 1913—one year before the removal of ‘Abbās II. Yūsuf supported the Khedive’s efforts by reaching out and recruiting many notables, land owners, intellectuals, and high-ranking officials, as well as introducing Kāmil to the public and promoting him. He solidly supported the Khedive against the British until 1908, when the Khedive came to a confidential agreement with the new British diplomat who supervised Egypt’s policies after Cromer, Eldon Gorst, to lighten the criticism against the British in return for their planning to leave the country. Yūsuf was aware of the secret organization of the nationalist movement under the sponsorship and leadership of the Khedive and worked closely with Kāmil until the end of the nineteenth century.

Although the agenda of the RCPP supported a separation of religion and politics, it retained the right to express opinions in matters that reflect religious interests. In addition, both the RCPP and al-Muw’ayyad advocated for Turkish policies and sided with Turkey in its war against Armenia, accusing the British of supporting Armenia and framing the war religiously as a war between Islam and European imperialist Christianity. They also advocated for the Caliphate as a political authority with religious legitimacy. In his memoirs, ‘Abbās II wrote that he found in Yūsuf the ideal man who could unify the nationalist movement in the writings of al-Muw’ayyad instead of the chaotic writings that spanned the many other newspapers. The Khedive wrote that Yūsuf succeeded in reaching the prominent figures in society and was able to unify them and that his influence over them was impressive. He added that Yūsuf could at the same time write in a simple style that made his newspaper accessible to the commoners. Those who followed him, the Khedive remarks, knew that he was close to the Khedive (Hīlmī 1993, pp. 112–15).

Interestingly, ‘Abbās II, in his memoirs, denies the accusation against Yūsuf of being pro-Ottoman. He emphasizes that was neither the man of Turkey, nor even a particularly Islamic. Egypt, for Yūsuf, was everything, ‘Abbās wrote. He explains that the high tone of advocacy for Islam in his writings was only a tactic to influence the masses and turn them gradually to the national cause. Comparing him to Kāmil, the last Khedive saw the irony in Kāmil’s serious Islamic thoughts and attitudes despite being a product of civic education, while Yūsuf, who rid himself of Islamic influence, knew clearly how to separate his individual religious duties from the national duties he had toward the country in spite of being a graduate of al-Azhar. If the political Islam of the UP represented liberal Islam, that of the RCPP certainly represented the official Islam—an Islamic discourse that centralized the interests of the state and firmly reflected and advocated for its positions.

The third movement was that of the Nationalist Party, NP, and its newspaper, al-Liwā’. Though the party was officially founded in 1907, it had already been active as a secret organization supported by the Khedive himself. In 1906, the unfair trial of Egyptian peasants and the hanging of four of them in Dinšwāy, a Delta village, sparked a wave of
nationalism in Egypt and brought Muṣṭafā Kāmil to light as a prominent leader of Egyptian nationalism. Kāmil was an enthusiastic activist and a gifted speaker, who could mobilize masses through his fiery speeches. In spite of differences between the Khedive and Kāmil, as Kāmil had already announced in 1904 that he did not approve of the Khedive’s policies, the Khedive further supported Kāmil to publish both English and French versions of al-Liwā’ in Europe to garner support for the national cause in Europe. Cromer resigned in 1907 and was replaced by Eldon Gorst (1861–1911), who made peace with the Khedive, gave more positions to the Egyptians in the government bureaucracy and supported the Legislative Council and the General Assembly.

Muṣṭafā Kāmil worked with neither the British nor the Khedive but rather found refuge and support in Istanbul. Kāmil was unapologetically pro-Ottoman and repeatedly called for al-Jāmi‘ah al-Islāmiyyah, an Islamic League. Historians are divided in evaluating his position—was it a pragmatic position in his fight against the British occupation or a reflection of his Islamic sentiments and ideology? The Khedive, in his memoir, provided a reasonable explanation. He wrote,

> The convergence that he (Kāmil) wanted with Turkey was more like an imagination than a (reasonable) hope. We explained this to him, so he changed his policies that were too much Turkish into (policies that are) more nationalist. He gradually matured as he went through many experiences, though his followers walked behind him unaware of the old basic fault.¹⁰

This presentation is likely true, but Kāmil, however, at 33 years old, died of tuberculosis in February 1908, leaving behind his writings, statements, and speeches, not his unknown intentions. What he left is clearly not only pro-Ottoman but pro-Caliphate as well. As I mentioned above, the Khedive found irony in the Islamic overtone of Kāmil’s thought, in spite of his civil education, compared to the decisively nationalist character of Yūsuf, in spite of his religious education. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Rāmaḍān highlights the “reactionary” content of al-Liwā’, being more traditionally Islamic and less progressive.²⁷

The funeral of Kāmil was a surprise to everyone, including the nationalists themselves. Masses of people followed Kāmil to his grave, mostly students and civil servants. His successors, Muḥammad Fārīd (1868–1919) was a respectable lawyer but lacked Kāmil’s charisma and inspiring public speeches. Fārīd, however, expanded membership, which was popular among students, to workers. He founded night schools for them, a number of consumer cooperatives, labor unions, and organized the first strike in Egyptian labor history.

Soon the movement, however, saw a number of splits. Those who believed that ignoring the British could not be a part of the solution joined the UP. Others preferred a return to the leadership of the Khedive and joined the RCPP. Some followers further radicalized Kāmil’s discourse and founded underground military organizations to fight the British and their Egyptian collaborators. There were also those who left because of the excessive Islamic and pro-Ottoman strategies, as they sought a more nationalist discourse that would accommodate the Copts. This nationalist Islamist split became increasingly noticeable from 1908 to 1911, and the NP was shifting steadily to a more Islamic framework of thought and action. An article published in al-Watan Newspaper on June 15th, 1908, provocatively insulted Islamic history in Egypt. Both Ali Yūsuf, the editor of al-Mū’ayyad and ‘Abdu’l-‘Azīz Jawīš, the editor of al-Liwā’ responded to al-Watan promptly and harshly. Soon, an exchange of arguments fueled by a number of articles and crowned by the assassination of the Coptic Prime Minister Butrus Ghālī by a member of the Nationalist movement in 1910 led Coptic leaders to hold the First Coptic Conference in 1911. In this conference, they announced their political demands that had to be met in the constitution, the parliament, educational curricula, etc. The Muslims responded by holding the “Egyptian” Conference in which they refused to accept the Copts as a political minority (al-Bīsr 1980, pp. 69–104). The Nationalists were disappointed by Sheikh Jawīš, since he was the editor of the Nationalist paper and they had expected him to take a more unifying discourse.
The rise of nationalism made Gorst change his policy into one that was more suppressive to the nationalists. Newspapers no longer enjoyed their freedom of expression. The assassination of Ghâlî in 1910 revealed the spread of military underground nationalist organizations, which led Gorst to implement harsher measures that included arresting nationalists, trying them, and sending them to jail. In 1911, Gorst resigned and was replaced by Herbert Kitchener (1871–1916). Young Kitchener and young ‘Abbâs clashed spectacularly in 1894, when the new Khedive criticized the preparedness of the troops at the southern borders that were under the command of none other but Kitchener. In place of the muted conflict between ‘Abbâs and Cromer or the reconciliatory relationship between ‘Abbâs and Gorst, Kitchener clashed with the Khedive openly. He introduced harsher measures to suppress nationalism so both Farîd, the president of the NP, and Jâwîš, the editor of al-Liwâ’, fled to Istanbul and sought the assistance of Turkey and its ally, Germany. In July 1914, ‘Abbâs was in Turkey and was wounded in a failed assassination attempt against him. As Turkey joined Germany against Great Britain, Kitchener took this as an opportunity to remove ‘Abbâs and install his uncle Husayn Kâmil (1853–1917) in his place, declaring Egypt to be a British protectorate, independent from the Ottoman Empire, and changing Husayn Kâmil’s title to Sultan. The Sultan would rule until 1917, when he was succeeded by his brother, Fu‘âd I (1868–1936), who would change his title in 1922 from Sultan to King.

To understand the third type of political Islam that is growing within the NP, we need to explore the life and thought of ‘Abd al-‘Azîz Jâwîš (1876–1929). Born in Alexandria, Jâwîš moved to Cairo in 1892 to study at al-Azhar—the same year that ‘Abbâs II became the Khedive. Two years later, in 1894, he began his studies in Dâr al-‘Ulûm, from which he graduated in 1897. During these early years, he attended ‘Abdu’s meetings, read al-Mu’ayyad regularly, and was inspired by Muṣṭâfa Kâmil’s articles. He sailed to England in 1898 to further his studies, returned to Egypt in 1901, only to be sent again in 1902 to teach Arabic at Oxford until 1906. Attending a conference on Orientalism in Algeria in 1905, he met with Farîd, who was impressed with his eloquence in advocating for Islam. Muṣṭâfa Kâmil sent him a letter asking for help as he plans to visit England in his national endeavors to fight against the occupation. Jâwîš positively answered him and met with him in Oxford. Returning to Egypt in 1906, Jâwîš worked in the Education Department as an Inspector General, where he wrote books in pedagogy and in teaching English. The sudden death of Kâmil in 1908 made Farîd ask Jâwîš if he would become the editor of al-Liwâ’. Jâwîš immediately resigned from his comfortable job and moved to the newspaper, which he edited from 1908 to 1912 (al-Jundî 1965, pp. 34–62).

It seems that it was Jâwîš who steadily and strongly picked up the pro-Ottoman attitude of Kâmil and the NP and pushed it forward into a pro-Caliphate Islamic discourse that included nationalism. In other words, Jâwîš turned the discourse of Kâmil inside out, so that pan-Islamism was neither a means to receive Turkey’s support nor an element within the folds of nationalism; it was the other way around: nationalism, lying in the folds of pan-Islamism was a means to protect the Caliphate. ‘Abbâs II, in his memoirs, is very sympathetic to Kâmil and sees him as an ally in spite of their admitted differences, but his characterization of Jâwîš is harsh and bitter. He calls him undisciplined and violent, an opportunist born in Morocco, who misled Kâmil and who was responsible for the divisions among the nationalists. Kâmil, it seems to me, kept his independence from the Khedive, but continued to work in the sphere of the state, if not within its structure when needed. Jâwîš, on the contrary, was the founder of a discourse that would drift away from the state’s sphere, and worked, when necessary, against it. During the four years of his editing al-Liwâ’, Jâwîš would be interrogated four times, tried three times, and sentenced to jail twice. His articles were fiery and his style was subtle, provocative, and uncompromising, waging campaigns against the British; the Khedive; the UP, which he saw as pro-British; the RCPP, which he saw as one of the Khedive’s puppets; and even against Rašîd Riḍâ, the Azhari scholar and a disciple of ‘Abduh, whom historians see as ‘Abduh’s successor.
As an editor of al-Liwā’, Jāwiš became the main supporter of the Islamic League, al-Jāmi‘ah al-Islāmiyyah. He called the NP Hizb Allah, the party of god.79 Jāwiš’s Pan-Islamism80 made him pay attention to the crises of the Islamic World in its entirety, seeing Egypt’s problem as a piece in a larger puzzle. In al-Hidayah, an Islamic newspaper that he published in 1910, Jāwiš covered the Muslims in Bulgaria, Russia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, India, and China (al-Jundî 1983). His project of progress positioned Islam as the framework of all social, cultural, economic, and political activities: Islam which supports consumer cooperatives; modern education; inclusive tarbiyah that considers mind, body and heart; advocates for labor unions; encourages the foundation of social associations; advocates for Muslim women, who should enter al-Azhar alongside men, to become the cornerstone of the Muslim family; founds agricultural unions; and campaigns to create banks from the small savings of the people.81 In these writings, Jāwiš introduces Islam as the foundation of social reform, calling for applying Šarī‘ah in society, using concepts such as mas.lah. ah or public interest, and advocating for ijtihād, religious-legal reasoning, to create Islamic rules that were suitable for the new reality.82

Jāwiš was not only an editor or an intellectual, he was also an activist engaged in organizing nationalists and leading their actions. On Jāwiš, Eliezer Tauber wrote, “As the main activist of the Nationalist Party during the presidency of Muhammad Farid, Jawish would organize anti-British demonstrations, would collect moneys for nationalistic projects, and would write inflammatory anti-British articles, for which he twice paid in terms of arrest.” (Tauber 2006). Tauber writes that Jāwiš’s name was recurrently mentioned in British reports and was considered by the British as the most dangerous and most fanatic of all the leaders.83 Jāwiš’s association with violence, at least from the perspective of the authorities, went beyond his instigating writings. In 1910, he was interrogated after the assassination of the Coptic prime minister Butrus Ghâlī, since he was well acquainted with the nationalist assassin, lbrâhîm al-Wirdâgni. In another incidence, the police interrogated him for collecting money to finance terrorist operations, but he argued that the money was meant to support educational projects. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz ‘Alî, a leader of the militant work of the Nationalist Party, admits in his memoirs, however, that the secret militant work was conducted through the society of al-Tadayîn al-Akhawî, Brotherhood Solidarity, an underground organization that was led by Jāwiš and a few other leaders of the NP (al-‘Azîz ‘Alî 1978, p. 33). Jāwiš’s militant and self-admitted work was his central role in the Italian–Turkish war in the Ottoman province of Libya from 1911 to 1912. ‘Alî explains the central role al-Tadayîn al-Akhawî played in this war by smuggling Turkish officers and volunteer mujâhidîn into Libya and providing them with food and weapon supplies.84 Al-Jundî, however, introduces Jāwiš as the main player in this war because of his Tunisian family background and the help from his two brothers who traded between Alexandria, their birthplace, and North Africa, and thus their knowledge of the roads and their connections with the tribes.85 It is exactly this secretive role that would alert the authorities and necessitate Jāwiš to escape quickly to Istanbul in 1912.

Istanbul was an appropriate place for self-exile. In 1909, Jāwiš had visited Istanbul and befriended a number of members of the Turkish Committee of Union and Progress and was inspired by their revolution and establishment of parliamentary rule and constitutionalism in Turkey. In addition, he worked with their officers in the Libyan War, and they were grateful to his efforts. In Istanbul, Jāwiš stayed until 1918, protected and supported by the Unionists, working tirelessly. He immediately published a new newspaper, Al-Hilal al-‘Uthmānî, or the Ottoman Crescent, using its headquarter as a meeting and organizing center for Arab and Muslim activists from the four corners of the Islamic World who worked against European imperialism. In 1914, he had an agreement with a wealthy Indian Muslim to help build an Islamic navy fleet for the Ottomans and accompanied the Turkish campaign to liberate Egypt from the British occupation in 1915. It seems that he later travelled to Medina to found an Islamic University, and from there moved to Jerusalem to reconstruct the Šalâh al-Din College and run both of these educational institutions. Turkey,
however, was defeated in WWI, and, fearing the invasion of the British troops, Jáwîş escaped to Germany in 1918.

Jáwîş resumed his work in Germany and campaigned to support Mustafa Kemal Pasha. In October 1922, after the Turkish victory over Greece, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rewarded Jáwîş by inviting him to go back to Turkey. There, he was cautiously welcomed by the Kemalists. According to al-Jundî, he was appointed as the president of the Islamic Academy. He met with Atatürk in November 1922 and had several conversations with the Kemalists. Jáwîş found that their main concern was his opinion of the Caliphate. He agreed with them that the Ottoman Caliphate was a bad example of good governance but could not compromise about the significance of the Caliphate as a political framework for Muslims. Understanding the secular project for Turkey that the Kemalists had, Jáwîş escaped Istanbul and entered Alexandria in hiding in November 1923. Egypt in 1923, 11 years after Jáwîş had left it, had become a different country. A popular revolution in 1919 had made Sa’d Zaghlûl, a UP member, but now the leader of al-Wafd Party, WP, the undisputed nationalist leader of the country. The WP, wary of Jáwîş, spread rumors and propaganda against him. The NP had lost its membership and influence. Britain announced the conditional independence of Egypt in March 1922, and by 1923, Egypt had a new constitution, parliament, and a nationalist government led by Zaghlûl. Quietly, Jáwîş published articles in certain newspapers, mostly covering the fall of the Caliphate. In 1925, he was appointed the Director of Primary Education, a job that he kept until his death in 1929.

Before his death, Jáwîş witnessed two interesting events. As Turkey announced the end of the Caliphate in March 1924, two contradictory organizations immediately emerged in Egypt to restore it. The first organization was stimulated and supported by King Fû‘ûd I, who desired to be the Caliph, hoping that the absolute authority of the Caliph would help him against the parliamentary and constitutional political life that was imposed on him in 1923. This organization spread its membership through the bureaucracy and governmental institutions, using the King’s power to recruit members in its ranks. The King was also able to attract many Azhari scholars, who wanted to see the Caliphate restored. The second organization was initiated by Sheikh Muhammad Maḍî Abû al-’Azâyim (1869–1937). Abû al-’Azâyim supported the reestablishment of the Caliphate but rejected the possibility of having the King as its head. He understood the political opportunity the King was seeking and declared that a Caliph capable of leading the Islamic World could not be under European control himself. Jama’at al-Khilāfah, or the Caliphate Group, spread in Egypt as well, though its members were persecuted by the King and his government. In May 1926, the Caliphate Conference was held in Cairo under the presidency of the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar and ended in bitter failure. It was interesting to see two organizations of political Islam carrying the same message, one from within the state and the other against it.

In the same year, 1926, there was a second and probably even more interesting event, as far as Jáwîş was concerned: the foundation of al-Fath, an Islamic newspaper that Jáwîş was invited to write articles for. The same group of scholars and Islamic intellectuals that founded this newspaper also founded an Islamic organization in 1927: al-Šubbān al-Muslimūn, or the Young Muslims, to fight against the Westernization of the Muslim society. Jáwîş was invited to sit on its board. A twenty one year old recent graduate of Dâr al-‘Ulum—the school from which Jáwîş graduated—was invited to publish in al-Fath and give a lecture in al-Šubbān. His name was Hasan al-Bannâ (1906–1949). One year later, in 1928, he would found an organization that would echo the thoughts of Jáwîş, turning it into an ideology of Islamism, and include in its folds a secret militant organization calling for the restoration of the Caliphate, emphasizing the centrality of tarbiyyah, and expanding its membership to become, in only a few decades, the largest Islamist organization in the world under the name of al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn.
6. Conclusions

In this article, I traced the origins of political Islam back to the French Campaign against Egypt in 1798. I argued that what the French introduced in Egypt were neither ideas nor a form of civilization but rather technologies and techniques of governance. The rise of modern technology in building and running the state, in administering the economy, and in the new forms of knowledge characterized the period from 1805 to 1849. Taking Hasan al-‘At-tār’s (1766–1835) writings as an example, I explained that the engagement of “Islam” with the business of the state at this stage was centered around the need to nurture technical and applied knowledge.

It is in the second stage, from 1849 to 1879, that the question of civilization became centralized, and rather than borrowing technologies and techniques, we find a series of political, economic, and cultural engagements with the Western civilization. This was neither a conversion to new modes of life nor a total shift to new values that were not traditional and Islamic. In other words, there was no rupture. In addition, there was neither a secular/religious dichotomy nor a Westernized elite moving against its people. Both the modern military and bureaucracy that Ali had founded were being increasingly filled with native Egyptians, who found their way to the higher echelons of society through education or military service. The institutional negotiation with modernity was intellectually reflected in the writings of Ṭahtāwī (1801–1873), whose works we explored in this paper. In these works, we were able to see the beginnings of a discourse that articulated politics, addressed civilizational questions, and founded and defined nationalism as it relied on the legal and intellectual traditions of Islam and recycled its concepts in new modern discourses. Though briefly, the article examined the new educational system, explored the establishment of Dā’al-‘Ulūm, touched on the reformation of al-Azhar, and discussed the curriculum of the modern law school. These explorations proved how hasty, unsubstantiated, and false the claims of the rise of a secular state, secular education, and secular laws are, with the wrong assumptions that these structures eventually resulted in the emergence of a rejecting and rebellious Islamism that protested this deviation from tradition and religion. The increasingly international politics and economics of Egypt within the newly emerging international system affected national transformations deeply. The weakening of the state to accommodate—let alone lead, progress, and change—resulted in a phenomena of dispersion, where social and political movements grew outside state spaces. We explored the works of al-Afghānī (1838–1897) as an example of the emergence of undifferentiated and un-ideological political Islam outside the folds of the state. By 1879, the newly dug Suez Canal brought mounting political tension and economic burdens on Egypt that left the state helpless. Khedive Ismā‘il was removed and his son, Tawfīq, sat on the throne of Egypt.

The third stage, from 1879 to the mid-1920s, started with chaos and army rebellion that was quickly controlled as Great Britain invaded the country and supported the Khedive. In 1892, ‘Abbās II (1874–1944) rose to power and encouraged social and nationalist movements. Here, we were able to witness the gradual emergence of three differentiated discourses of political Islam. Their mature forms found expressions in three political parties. We explored liberal political Islam, as represented by Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) and the al-Ummah Party; official political Islam, as represented by ‘Alī Yūsuf (1863–1913) and the Reform on the Constitutional Principles Party; and an extra-state, radical Islamism, as represented by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Jāwīs (1876–1929) and the Nationalist Party. These three political parties were all founded in 1909, long before the fall of the Caliphate and the claimed dramatic effect of its collapse that resulted in the emergence of political Islam. In fact, with the eruption of WWI in 1914 and the siding of Turkey with Germany, England severed all political connections between Egypt and Turkey and Egypt was announced as a British protectorate. ‘Abbās II was removed and his successors carried the title of Sultan. The nationalist movements in Egypt called for independence, which they gained in 1922—that is, before the fall of the politically irrelevant Caliphate.
In this work, I refuted the three conventional arguments that explain the *sudden* emergence of political Islam in Egypt in 1928 through the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood Group. I proved that the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate was a minor event that had no serious effect on the political and cultural life in Egypt. I also proved that the state of Egypt never experienced a secular project that motivated the religious people of Egypt to resist it through political Islam. In addition, by exploring three forms of political Islam that found expression in three political parties, I proved that the Brotherhood was not intellectually a continuation of either al-Afghānī or ‘Abdūh but rather of Jawīš. Moreover, I proved that the emergence of political Islam was very gradual, and its emergence in a relatively mature form at the turn of the twentieth century was an accumulation of discourses and institutions that began to rise after the departure of the French Campaign and the establishment of Mohamed Ali’s rule in 1805. We saw the gradual *formation* of political Islam from within the state and its folds, as the modern state had to negotiate and articulate religion, culture, identity, and modernity and struggle its way through a challenging international political and economic context. What now remains to be studied is a close examination of al-Banna’s discourse: his core concepts, statements, arguments, and social, cultural and political agenda from the foundation of the Brotherhood in 1928 until the eruption of WWII in 1939 and the rooting of this discourse in the works of Jawīš and the al-Liwa’ newspaper.

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### Notes

Muhammad 'Imarah states that Tahtawi is “the father of the nationalist thought in the Arab World per excellence.” (‘Imarah 1984b, p. 192).

I am aware of the argument that Afghani was an Iranian Shiite Muslim, but I do not accept it for reasons of weakness and inconsistency. See (‘Imarah 1984a, pp. 127–60).

Afghani discussed the idea of assassinating Ismail with ‘Abduh, and, in a dare movement, used his Masonic connections to visit the French Embassy with Salim al-Naqqaš to persuade the French to push for deposing the Khedive. See (Šalaš 1993, pp. 47, 48).


Muhammad ‘Imarah observes that ‘Abduh is “the father of the nationalist thought in the Arab World per excellence.” (‘Imarah 1984b, p. 192).

See (Mohamed 2012) for a discussion of the inclusive state.
Wolfgang G. Schwanitz in “Understanding the Origins of Pan-Islamism during World War I” argues incorrectly that Pan-Islamism was a product of WWI jihadism waged by the Ottomans and supported by Germany in its war against Britain and France. He refers “Islamism” as a theory to the writing of ‘Abd al-Malik Hamzah. In fact, Hamzah, was a younger activist, who worked with Jāwīš as a secretary of Afghānī. Jāwīš’s Pan-Islamism preceedes the War. For a reason that is unclear to me, Schwanitz translated İslamiyyah into Islamism and al-Jami‘ah al-Islāmiyyah into Pan-Islamism. Al-Jami‘ah was an idea that we could see as early as in Afghānī’s writings, and it referred merely, as it did in ‘Abduh’s and Kāmil’s writings to a relaxed political framework of coordination and mutual defeense among Muslims countries.

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