Shorofat 1

Constructing the National Past: History-Writing and Nation-Building in Nasser's Egypt

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Contents

Chapter One

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

"History" in the words of Edward Hallett Carr "is an unending dialogue between the present and the past."[1] It is a continuous process of revisiting and reinterpreting what earlier generations once held as the ultimate truth. In view of the concerns and desires of the present, every age is bound to assess the past from a different perspective. Thus, it is no surprise that in times of political transformation, the past has often been used as a tool for realizing the goals and aspirations of the present. In the postcolonial setting, history has been central to the ideology of resistance. Projects of rewriting history have aimed to recover the national identity and to validate the current ideology of the resurrected nation.[2] In the eyes of those striving to throw away the chains of colonization, regaining ownership over one's history was viewed as an imperative step towards the attainment of complete cultural independence from the influence of foreign thought. More importantly, however, exercising control over the project of rewriting history was, in many instances, fundamental to the intricate processes of nation-building experienced by most postcolonial societies.[3] This was precisely the case in Egypt following the 1952 coup d'état that abolished the monarchy under the leadership of Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, a nationalist hero who was dubbed the "first Egyptian to rule Egypt since Cleopatra."[4]

The mere fact that Nasser was an ethnic Egyptian bestowed considerable legitimacy upon him and his revolution, and by 1956, he had become the undisputed leader of Egypt. However, the July Revolution, as it came to be known, was in need of a historical anchor; the revolutionary present had to be linked with the nation's non-Egyptian past. The continuance of foreign rule in Egypt since the demise of the pharaohs made this a difficult task.[5] To overcome this, Egypt's immediate past had to be rejected and the nation's history had to be rewritten. Accordingly, Muhammad Ali Dynasty was portrayed as foreign and the corruption of his successors was blamed for the eventual British occupation of Egypt. Nasser's regime

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1- Israel Gershoni, "Imagining and Reimagining the Past: The Use of History by Egyptian Nationalist Writers, 1919–1952", *History and Memory* 4, No. 2 (Fall–Winter, 1992): 5, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618633.

2- *Ibid.*: 5.

3- Ulrike Freitag, "Writing Arab History: The Search for the Nation" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, No. 1 (1994): 21–22, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/195565.

4- Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation, Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

5- Richard Hrair Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1971): 70.

chose Arabism to be established as the most significant element of the Egyptian identity.[6] To defend the regime and justify its new Pan-Arabism orientation, historical reinterpretation had to unify the Egyptian and the Arab past. It had to selectively emphasize certain historical periods and experiences and deemphasize others.[7] The Nasserite historian was thus dictated by the regime's ideological limits and the historiographical environment ultimately became characterized by overall intellectual and conceptual conformity.[8]

It is against this backdrop that this publication aims to examine the construction of Egypt's national past under Nasser. It Seeks to look at the ways in which history-writing aided the complex processes of nation-building in the newly-formed Republic. In order to effectively do so, this Publication will first consider the concept of nationalist historiography in more depth, presenting part of the general assumptions and features of this discourse. It will then turn to Egyptian historiography in particular, with the intention of identifying its origins and assessing its development. To reinforce the comprehensibility of the ensuing chapter, a brief historical background of the lead–up to the 1952 Revolution will follow. Next, this Publication will deal with the emergence of identity discourse in Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century to illustrate the diversity of positions on the Egyptian national identity before the formation of the Republic. This will set the stage for the subsequent discussion of Nasser's perception of Egypt's national identity and the resulting philosophy of the Revolution. At this point, it will be possible to analyse Nasser's construction of the Egyptian identity through the use of history-writing. This analysis will be primarily based on the reinterpretation of history in school curricula and the film industry. It will address the ways in which the revolutionary regime turned to the past to realize the goals of the present. This will then be concluded with an attempt to comprehend the resultant Egyptian national identity, with the aim of assessing the success of Nasser's history-writing project.

1.2 Nationalist Historiography

"Stories of peoplehood" defined as "persuasive historical stories that prompt people to embrace the valorized identities…that political leaders strive to evoke for them" are central to nationalist historiographical discourse.[9] This concept, developed by political

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6- Note that, initially, and for a short-lived period, Nasser's regime took on an essentially Egyptian nationalism that looked to the civilization of Ancient Egypt for a source of national identity. This was illustrated by acts, such as the relocation of a statue of Ramses II from Memphis to a main square in Cairo, for example. See Mirrit Boutros Ghali, "The Egyptian National Consciousness", *Middle East Journal* 32, No. 1 (Winter, 1978): 64, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4325713.

7- Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir*: 76–81.

8- Jack Crabbs Jr., "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, No. 4 (October 1975): 404, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/162751.

9- Michael Böss, (ed.), *Narrating Peoplehood amidst Diversity: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives*, MatchPoints 2 (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2011): 11.

scientist Rogers M. Smith, suggests that an enduring sense of political community cannot develop without tales of the past that inspire feelings of trust and belonging in a population. These tales must assert that the very identities of the members of a nation are built upon their culture, religion, language, race, history, or other such factors, "in ways that both affirm their worth and delineate their obligations."[10] Along these lines, it is only logical to claim that, not only are stories of peoplehood fundamental to the constitution of a political community, but that they are also essential to the definition of its cultural and ethical values. In times of political and social upheaval, and as the community's cultural and ethical values undergo a natural process of change, traditional stories of peoplehood are often brought to the forefront and challenged by those in power. This simple observation sheds light on a crucial aspect of history-writing, namely the link between truth and the power systems that construct and define it. As Michel Foucault contends, knowledge is constructed and dominated by power, and exercising control over both knowledge and power is what defines all that is "normal".[11] Similarly, postmodern historian Hayden White, in his analysis of the connection between language and reality, argues that "history is the persuasive composition of a point of view through the use of language".[12] In effect, White is suggesting that history is essentially a constructed narrative; that it is nothing but historiography, or in Shelley Walia's words, "a matrix of reading practices that engage dialectically with existing texts representing an assortment of culturally constructed forms of knowledge, beliefs, codes and customs".[13] This definition, in combination with both White's analysis of language and history, and Foucault's model of power and knowledge,[14] draws attention to the significance of historiography in State and nation-building projects. With this point established, it is now possible to delve into the features of nationalist historiography in more depth.

General Historiography

In a global political system that is based on the nation–State as the most dominant political unit, the resulting widespread success of nationalism makes it difficult for historiography to avoid the national. Professionally organized history developed in conjunction with the nation–State, leading modern historical inquiry to typically center on the nation. Generally speaking, this can occur in one of two ways, either through the national or the nationalist approach. Thus, a distinction must be made between national and nationalist historiography. Whereas the former treats the nation as the framework within which historical study is conducted, the latter views the nation as the historical agent, and manipulates the past on the basis of the specific concerns of the present and the aspirations for the future. Consequently,

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10- *Ibid.*: 11.

11- Shelley Walia, *Edward Said and the Writing of History*, Postmodern Encounters (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001): 13.

12- *Ibid.*: 23–28.

13- *Ibid.*: 14.

14- Foucault's model of power and knowledge explains that "knowledge is used by agencies wielding power which have at their disposal the established language structures through which all forms of imposition on society are made". See *Ibid.*: 24.

nationalist historiography tends to change as present circumstances change. In this sense, the national approach is both stronger and less politicized.[15] It views the nation as the most central unit of human organization that unites sub-national groups and, at the same time, divides humanity. To the national historiographer, the nation is the source of identity and values, and is the central historical actor. On the basis of these key assumptions, the national approach orders historical accounts within the framework of the nation.[16] Alternatively, nationalist historiographies are more complex, although they tend to have similar features, ranging from their fixation on the nation's golden age to their preoccupation with defining the national identity and embodying it in a national character.[17] For the most part, national historiography has dominated the historiographical scene. However, in times of political or economic turmoil, history-writing is more likely to be rapidly pushed in a nationalist direction.[18] This is essentially what took place in Egypt following the July 1952 Revolution.

Egyptian Historiography

The earliest official attempt to rewrite national history in the Arab world is largely believed to have occurred in Nasser's Egypt, when the Egyptian historical society decided, in 1965, to move the topic of historical revision away from articles in newspapers and journals to the academic realm, holding a series of conferences to this end.[19] However, modern Egyptian historiography actually dates further back to the 1830s. Beginning as a translation movement under the rule of Muhammad Ali,[20] a number of western-educated Egyptian writers took on the unprecedented task of recording Egypt's history. Among these writers, Rifa'a al-Tahtawi is conspicuous for being the first Egyptian to write and publish a history of ancient Egypt. For what was perhaps the first time, al-Tahtawi deals with Egypt as a distinct geographical entity with a permanent existence throughout history. As the ideologue of Muhammad Ali and his family, al-Tahtawi wrote Egypt's history with the intention of highlighting the past events that justify and enhance the standing of his patron's policies.[21] Although most of al-Tahtawi's information derived from published European sources, his style of history-writing represented a break with traditional Islamic historiography, which was written in the form of chronicles, and ushered in the modern

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15- Claire Norton, (ed.), *Nationalism, Historiography and the (Re)Construction of the Past* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007): 18.

16- *Ibid.*: 2.

17- *Ibid.*: 14–15.

18- *Ibid.*: 19.

19- Freitag, "Writing Arab History": 29.

20- Muhammad Ali came to power in 1805. He was sent to Egypt by the Ottoman Empire to fight the French. There, he eliminated the order of the Mamluks and declared himself Khedive of Egypt. See Jason Thompson, *A History of Egypt: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008): 224–234.

21- For instance, al-Tahtawi equates Khedive Ismail's eventually destructive policies of opening up Egypt to European creditors to the Ptolemies, the successors of Alexander the Great, who gave foreigners full liberty in Egypt. See Youssef M. Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography: Historical Discourse and the Nation-State*, rev. ed., Culture and Civilisation in the Middle East (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003): 17–27.

historiographical approach.[22] It was not until 1928, almost a century later, that Shafiq Ghurbal published *The Beginnings of the Egyptian Question and the Rise of Mehemet Ali*, becoming the first Arab historian to rewrite a period of his country's modern history from original and unpublished sources.[23] A number of other historians followed in the footsteps of Ghurbal and heralded a new stage in the development of Egyptian historiography, setting the scene for Nasser's forthcoming cultural revolution.[24] With this in mind, the following section will briefly describe the lead-up to the 1952 coup d'état that brought Nasser's military regime to power.

1.3 Historical Background

The Egypt of the interwar period was largely characterized by a consuming desire for true independence from British rule.[25] The 1922 British declaration of Egypt's independence may have abolished the Protectorate, but it gave Britain continued control over the security of imperial communications in Egypt, the defense of the country against foreign aggression and the protection of its foreign interests, among other forms of colonial interference.[26] This left Egypt in a constant power struggle, and so by 1936, the British were forced to renegotiate the 1922 Declaration. The outcome was an Anglo–Egyptian Treaty of Alliance that once again recognized Egypt's independence but provided for continued British military presence in the Suez Canal zone and reasserted Britain's right to defend Egypt.[27] What made this Treaty different, however, was that it was signed by the elected Wafdist government, which had dominated the political scene since 1923. Nonetheless, the Egyptian Government's inability to secure unconstrained independence from Britain exacerbated the unrest within the country and fuelled anti-Western resentment. For his part, King Farouk also failed to mobilize popular support and continued to be widely known for his scandalous personal behavior and his association with Egypt's humiliating defeat in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War.[28] To add to this, the growing gap between rich and poor, aggravated by declining wages and increases in the cost of staple goods, in addition to the massive inequality in land distribution,[29] worked to further alienate the masses from the ruling elite.[30]

22- Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 8.

23- Ghurbal's family was originally Tunisian but he believed that he was a true Egyptian citizen and took it upon himself to study and teach his country's history. Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography*: 78.

24- At this point in history, the model of the bureaucrat-historian of the nineteenth century was replaced with the academic historian as Egyptian scholarship took on a new maturity and began to develop a "politically disinterested" tradition. See Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 11.

25- Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 with the professed intention of restoring order. The Protectorate was declared in 1914 to prepare Egyptians for self-government. See Thompson, *A History of Egypt*: 253–273.

26- These conditions became known as the "Reserved Points". See *Ibid.*: 275.

27- William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4ᵗʰ ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009): 196–197.

28- *Ibid.*: 302.

29- By 1952, 0.4% of landowners possessed 35% of Egypt's arable land. See *Ibid.*: 302.

30- James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001): 13.

While the 1936 Anglo–Egyptian Treaty of Alliance allowed Britain great influence over Egyptian affairs, it also gave the Wafdist government greater control over the Egyptian military. An outcome of this development was the liberalization of the military's admissions policy and the consequent recruitment of Egyptian youths from all socioeconomic backgrounds to the officer corps, hitherto dominated by members of the aristocracy. The core of Nasser's military group that overthrew the monarchy in July 1952 were recruits of lower or middle-class backgrounds who had joined the Egyptian Military Academy as a result of the Wafdist government's new admissions policy.[31] Organizing clandestinely under the name of "the Free Officers" Nasser and a group of 300 commissioned Egyptian officers came together with the overarching goal of upholding the honor of the army and liberating Egypt.[32] The Free Officers were disillusioned by democratic rule and were reluctant to place the fate of Egypt in the hands of voters once again. Although lacking a clear ideology, they were driven by their conviction that Egypt's welfare rested on abolishing all pillars of the power triangle: the Wafd, the King and the British.[33] Upon realizing that the Government had started gathering information about their plan, they chose the evening of 22 July 1952 to take control of the main military bases and the radio networks, announcing the success of the coup, and vowing to rule for the interests of no one but the Egyptian people.[34] The years to follow would be marked by a state of uncertainty, with the Free Officers divided over the future of Egypt's form of government.[35] By 1956, however, Nasser would emerge as the preeminent leader of the new revolutionary regime. In the course of the next decade, he would become "the embodiment of what the Arab world wanted to be: assertive, independent, and engaged in the construction of a new society freed of the imperial past and oriented toward a bright Arab future."[36]

31- *Ibid.*: 14.

32- Anne Alexander, *Nasser: His Life and Time*s (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005): 36.

33- Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation State*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004): 103.

34- Robert L. Tignor, Egypt: *A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010): 256.

35- General Muhammad Naguib had been treated as a front to give legitimacy to the movement through his reputation as a senior officer. After the coup, he was elected the first President of the Republic but was eventually placed under house arrest by Nasser to suppress the officers' demand of a return to constitutional life. See Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 108.

36- Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*: 301.

Chapter Two

IDENTITY DISCOURSE AND NATION BUILDING

2.1 The Emergence of Identity Discourse in Egypt

The term "national identity" can be used either to refer to an individual's identity as a member of a political community, or to denote the identity of the political community itself. Needless-to-say, in the modern world, the membership of a political community has become an integral component of individual identity. Being territorially demarcated, the political community creates a regulated space that binds members, creates common bonds, and shapes every aspect of their lives through its laws on marriage, family structure, property, and so forth. As for the identity of the political community itself, there are a number of features that define and distinguish one community from the other, the most evident being territory, language and historical experiences. As a political community typically possesses authority over the educational and cultural institutions within its territory, it can effectively mould the identity of its members. In premodern societies, national identity did not possess this degree of importance. Rulers were seldom in control of the society's cultural and educational institutions and, as a result, could not shape the identity of their subjects. Consequently, premodern communities largely defined their identity in terms of religion or ethnicity.[37] Mirrit Boutros Ghali points out that in early nineteenth century Egypt, Egyptians were essentially in a state of "cultural ignorance" and owing to the detached nature of foreign rule, they had practically no sense of national identity. Instead, they identified as Muslims, Christians, or albeit infrequently as Jews.[38] How is it then that sentiments of national identity, or membership within the "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's terms,[39] reach the minds of members of a nation? The answer is not a challenging one: they are constructed and transmitted through discourse, primarily through narratives of national culture, or "stories of peoplehood". In the words of Stuart Hall, national cultures "construct identities by producing meanings about "the nation" with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it"[40].

37- Bhikhu Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 56–65.

38- Ghali, "The Egyptian National Consciousness": 61.

39- Benedict Anderson proposes that, because "members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members…yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…the nation is imagined". See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983): 15–16.

40 Ruth Wodak *et al., The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, translated by Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten, and J.W. Unger, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 23.

This form of identity discourse first emerged in Egypt around mid-nineteenth century, when the Egyptian elite began to envisage a cultural and political identity for an autonomous Egyptian community. By late 1920s, the consolidation of a new Egyptian middle class instigated what is commonly referred to as the "knowledge boom" of the turn of the twentieth century.[41] Members of this social stratum became known as effendis, a title previously reserved for Western-educated bureaucrats, and served as teachers, engineers, physicians, journalists and public intellectuals, among other professions. One of the most significant contributions of effendis during this period was their intellectual engagement in the debate on the nature of Egyptian nationalism.[42] Unsurprisingly, as a result of Egypt's long and diverse history, defining the Egyptian national consciousness was not an easy undertaking. These Egyptian thinkers found themselves unable to reconcile the various elements of Egypt's national heritage and were forced to ask themselves unavoidable questions. Was Egypt's identity Pharaonic or Arab? Was its heritage Coptic or Islamic? What effect did the Greco–Roman colonization have on Egypt's national culture?[43] Although these questions were addressed in diverse ways, the nationalist intellectuals and writers engaged in this debate shared a common objective: to mould an Egyptian national identity and construct a modern national culture for the Egyptian society.

Among the various nationalist views that were articulated in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century, two stand out as most significant in shaping the Egyptian national discourse of this period. These were the Egyptian historical narrative and the Islamic–Arab narrative. The former became increasingly popular in the 1920s, a period that witnessed the rise of the ideology of Egyptian territorial nationalism. This ideology is associated with the nationalist thought of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid who, at the beginning of the century, proposed that the population of the Nile region were a "single, discrete and self-contained people whose national characteristics and history derived from the distinctive landscape of the Nile Valley".[44] Accordingly, this distinct territorial entity cannot be linked to the greater Islamic community, to the Ottoman Empire or to the nation of Arabic speakers. This view was reinforced by a series of revolutionary events that took place in the aftermath of the World War I. The Revolution of 1919,[45] the emergence of the effendis as the central social basis of the nationalist movement, the establishment of the Wafd Party under the leadership

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41- The consolidation of the middle class was facilitated by a number of changes occurring simultaneously during this period: large-scale urbanization, rapid population growth, the creation of a national economy, and the expansion of the education and communications systems. See Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi, 2007): 57.

42- Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*: 143–144.

43- Ghali, "The Egyptian National Consciousness": 59–61.

44- Gershoni, "Imagining and Reimagining the Past": 12.

45- The 1919 Revolution was a nationwide upheaval that brought together broad segments of Egyptian society against British rule. See Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*: 195–196.

of Sa'd Zaghlul,[46] among a number of other events, led to Egyptian territorial nationalism becoming the most prominent national discourse of the 1920s.[47] The failure of Egypt's nationalist elite to bring about tangible change in the 1930s and 1940s, however, instigated a growing reaction against the Western values underlying the Egyptian historical narrative.[48] With the goal of forming an alternative national self-representation in which Islam and Arabism would be central elements in the Egyptian identity, nationalist writers turned to seventh-century Islam to recreate the Egyptian national past as a part of the "great Islamic–Arab historical pageant".[49] The revisionist work of writers such as Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat and Abd al-Aziz al-Bishri in the 1930s and 1940s represented this concerted intellectual effort to construct an Islamic–Arab narrative of Egyptian national history.[50] Following the humiliating Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, however, the ideology of Arab nationalism was brought to the forefront. Under the leadership of Nasser, Arabism would remain the uncontested identity of the Egyptian Republic for years to come.

2.2 Nasser's Perception of the Egyptian Identity

Gamal Abdel Nasser was born in 1918, to an Egypt stricken with poverty and in a state of relentless despair. Growing up in an environment of burgeoning Egyptian nationalism, Nasser became an ardent believer in the necessity of dignity in Egypt's national affairs. He was committed to the idea that this dignity would not be conceivable without complete and unconstrained Egyptian independence. This belief became his "guiding light all through his life".[51] As an adolescent, Nasser was heavily involved in the 1935 and 1936 anti-British demonstrations. Many years later, he would reveal that 1936 was the year he lost faith in Egypt's nationalist elite.[52] Coincidentally, 1936 was also the year in which the Egyptian military began to serve an independent State, after years of being an arm of

46- Sa'd Zaghlul was leader of the Egyptian independence movement following World War I. In 1924, he became the first popularly elected Prime Minister of Egypt. See Cleveland and Bunton, A History of the Modern Middle East: 194–195.

47- Nationalist writers such as Muhammad Husayn Haykal and Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad attempted to shape a territorialist representation of Egyptian history through their essays, articles and novels. See Gershoni, "Imagining and Reimagining the Past": 13–14.

48- Substantive historical changes going on during this period led the Arabic language and the Islamic heritage to move "from the periphery of national life" to the center. See Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, "Print Culture, Social Change, and the Process of Redefining Imagined Communities in Egypt; Response to the Review by Charles D. Smith of Redefining the Egyptian Nation", International Journal of Middle East Studies 31, No. 1 (February 1999): 91, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/176332.

49- Gershoni, "Imagining and Reimagining the Past": 21.

50- Many of these writers were influenced by the work of Muhammad Farid and Mustafa Kamel, who were both members of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh's circle. For more on Al-Afghani and the Egyptian national debate, see Rudi Matthee, "Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Egyptian National Debate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, No. 2 (May 1989): 151–169, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/163072.

51- Faysal Mikdadi, *Gamal Abdel Nasser: A Bibliography*, Bibliographies of World Leaders 5 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991): 1.

52- Describing the 1936 demonstrations, Nasser writes, "I decided that 'positive action' meant uniting all the leaders of Egypt behind a single slogan. So our chanting, rebellious crowd went round to their homes, one by one, demanding in the name of Egypt's youth, that they come together. They did unite on one issue, but their decision destroyed my faith – they agreed to conclude the Treaty of 1936." See Alexander, *Nasser: His Life and Times*: 1.

the British occupation. A year later, and in consequence of the 1936 Treaty, Nasser began officer training at the Military Academy, where his leadership talents and charisma were recognised and put to use. His graduation from the Academy coincided with the outbreak of the World War II, which placed a formally independent Egypt under the command of the British.[53] Over the course of the next decade, Egypt's subservience to the British, the plight of Palestine's Arab population and the subsequent defeat under the hands of the Israeli army in 1948 and 1949, all worked together to convince Nasser that Arab unity was the only way to restore the dignity of his people.[54] To Nasser, Egyptian and Arab nationalist loyalties could, and had to coexist. He saw Egypt as a member of the greater Arab entity, and following his succession to power, reportedly declared that "by our country I mean the whole Arab world".[55] It is crucial to point out that, despite his commitment to the Arab nationalist cause, Nasser identified first and foremost as an Egyptian. Upon being asked whether his national identity was more Egyptian or Arab, he replied: "I am Egyptian. And I feel Arab because I am deeply affected by the fortunes and misfortunes of the Arabs, wherever they may occur".[56] In fact, resonances of the Egyptian territorialist standpoint that thrived in the 1920s and 1930s are present in some of Nasser's declarations and writings. They reveal that Nasser took pride in Egypt's distinctiveness and in its historical role as the source of civilization and human knowledge. Yet, he believed that Egypt's spirit was Arab, above all, and fully rejected the territorialist notion that Egypt possessed a Mediterranean or Western character.[57]

Beyond Nasser's Egyptian and Arab nationalism, the formative years of the Revolution lacked a firm ideological commitment. Steven Cook points out that it was "not ideology or some grand project that drove the Free Officers' intervention, but rather anger, shame, and fear of arrest that led them to put tanks and troops on the streets in the wee hours of July 23."[58] This is not to imply that the Officers did not stand for anything. Despite the absence of a framework of action, they were guided by six principles that they developed in 1951 and remained loyal to long after they had taken power. In brief, these were the elimination of the British occupation and its Egyptian supporters; the abolishment of feudalism; the termination of capitalism's domination of political power; the establishment of social equality; the formation of a strong popular army and finally; the development of a healthy democratic life.[59] Accordingly, Article 1 of the Constitution of the National Union described Egypt as "a socialist, democratic, co-operative society, free of all social and political

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53- Gordon, Nasser: *Hero of the Arab Nation:* 17–18.
54- Mikdadi, *Gamal Abdel Nasser:* 3.
55- Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt*: 27.
56- *Ibid.*: 28.
57- *Ibid.*: 29.
58- Steven A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square, Council on Foreign Relations Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 39.
59- Goldschmidt Jr., *Modern Egypt*: 104.

exploitation".[60] Although until the late 1950s, the regime relied on national capitalists working in tandem with the State to promote economic development, the official ideology of the Republic after 1961 was unequivocally socialist. This was carefully differentiated from Communism and Marxism and was described as a 'middle solution' between the extremes of the political spectrum.[61] In terms of Egypt's positions of leadership, Nasser identified three circles of influence, published in his book *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. In order of importance to Egyptian policymaking, these were the Arab circle, the African circle and the Islamic circle.[62] In his book, he declares that the Egyptian people cannot "ignore that there is an Arab circle surrounding [them] and that this circle is as much a part of [them] as [they] are a part of it". Neither can they ignore "that there is a continent of Africa in which fate has placed [them] and which is destined…to witness a terrible struggle on its future".[63] Moreover, he questions "Can we ignore that there is a Moslem world with which we are tied by bonds which are not only forged by religious faith [but] also tightened by the facts of history?". [64] To Nasser, "fate plays no jokes".[65] Egypt's geographical location and historical significance were not produced haphazardly, and Egypt could not run away from its "role in the construction of the future of humanity".[66]

2.3 Nasser's Construction of the Egyptian Identity

Foucault says, "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge".[67] To legitimize the coup d'état, establish his undisputed authority and create a unified national identity built on the principles of Arab nationalism, Nasser had to restructure the field of Egyptian historiography altogether. The National Charter, which was only made public in 1962, contained clauses on history writing that provided authorization for the 1963 'Project for the Revision of Modern Historical Writing'. The main purpose of this initiative was to encourage historians to write 'with a new level of consciousness'.[68] This was met with restrained opposition, as historians feared narrow-mindedness in historical research, but none were so bold as to oppose the Project openly. Muhammad Anis,[69] Director of the National Historical Documents Centre and one of the

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60- Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*: 71.

61- Crabbs Jr., "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt": 388.

62- Nasser could not raise the banner of Islam for two main reasons: to secure his alliances with countries like India, Yugoslavia, and the USSR (all who had internal issues with Muslims) and to stand in opposition to the Hashimites in Iraq and Jordan, who rallied behind Islam yet entered into alliances with the West. At the same time, Nasser's policy in Africa was largely based on the provision of Islamic education.

63- Gamal Abdel-Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Cairo: Mondiale Press, 1955): 54.

64- *Ibid*.

65- *Ibid*.

66- *Ibid*.: 55.

67- Walia, *Edward Said*: 25.

68- Crabbs Jr., "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt": 395.

69- Anis is believed to have introduced social and economic categories into Egyptian historical analysis. He focused mainly on European economic exploitation of Egypt and the struggle within Egyptian society between national and non-national elements among the ruling elite. See: Peter Gran, "Modern Trends in Egyptian Historiography: A Review Article", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, No. 3 (October 1978): 367–371, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/162772.

initiative's most ardent supporters, took on the task of defending the government, claiming that "the project would not eliminate free historical enquiry [as] the Ministry of Culture was mainly interested in funding rather than control.[70] Yet, he simultaneously argued that it was time for socialistic interpretations of history to come from Egypt's universities and socialist historians, and that freedom of historical inquiry could not be applied to the opponents of the Revolution. Egyptian historians were thus branded as either 'revolutionary' or 'reactionary' with the former encouraged to close ranks around the 'progressive' view.[71] In essence, Nasser had called for the rewriting of Egyptian history, but at the same time, permitted limited debate within this field of knowledge. Historians whose views were incompatible with those of the government were systematically ignored, while those who supported its socialist pan-Arabism ideology were granted relative freedom of action.[72] Although the establishment of a historical environment characterized by intellectual conformity was undoubtedly effective to the processes of nation-building in Nasser's Egypt, one must go beyond this field to better appreciate the construction of the Egyptian identity in relation to history-writing. The classroom and the cinema are two strikingly revealing areas to examine.

School Curricula

George Antonius once wrote "Without school or book, the making of a nation is in modern times inconceivable".[73] Although modern nations are evidently not built in classrooms alone, this declaration sheds light on the imperative link between culture and the political formation of the nation-State, suggesting that education, as a site of culture, is an explicitly ideological field in which nationalism is propagated and national identities are created.[74] Textbooks, in particular, possess the capacity to convey cultural norms and values in a systematic and uniform fashion. As Mona Russell reveals in her study of the Egyptian woman at the turn of the twentieth century, textbooks do not only deliver facts, they also reflect "profound political, economic, and cultural relations and histories".[75] In practical terms, they tend to constitute between 75% and 90% of instructional content, thus standardizing the national educational experience to a large extent.[76] For these reasons, curriculum acts as an effective method of social control, through both its legitimation of power relations and its projection of reality as it is conceived by the ruling elite. Hence,

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70- Crabbs Jr., "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt": 396.
71- *Ibid*.: 398.
72- *Ibid*.: 404.
73- Jeff Shalan, "Writing the Nation: The Emergence of Egypt in the Modern Arabic Novel", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, No. 3 (October 2002): 211, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183459.
74- *Ibid*.: 213–212.
75- Mona L. Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity* 1863–1922 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 141.
76- Faten Adly, *Textbook–Between Ideology and Objective*: *Analytical Study of the History Textbook in Prep School in Egypt* (Beirut: Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, 2005).

exercising control over Egypt's curricula was crucial to the post-1952 regime.[77] A glance into an Egyptian textbook from the age of Nasser indicates just that. In a comparative study of Year Nine textbooks from the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak eras, Faten Adly argues that the 1960 history textbook, in particular, acted as an ideological tool in the fabrication of the national consciousness; entitled *Modern Arab History Since the Ottoman Conquest Up to the Present*, the textbook is divided into a total of 32 sections that deal with each Arab State in accordance with its historical progression and in relation to its liberation movement. The textbook ensures that Arab and Egyptian history are treated as one and the same, and there is little differentiation between issues that pertain to other Arab countries and those that pertain to Egypt alone. To demonstrate the manner in which the revolutionary curriculum mirrored the policies of the regime, a selection of findings from Adly's textbook analysis are summarized in the following table:[78]

Themes	Occurrence
a) Liberation movements	This phrase is repeated a total of 184 times in various discussions on revolutions, popular rebellions, protests, demonstrations and national consciousness.
b) Political leaders	The role of leaders is presented as secondary to the role of the people in national liberation movements, and so references to leaders are numbered at a mere fifteen phrases.
c) Political parties	The regime viewed any form of political organization with contempt and accordingly, only eleven phrases are in reference to political parties.
d) Arab nationalism	The overall objective of the textbook can be seen as attempting to unify Egyptian and Arab nationalist loyalties, and thus the phrase "Arab nationalism" is mentioned 712 different times.[79]

While these observations portray the regime's control over the 1960 history curriculum in quantitative terms,[79] they do not expose the regime's systematic use of history. To gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which history was reinterpreted during this period, it is worthwhile to turn to the works of the architects of the curriculum writing project. Hamed Ammar, Professor of Educational Sociology known to this day as "the Chief of Arab Educators" and Ahmad Fouad al-Ahwani, Professor of Philosophy and Supervisor in

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77- Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman*: 141–143.
78- Adly, *Textbook – Between Ideology and Objective*.
79- In contrast, Arab nationalism is only mentioned 111 times in the Year Nine textbook from Sadat's era and thirty-eight times in Mubarak's era. See *Ibid*.

the Ministry of Education during Nasser's time, are two prime examples. In his collection of studies first published in 1964 under the title *On Building the Arab Human: Studies in Educational Thought and Civilisational Change*, Ammar argues that Arab history-writing has been in a state of perpetual imprisonment, with foreign powers leaving no room for the people's social history to be written.[80] He says "It was as if the Arab human had been cut off from labour, from production and from the organisation of his existence, and then came the revolution to bring him back to life".[81] Although Ammar is referring to the "Arab human" he is evidently speaking of the Egyptians in particular. However, as was the case in the history textbook analyzed by Adly, this distinction is not made. Ammar goes on to maintain that Egypt's pre-revolutionary history was characterised by "nothing other than corruption, feudalism and injustice, but the revolution came to erase that".[82] This is a crucial point to keep in mind. Not only does it reflect Nasser's personal view of Egypt's pre-revolutionary history, but as will be discussed, it is also one of most evident and recurrent ways in which Egypt's immediate past was both rejected and reinterpreted.[83]

Al-Ahwani's book on Arab nationalism reveals this systematic historical reinterpretation in more depth. Published in 1960, the work reflects the regime's effort to unify the Egyptian and the Arab past in order to legitimize the State's pan-Arabism ideology. Al-Ahwani employs the concepts of identity, language and religion. He argues that the Arab identity is embraced not ascribed, citing throughout the book that "Arabs are those who are content to be called Arabs".[84] This idea is intended to counter the territorialist argument that Egyptians are not ethnically Arab, suggesting instead that Arabism is based on the desire to adopt the Arab identity and the Arabic language. Here, al-Ahwani points to the linguistic link between nation and thought: the necessity of language to the conception of national identity. Although he concedes that this is a universal phenomenon, he is careful to emphasize Arabic's superiority over other languages. To him, not only is Arabic sacred because it is the language of the Quran, it is also superior because it has survived centuries of attack, whereas languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek have not.[85] By underscoring the importance of the Arabic language, al-Ahwani encourages Egyptians to take pride in their mother tongue, which he argues is their strongest link to the Arab world. With this association established, he takes on a more challenging task, namely the Arabization of the

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80- حامد عمار، **في بناء الإنسان العربي**، دراسات في التنمية ١٠ (القاهرة: مركز ابن خلدون للدراسات الإنمائية،) ١٩٩٢.

81- *Ibid*.: 257.

82- *Ibid*.

83- In describing Egypt's pre-revolutionary past, Nasser writes "when I go back to turning the pages of our history, I feel sorrow tearing my soul as I consider the period when a tyrannical feudalism was formed, a feudalism which had no other object save to suck the blood of life out of our veins and to sap from them the remnants of any feeling of power and of dignity". See Abdel-Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution*: 40.

84- أحمد فؤاد الأهواني، **القومية العربية** (القاهرة: وزارة الثقافة والإرشاد القومي، ١٩٦٠): ٥.

85- Here, al-Ahwani is referring to colonial attempts to substitute classical Arabic with colloquial dialects. See: *Ibid*.: 18.

Islamic past. This involves recounting Muslim history in a way that essentially substitutes "Islam" with "Arab nationalism". For example, he claims that seventh century Arabs triumphed over the Persians and the Romans because of the strength of Arabism, pointing to Arab nationalist values such as freedom, equality, justice and peace.[86] In another example, he compares Arab conquests to Turkish conquests, arguing that, whereas the former aimed to spread a peaceful message, the latter were violent and oppressive. This view does not treat Arab and Ottoman history as a part of a larger Islamic history. Instead, the Islamic past is reconstructed so that it essentially becomes a period within Arab history.[87]

In an environment of relative intellectual conformity, the independent works of Ammar and al-Ahwani reveal the shared ideological position of thinkers involved in curriculum writing and supervision during Nasser's era. However, as Russell asserts, the "textbook itself is but one link in a chain that connects the government, the educational bureaucracy, the teacher, and the student".[88] While we can easily access the content of the textbooks as conceived by the State and by the curriculum writers, we can never fully acquire an accurate appreciation of what was understood or how teachers conveyed the information. Nevertheless, in the hope of gaining some insight into how this State-led project of history writing influenced the educational experiences of students during this period, I carried out a number of conversations with individuals who attended primary and secondary schools in the 1960s. Replies to my enquiries regarding their understanding of pre-revolutionary Egypt during their school years were quite uniform. Egypt before 1952 was believed to have been in a state of incessant darkness. It was an idle and corrupt society characterized by its submission to the West and its humiliation at the hands of foreigners. In the absence of national dignity, the Egyptian people were continuously ruled by foreigners, and therefore not in control of their own fate. Muhammad Ali Dynasty, in particular, was portrayed as a family of outsiders whose loyalties were to foreign powers. For its part, the Ottoman Empire was understood to be an imperialist power that employed foreign agents in Egypt to exploit the people and to rob them of their meager earnings.[89] Interestingly enough, other Dynasties that ruled Egypt, such as the Mamluks for example, were not perceived as despotic occupiers. It was only the immediate past that was explicitly rejected. As will be discussed, this was not unique to education. Attacks on the Muhammad Ali Dynasty and the rejection of this period were also very present in Egypt's post-1952 cinema.

86- *Ibid.*: 10.

87- Al-Ahwani maintains that the religious nature of the Arabs dates to pre-Islamic times, using Quranic verses to prove that pre-Islamic Arabia was a land diverse with religious identities. See *Ibid.*: 58.

88- Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman*: 142.

89- Here, the idea of the *multazim* was mentioned as being the most present in their minds with regard to the Egyptians' relationship with the Ottoman Empire. This was an agent who was responsible for paying the taxes of a certain area. Portrayed as a foreigner, this individual would pay the required sum to the Empire but would then extract at least double the amount from the farmers.

The Film Industry

The Nasser era witnessed considerable progress in the field of education. In terms of numbers, primary school enrolment rose from 1.3 million in 1953 to 3.6 million in 1970. To encourage students to attend university, tuition fees were abolished and university students were promised government jobs upon graduation. As a result, the number of university students virtually doubled during the 1960s.[90] With these statistics in mind, one can safely argue that national education was the most significant site of political indoctrination in Nasser's Egypt. However, it was not the only one. Although television and the cinema were not accessible to the majority of Egyptians at the time, the revolutionary regime devoted considerable attention to the film industry, using it as an influential tool in the effort to reinterpret Egypt's history. Prior to the 1952 Revolution, the Egyptian film industry was controlled by foreigners, mainly Italians, who were primarily interested in developing a commercial cinema based on the Hollywood model and dedicated to profits. Following Egypt's official independence in 1923, Egyptians gradually gained positions within the industry and, for the first time, film companies and studios were established by native Egyptians. However, these companies did not renounce the European colonial tradition, creating a "neo-colonial" cinema that avoided addressing Egypt's social and political problems. [91] Censorship had been officially instituted by both the Palace and the British since 1914, banning attacks on foreigners, government officials and religious institutions. What is more, films were forbidden from portraying conflicts between farmers and landowners, and from alluding to nationalist politics or socialist ideas.[92] The July Revolution transformed the state of the film industry, introducing a politically conscious cinema engaged in the process of cultural rediscovery. In turn, this revolutionary cinema became an integral part of the initial stages of nation-building, acting as a vehicle of the new ideology and aiming "to provide the people with an interpretation of reality that claimed to transform them from traditional subjects to active citizens".[93] To achieve this goal, the State nationalized the cinema and took over almost complete control of the film industry. In 1957, the Ministry of National and Cultural Guidance set up the Organization of Consolidation of Cinema, with an annual budget of 1.5 million Egyptian pounds. Its objective was twofold: to improve the artistic and technical standards of films, and to increase their distribution both within Egypt and in other Arab countries. In 1959, the Government established the Higher Institute of Cinema, whose stated goal was to educate a new generation of native film-makers and technicians. This, in addition to a number of other measures taken by the regime, ensured that the cinema was, in effect, an extension of the State.[94]

90- Cleveland and Bunton, A *History of the Modern Middle East*: 320.
91- Ella Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution", *Critical Arts: A Journal for Media Studies* 2, No. 4 (1983): 23.
92- *Ibid*.: 24.
93- *Ibid*.: 27.
94- *Ibid*.: 28.

To further the regime's ideology, the revolutionary cinema engaged in the rewriting of history in a number of ways, two of which will be addressed in this section. First, it produced political films that actively criticized the former regime and portrayed the miserable life of the Egyptian people before the Revolution. Second, it produced historical films that Arabized the Islamic past and pursued to restore a sense of dignity to the Arab people. Ezzeddine Zulficar's *Rodda Qalbi*, produced in 1957, is a prime example of political films that celebrated the Egyptian Revolution and condemned the former regime. The film is based in an Egypt that was on the verge of a revolution, and is centered on a forbidden love story between Ali, the son of a gardener working in a prince's palace, and Engy, the daughter of the prince. The "foreign" prince is portrayed as a heartless man living off the hard work of the Egyptian farmers, who he refers to as animals. His reckless and dishonorable son is depicted as being detached from Egyptian society. Ali's family, on the other hand, are portrayed as noble and compassionate, selling everything they own to fund their sons' educations. When Ali's father asks the prince for Engy's hand in marriage on his son's behalf, he is thrown out of the palace and labelled a crazy man, an act that leads him to lose his voice. Heartbroken and disillusioned by the inequality of Egyptian society, Ali joins the Free Officers, and after the success of the Revolution, returns to the palace to seize the prince's property and marry Engy. For his part, Ali's father regains his voice as he Sees his fellow Egyptians regain theirs, chanting against the King and for the people's Revolution.[95] Like most productions of Nasser's time, this film is filled with allegories and symbolism. At one point, Engy claims that it is religiously permissible for her to steal her brother's clothes and give them to Ali as he is more in need of them. Evidently, this justification foreshadows the 1952 process of land reform that limited the land ownership of the ancien régime.[96] Moreover, Egyptian society is depicted as in a state of anticipation and in search of a hero. The Egyptians appear to be politically conscious and aware of the necessity of a revolution. In fact, the literal translation of Rodda qalbi is "my heart has been returned to me". As the agent is omitted from this phrase, it is possible to understand it as referring to both Ali and Engy's fulfilled romance, as well as to the triumph of the Egyptian people in regaining their spirit. This is confirmed in the first minute of the film, as the words "This is a love story, a nation's story" appear on the screen. As for the restructuring of history through the production of historical films, Yusuf Chahine's Al-Nasser Salahuddin is an ideal example.[97] Released in 1963, the film portrays the Kurdish leader of the Muslim jihad against the Latin Crusaders as an Arab nationalist hero in conflict with Western imperialism.[98] There is virtually no reference to Christianity or Islam, and what was traditionally Seen as a religious conflict is entirely reinterpreted by pan-Arabism ideology. The triumph of the Arabs and their restoration of Jerusalem subtly implies the inversion of power through history, and in the words of Hrair Dekmejian "serves as an important precedent to clothe the Nasirite movement of Arab unity with the cloak of historical legitimacy".[99]

95- «فيلم رد قلبي» ،**YouTube** ، https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkYvVXSwoEs.
96- Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*: 109.
97- «فيلم الناصر صلاح الدين كامل، ١٩٦٣» ،**YouTube** ، https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhtJmpjDC4k.
98- Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*: 130.
99- Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir*: 79.

Chapter Three

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

3.1 Evaluating the Egyptian National Character

Perhaps more than any other Arab leader in his time, Nasser's legacy is categorically mixed. Advocates and opponents of Nasserism have incessantly debated its successes and failures, often reaching the realization that their arguments are unresolvable. Nasser's devotion to Arab nationalism and his commitment to the welfare of the Egyptian masses are often overshadowed by his failure to create a practical and enduring power base beyond the influence of his charisma. To this, Fouad Ajami proposes that the "value of Nasserism may ultimately be purely psychological and symbolic and an altogether different 'currency' might be needed to evaluate its achievements and the role it played in contemporary Arab society".[100] In the same way, Dekmejian points to the "peculiar spiritual bond" between Nasser and the masses, arguing that any appraisal of Nasser's ideology, institutions and processes must be analyzed from the psychological perspective of the Egyptian and Arab people.[101]

Writing in 1967, Baha Abu-Laban examines the newly developing Egyptian identity in relation to a revolution that he perceives to be a prototype for Arab countries and emerging independent nations alike.[102] His study presents a qualitative description of the Egyptian national character from the perspective of the nation's political elite, arguing that the Revolution's national socialist doctrine provided Egyptians with a "long-sought, ego-enhancing identity".[103] Six major dimensions of the Egyptian national character are identified and analyzed. These include: revolutionism, modernism, future-orientation, self-confidence, egalitarianism and non-isolationism, three of which are particularly relevant to the present discussion. First, in the minds of the political elite, revolutionism is cast as being an inherent characteristic of the Egyptian people. The National Charter indicates that Egyptians led the conquest to defend Islamic civilization, they prevented the attacks of the European colonizers and repelled the Tartars. It was not until Muhammad Ali's ascension to power that Egypt began to face humiliation at the hands of world powers for the first time in its history. Nonetheless, Egyptian people never lost their spirit. Instead, they stored their energy for years and released it when the time was right, that is on 23 July 1952.

100- Fouad Ajami, "On Nasser and His Legacy", *Journal of Peace Research* 11, No. 1 (1974): 42, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/422632.

101- Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir*: 302–307.

102- Baha Abu-Laban, "The National Character in the Egyptian Revolution", *The Journal of Developing Areas* 1, No. 2 (January 1967): 179–198, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4189360.

103- Abu-Laban, "The National Character": 179.

In the same way, the Charter reveals that the self-confidence of the Egyptian people was rediscovered on the day of the Revolution. The tyrannical forces that had for long suppressed their identity had been dissolved and they were finally in control of their own fate. An aspect of this rediscovery was their realization that isolationism was no longer an option. The Charter asserts that one of the most severe errors of the 1919 Revolution was its leaders' inability to understand the definition of Egypt's Arab character and their failure to extend their vision beyond Sinai. With the recent awakening, however, Egyptians could now realize that their destiny was interlinked with the destiny of the Arab world and that it was their duty to guarantee liberty and unity for the Arab nation.[104] Evidently, Abu-Laban's analysis of the Egyptian national character is not based on the perspective of the masses. Nevertheless, it reveals the image of the national character as it is presented by Nasser's Government and as perceived by observers. Egyptians were inherently revolutionary, they were self-confident and they were destined to lead the Arab world. Writing in 1956, for example, F.R.C. Bagley notes that the greatest accomplishment of Nasser's regime is "its success in infusing a new energy and sense of purpose into many Egyptians".[105] Through the manipulation of history, Nasser sought to achieve a dream that directed his choices since his early days. He sought to restore Egyptian and Arab national dignity.

3.2 Conclusion

Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot writes:

"The need to re-write people's history is typical of all post-colonial and post-revolutionary societies, and is a natural and a healthy one. For if every generation must write its own history, how much more acute is the need for people who, as in the case of Egypt, have thrown off the burden of an alien domination, as well as that of a bankrupt political regime. The ghosts of the past must therefore be exorcised, the myths destroyed and new ones created."[106]

By definition, revolutionary regimes are based on a deep-seated rejection of the past. This is essential not only to rationalize the revolution, but also to strengthen the ideological tenets of the new society. It is in this sense that history-writing and nation-building are intricately related: the past impacts ideology formation and in turn is recast by the ideological circumstances of the present.[107] In the case of the Egyptian military regime,

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104- *Ibid.*: 191.
105- F.R.C. Bagley, "Egypt Under Nasser", *International Journal 11*, No. 3 (Summer 1956): 197, online e-article, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40198229.
106- Freitag, "Writing Arab History": 24.
107- Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir:* 66–67.

the past was used as a tool for justifying the 1952 Revolution, for validating Nasser's pan-Arab ideology and for creating a unified national identity. Through the establishment of intellectual and conceptual conformity in the field of Egyptian nationalist historiography and the subsequent restructuring of history in school curricula and the film industry, the regime sought to base the present on solid foundations of the past. As a student of history, I cannot ascertain whether or not Nasser's history-writing project ultimately succeeded in this regard. However, as an Egyptian, I can say that despite its many failures, the Nasser era remains present in the minds of later generations as being a time of unparalleled national pride and incomparable regional leadership in Egypt's modern history.

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