

The Rise of Egyptian National Consciousness and Self-Awareness under Cromer (1883-1907)

Houra Mama Wahiba,

University of Mascara.

E mail: hourewahiba@yahoo.fr

Abstract

In 1882, Britain intervened militarily in Egypt. The British intervention was intended to be temporary but it was soon revealed to be permanent. From 1883 to 1907 Egypt was ruled by Lord Cromer who served as Consul-General. Cromer's policy provoked the antagonism of the Egyptian intelligentsia and led to the rise of national consciousness. Egyptian awareness manifested itself in the form of religious and political movements aiming either at reform or self-rule. This paper has a twofold target: while Cromer's colonial policy in Egypt is explored, the attitude of Egyptian nationalists towards British policy is then examined.

ملخص:

نمو الوعي القومي المصري في فترة حكم كرومر (1883 - 1907)

في عام 1882 تدخلت بريطانيا عسكريا في مصر. كان المقصود من التدخل البريطاني أن يكون مؤقتا ولكن سرعان ما أصبحت إقامة البريطانيين دائمة. من 1883 - 1907 كان يحكم مصر اللورد كرومر الذي شغل منصب القنصل العام. أثارت سياسة كرومر عدااء المثقفين المصريين وأدت إلى نمو الوعي الوطني. تجلّى الوعي القومي المصري في شكل حركات دينية وسياسية تهدف إلى الإصلاح أو الحكم الذاتي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على سياسة كرومر الاستعمارية في مصر، كما يهدف إلى تحليل موقف الوطنيين المصريين تجاه السياسة البريطانية آنذاك.

The 1882 British military intervention in Egypt was a major turning point in the political history of the country. 'The rescue and retire

mission' that the cabinet of Gladstone advocated to restore the authority of Khedive Tawfiq (1879-92) following the debacle of the Orabi Revolt (1881-1882) soon proved to be permanent; locking the British on the spot for over half a century (1882-1956). Professor al-Sayyid Marsot argued that from 1882 to 1907, Britain made about one hundred and twenty statements of its intent to evacuate Egypt; yet procedures were undertaken that further consolidated Britain's position in the country (Al-Sayyid Marsot, 1968: xi). At the outset, Britain had no intention to make its presence in Egypt permanent. It had intervened following the request of Khedive Tawfiq who anticipated the evacuation of the British army shortly. However, it became evident that the issues that led to military intervention would not be settled overnight. The British doubted the ability of the Egyptians to run their own affairs. They were convinced that British custody and mentorship would help to get Egypt on its feet. In this context, W.M. Sloane pointed out that '... Neither the ignorant, venal pasha class of Turks who had misgoverned the country, nor the ignorant, rash, inexperienced natives of the Arabi class, nor the existing ministers with their bureaucracy- no one in Egypt could either restore or keep order' (Sloane 1904: 462). Egypt soon became a source of international contention, a fact that drove Lord Granville to send a circular on January 03, 1883 to the European powers which had interests in the region explaining the reasons behind the British presence there. The circular stated that:

Although for the present a British force remains in Egypt for the preservation of public tranquillity, HM Government are desirous of withdrawing it as soon as the state of the country and the organization of proper means for the maintenance of the khedive's authority will admit it. In the meanwhile, the position in which HM Government are placed towards His Highness imposes upon them the duty of giving advice with the object of securing that the order of things to be established shall be of a satisfactory character, and possess the elements of stability and progress (Quoted by Vatikiotis 1980: 171).

Yet one may note that the main reason behind the prolonged British occupation of Egypt was the protection of the vital trade route to India. Up to the nineteenth century, Britain was committed to maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. However, once in Egypt, it had to change its policy from defending the dominions of the Ottoman Empire to using Egypt as a vital base for the safety of British interests in the Indian sub-continent. Thus, the

stage was set for a permanent occupation of Egypt. From 1882 to 1914, Britain exercised an indirect rule through its nominees who served as Consul Generals. This indirect rule justified the British presence in Egypt and was useful for conducting the country's affairs. In a letter dispatched on April 07th, 1885, Gladstone notified Baring to remain in the shadows and rule indirectly through representatives (Berque 1972: 149). The khedive and his cabinet presented a phony picture of self rule when the real power was never in question.

On September 11th, 1883, Sir Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, arrived at Cairo to assume duties as Consul-General after years of service in India. Baring stressed that financial solvency and political stability required a permanent occupation of the country. He claimed that 'there was only one practicable method by which the Egyptian administration could be reformed that was to place the government more or less under British guidance' (Baring 2010: 265). He was quietly if not openly convinced that the Egyptians could not run their affairs, stating that 'no one but a dreamy theorist could imagine that the natural order of things could be reversed, and that liberty could first be accorded to the poor ignorant representatives of the Egyptian people, and that the latter would then be able to evolve order out of chaos' (Baring 2010: 266). Baring implemented "the Granville Doctrine" which made it clear that any Egyptian minister who opposed the Lord's instructions would be removed from office. (Al Sayyid Marsot 2007: 89). Hence, Egypt became Britain's "veiled protectorate" with the khedive as the Lord's marionette. The natives had their share of foreign subjugation; they were brought unwillingly under military coercion. The nationalist movement was curbed, its leader, Ahmed Orabi Pasha was sent into exile in Ceylon, and other activists were jailed.

Foreign occupation was a source of embarrassment and moral harassment to the Egyptian elite. Subsequently, religious and political currents emerged that aimed at either reform or self-rule. Hence, the rise of Egyptian national consciousness and self-awareness under Lord Cromer (1883-1907) shall be examined. The main characters of the period that influenced the course of Anglo-Egyptian relations and led to Cromer's removal from power shall be identified.

Nationalism is that profound bond to one's motherland. As an ideology, it rose in Western Europe following the French Revolution and came to be associated with the notions of liberty and democracy in opposition to despotism and autocracy. In the East, nationalism was

embraced as an antidote against European imperialism and colonization. It became a strong incentive for the colonized in quest of national sovereignty. In Egypt, nationalism found its way following the Napoleonic Expedition of 1798 – 1801. Though Napoleon's invasion of Egypt was purely colonial, it revealed the weakness of the East in front of the advanced occidental world. More importantly, the campaign was like a thunderclap that hit the Egyptian minds and woke them from their long lethargy. A group of Egyptian intellectuals came to see in the West a model to be followed in their pursuit of modernism and development. Among the pioneers of 19th century Egyptian intellectual movement or what came to be known as 'Nahda' was Rifaa Tahtawi (1801-1873). His five year stay in France enabled him to get acquainted with French revolutionary ideas; he returned home and introduced for the first time the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians' (Kutelia 2011: 87).

In the 1880's, Egyptian society witnessed the emergence of two influential classes: the rising middle class in cities and the large property owners in rural regions. The former class was of a tremendous importance, for it was on that class that Egypt would rely in its struggle for independence. The emergence of the middle class coincided with the birth of a young educated generation that went to cities to acquire knowledge and earn a living; there, the exposure to western thought helped shape the character of that generation. Without that influential educated generation, Egyptian nationalism would have never come into existence (Bearce 1949: 4). On the other hand, the early seeds of the intellectual movement that led to the emergence of Egyptian nationalism rose first in El Azhar. It coincided with the arrival of Jamal din El Afghani at El Azhar in 1871 with his Pan-Islamist ideas. Pan-Islamism was a religious current that appeared in Egypt in the 1880's. The reformatory current was a reaction to the 19th century European assault on the Islamic Ummah.

Before landing in Egypt, El-Afghani had wandered in the Muslim world and had noticed the decadence of the Ummah by contrast to the occidental world. In India he was struck by the weakness of an ancient civilization in the face of a tiny English presence. In Turkey, he had acquired the reputation of a free-thinker and thereby was expelled (Delanoue 1977: 137). Through his lectures at El Azhar, the Iranian Shiite who claimed to be Sunni preached that "Islam must reform itself and must unite in order to drive off western aggression" (Bearce 1949: 5). His reformatory ideas found fervent supporters among the

Azharistes and the masses alike. In his preaching about 'rational-reform of Islam', el Afghani advocated conformity of Muslims to the principles of the Islamic institution of el-Sharia as being the only way for salvation (Vatikiotis 1980: 189). More notable was his call for Muslims' unity and global solidarity against the European yoke. Despite the fact that liberal ideas were not in his propaganda, the Iranian reformist, favoured a constitutional government for Egypt as a means of restricting the autocratic rule of the governor (Delanoue 1977:137). El Afghani and his disciples reasoned that despotism was against the spirit of Islam; for them Islam was a "Republic where every Moslem had the right of free speech in its assemblies, and where the authority of the ruler rested on his conformity to the law and on popular approval" (Bearce 1949: 6). Due to his religious activism, el Afghani had to leave Egypt in 1879. He had succeeded so far in creating within Egypt "an active intelligentsia" that would challenge the authority of the khedive and the encroachment of the British in the country.

Among El-Afghani's followers and distinguished disciples was Shaykh Mohammed Abduh. Born in 1849 of a modest peasant family in the Delta region, Abduh acquired his basic education in a quranic madrasa in Tenta. From there, he made his way to Cairo where he carried on his theological studies at el-Azhar University (1866-1877). As a disciple of el-Afghani, Abduh had the chance to get acquainted with his mentor and to be influenced by his pan-Islamic ideology. Bearce observed that press was one avenue for the young Azhariste in his political career. He became an ardent contributor to El Ahram newspaper which came into existence in 1876 (Bearce 1949: 6). Another avenue for advocacy was opened to Shaykh Abduh as he acquired a teaching post at El Azhar; an opportunity that he seized to advocate reform of the institution's curricula.

The Azharite reformist did not enjoy his post for a long time; accused of collaborating with el-Afghani, he was relieved of his teaching duties at Dar-al Ulum, Azhar University, in 1879. In the spring of that year and in a desperate move to get popular support in the face of financial troubles; Khedive Ismail called for an assembly of notables, the first elected assembly that Egypt had ever known (Bearce 1949: 6). About the Assembly, Arthur Goldschmidt said: "Khedive Ismail inadvertently helped to create Egyptian nationalism by convoking the first representative assembly" (Goldschmidt 1988: 30).

Donald Malcolm Reid observed that Egyptian press played a significant role in national politics. Private press flourished during the reign of Khedive Ismail. In 1876 the Syrian Taqla brothers founded El Ahram journal. Other journals came into existence as the satirical journal Abu Naddara Zaraqa of Yaqub Sanu, Misr and al-Tijara of Ishaq and Naqqash and al-Watan of Abd-al-Sayyid (Reid 1998: pp222-223). The journals were to be banned in 1897 due to their expressed opposition to the regime. Another prominent figure in Egyptian journalism was Abd Allah al-Nadim, the orator of the Orabi revolution. Through his paper al-Tankit wa al Tabkit, al-Nadim criticized the government in a satirical way. He was later exiled to Istanbul.

The financial problem that Egypt witnessed during the reign of Khedive Ismail led eventually to the treasury's bankruptcy. To guarantee the safety of their interests, France and Britain interfered by establishing a dual control over Egypt's finances. Two Controllers-General were appointed in the Egyptian Cabinet with the British Romaine as Minister of Finance and the French Baron Malaret as Minister of Public Works. Since the khedive refused to agree to such a loss of authority, he was forced to abdicate in favour of his son Tawfiq (Al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 82-83).

In 1881 Khedive Tawfiq called for Abduh to serve as editor of the Official Journal. Through it, the Shaykh, together with such prominent nationalist figures as Saad Zaghlul, expressed support for constitutional reform. It is interesting to note that the nationalists at the time still recognized the sovereignty of the Ottoman Sultan and the authority of Khedive Tawfik. Vatikiotis clarified that "enlightened Egyptian leaders such as Shaykh Muhammad Abduh ...felt that continued loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph presented a safeguard against European imperialism; when the masses were instinctively pro-Ottoman because they knew no other bond than of religion" (Vatikiotis 1980: 190).

Professor Affaf Lutfi al-Sayyid observed that the European meddling in Egypt's domestic issues stimulated the growth of a nationalist current representing the three influential segments of the Egyptian society: traders and property-owners, Ulama and notables, and Egyptian army officers. Each class had its own target; the landowners called for a constitution that would protect their interests, the Ulama saw in the constitution a means to get rid of the autocratic rule of Khedive Tawfiq, and the Egyptian Army officers had as an objective

the elimination of the Turco-Circassian military caste that dominated the high-ranked position. (al-Sayyid 2007: 85-86). One may note that the situation of the Egyptian army was further exacerbated by the introduction of a measure that reduced the number of the army from 45,000 to 18,000 (Weigall 1915: 126).

On February 07, 1882, a constitution for Egypt was introduced with Mahmoud Sami el Baroudi as Prime Minister, Ahmed Orabi as Minister of War and Mostapha Fahmy as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice. "The constitution granted broad freedom to Egyptians, guaranteed yearly sessions of the Chamber of Deputies, and protected members of Chamber from arrest and from any interference in the free exercise of their opinions" (Bearce 1949: 8). The new constitution with its pledges of political reform ushered in chaos and disorder. The exploited peasants rebelled against their masters and Tawfiq had no choice but to abandon the reform process. The khedive's tentative drive incited the wrath of the nationalist intelligentsia culminating in the Orabi Revolt (1881-1882). The revolt was sustained and supported by both Shaykh Mohammed Abduh and Saad Zaghlul who excited nationalist spirit through public propaganda.

Unfortunately, the Orabi revolt, the first manifestation of Egyptian nationalism, failed due to its disorganization and violence, leading to the ultimate British occupation of Egypt (Tomiche 1977: 94). Under the alibi of safeguarding their interests and restoring law and order, British troops intervened militarily in Egypt and succeeded to crush the rebellion at the Battle of Tel el Kabir (September 1882). Despite the abortion of the Orabi uprising, arrest of Zaghlul and exile of Abduh, the spirit of nationalism would not die.

In 1883, Lord Dufferin saw the necessity of setting up two representative bodies; the Legislative Council and the General Assembly. The Legislative Council consisted of "twelve men appointed by the Egyptian ministry and fourteen elected indirectly" (Bearce 1949: 12). On the other hand, the General Assembly, that was purely consultative, included 46 elected members out of 80 (Bearce 1949: 12).

In 1884 Shaykh Abduh went to Paris where he met his spiritual master el Afghani. Together the master and the disciple founded a society and a review, both holding the name of "The Indissoluble Bond" (al-Urwa al Wuthqa). The review found fervent readers in different Islamic countries; yet it was soon censored after the publication of 18 issues (from March 13th to October 16th, 1884) (Delanoue 1977: 38). Abduh

then went to Beirut where he earned a living as a school master. In 1889, he returned home to occupy the post of judge in the national courts. Ten years later, the Shaykh became the Mufti of Egypt, a post he held until 1905.

As a religious reformist, Abduh sought to change the old institution of el Azhar by reforming its administrative hierarchy and educational system. He aimed at a theological reformation deemed essential to “clean Islam of its long-established interpretations” (Vatikiotis 1980: 195). Islam in Abduh’s view was compatible with science; therefore a rational adjustment between the Islamic system, el-Sharia, and modernism would renovate the Islamic religion from deep-rooted practices and beliefs (Vatikiotis 1980: 195). The Shaykh’s reformist spirit and critical mind owed him the antagonism of the narrow-minded and conservatives of el Azhar. In his national militancy against Cromer, Abduh adopted a moderate way of protest. This temperate way of protest alienated him from the circle of extremist and fanatic nationalists (el Macedi 1974: 225).

A new dawn of Egyptian nationalism followed the death of Khedive Tawfiq and the accession of his son Abbes Hilmi II to power. Born in 1874, the young ruler had the chance to acquire western education at the Theresianum in Vienna. He returned home with ardent stories of nationalist currents in Hungary, Bohemia and Italy (Berque 1972: 164). Abbes Hilmi II deeply resented Cromer’s tutelage, being convinced of his ability to govern without the mentorship of the Lord. On his part, Cromer was not ready to see his authority being challenged by a young inexperienced ruler (al Sayyid-Marsot 2007: 91). In January 1893, in a show of strength, Khedive Abbes relieved Mostapha Fahmi of his function as prime minister and attempted to nominate Houcine Fakhri Pasha instead. Infuriated, Cromer repudiated the khedive’s choice and reinstalled Fahmy Mostapha pasha. The khedive was threatened by removal from power if he showed any sign of defiance (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 92).

Intimidated by Cromer, the khedive then backed and supported secretly a mounting nationalist movement. During his reign, a new generation of nationalists emerged. The nationalist movement included leaders such as Mostapha Kamil, who through his newspaper (al-Liwa) and Shaykh Ali Yusuf, with his anti-British newspaper (al-Muayyad), made common cause with the khedive. Berque considered al-Muayyad as: “the only organ of nationalist, pro-Islamic tendency to appear in the country at that time” (Berque 1972: 202).

Driven by a spirit of nationalism, Mostapha Kamil, a young Egyptian lawyer, consecrated his entire career to the Egyptian cause. Sharing the same conviction of Khedive Abbas, Kamil came to the conclusion that the British could be brought forcibly to leave Egypt, especially if the khedive secured the support of other European nations (al-Sayyid 2007: 92). Through his review, 'al-Liwa', the young lawyer aroused nationalist spirits eager for change. In France, the nation of justice and liberty, Mostapha Kamil launched a campaign against the British presence in Egypt. The campaign, however, proved to be fruitless. It did not achieve its main targets; a sympathetic public opinion and removal of the autocratic Cromer from power. At home, the Egyptian activist worked to raise self awareness and national consciousness through his speeches and by founding a private school for "future patriots" (Bearce 1949:14).

On his part, Cromer managed to depict Egypt as a blend of ethnic groups with distinct beliefs and practices inapt for self-rule. During his tenure, education was intentionally neglected to leave people illiterate hence easily manipulated. Western school charges deprived the poor of acquiring ample education that would qualify graduates for earning a decent living. The acquisition of elementary education in "kuttabs" did not enable brilliant students to get higher education (el-Macedi 1974:226). Cromer was strongly convinced that western education would lead to the emergence of an educated elite that would ultimately challenge British authority. In a letter to Gorst, one of his colleagues, the Lord wrote: "Whatever we do, education must produce its natural results, and one of these natural results, both in India and Egypt, will be the wish to get rid of the foreigner" (Tignor 1966: 320).

Cromer underestimated the nationalist movement, for he believed it was mere talk by young men. Mostapha Kamil, on the other hand, struggled to prove that Egypt was a nation-state worthy of a sovereign government that is run by Egyptians for the best interest of Egyptians (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 92). Kamil's campaign won the allegiance of the intelligentsia and since then it adopted non-violent protest as a means for resisting abusive measures (al-Sayyid-Marsot 2007: 93).

Further turmoil that added fuel to the fire of Egyptian nationalism was the Dinshaway incident of 1906. The incident was sparked by British officers shooting at pigeon in a small village in the Delta region. The officers mistakenly killed an old woman which provoked the peasants' fury. In response, the peasants attacked the officers so they opened

fire causing injuries before running away. Two officers managed to escape, one of them died in the process. The British reacted promptly to the incident; fifty-two villagers were arrested and tried in a special martial court, four were condemned to death, and others were publically flogged and imprisoned (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 94).

The Dinshaway incident had significant repercussions both in Egypt and England. It consolidated the nationalist movement and gave it a drive for independence. It brought the seeds of self-awareness to the rural areas and obliged the British to remove autocratic Cromer from power (el Macedi 1974:221). In his article, "the British Occupation", M.W. Daly considered the incident "an important milestone in Anglo-Egyptian relations". According to Daly "what started as a minor affray ended as a two-headed icon of Egyptian nationalist mythology and British imperialism" (Daly 1998: 243).

To sum up, between 1883 and 1907, Egypt was ruled by the British Consul Lord Cromer. The Khedive and his Cabinet continued to govern the country nominally providing the façade of autonomy yet the least desire of rebellion was harshly crushed. During the Lord's tenure, the state affairs were conducted in a manner that served British interests a fact that provoked the anger of the Egyptian intelligentsia and paved the way for the growth of national awareness. The early seeds of Egyptian nationalism resulted in the emergence of religious and political currents with the target of getting rid of the colonizers. Thus Egyptians' ardent resistance to Cromer's policy was fruitful resulting in the removal of the Lord from power in 1907 and obliging the British to change their policy towards Egyptian public opinion.

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