Introduction

The French political philosopher Montesquieu published, in 1748, an elaboration of his exploration of the concept of liberty. In one of his most insightful notes, he wrote: "No word has received more different significations and has struck minds in so many ways as has liberty."[1] Montesquieu's insight came before the profound, accelerated transformations of the second half of the century took place, with the outbreak of the great revolutions that shaped the politics of modern history, beginning with the American and French revolutions. His note preceded the modern ideological discourse of the nineteenth century that witnessed the formation of central concepts such as liberalism, socialism, and communism, which to a large extent dominated modern political thought. Had Montesquieu composed his note a century later, he might well have outlined the same content with more emphasis on the increased complexity and refinement reflected in the term "liberty" following the dramatic effects that the Enlightenment had on the nineteenth century and its attendant political events.

Although the philosophical preoccupation with the political aspects of freedom is strongly connected with the civilizational and historical legacy that is often presented as integrated in the "West," the concept "freedom" is strongly considered central to modern political thought in the Mediterranean countries. The vigorous claims for freedom dominating the slogans of twentieth-century political and social movements in the eastern and southern Mediterranean manifest the pivotal position that this concept occupied in the political and social systems of values. The transformation of freedom in modern philosophy to an inalienable attribute of the value of individuals and nations contributed significantly to the empowerment and intensification of its political influence. The focal function of these conceptions left a

[1] Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 154.

mark on all modern ideologies: freedom of nations from foreign rule, freedom of individuals from the oppression of political authority and from conformity to the social majority, freedom of religion or from religion, emancipation of slaves, of women, of the working class, and so on.[2]

Rationale

The fertile cultural, social, and economic background against which modern political ideas took shape in the eastern and southern Mediterranean was formed mainly during the nineteenth century. During this period scholars, journalists, and politicians not only founded a new epistemic background that was later referred to as *nahḍa* (revival) but also shaped the themes and language that preoccupied and articulated the sociopolitical discourse of the twentieth century. As part of these transformations, the semantics of freedom inflated significantly, which made the task of outlining all its manifestations almost impossible. The following chapters focus on the history of the political aspects of freedom, especially those that evolved in two categories – the social and the individual – in the cultural space that is confined to the Ottoman Arabic-speaking provinces. Despite the title, which relates to the whole of the nineteenth century, this research illuminates the history of this idea in the Arabic-speaking areas during the period that ranges from the French invasion of Egypt in 1798 through the British invasion of Egypt in 1882, relying on the assumption that Egypt constituted during this period the central country producing knowledge in Arabic. In general this book examines the transition of the idea of freedom from its frequent nonpolitical use prior to the nineteenth century, through its political semantic inflation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to the stage where it became a signifier in Arabic for ideological affiliations.

The hypothesis underlying this inquiry assumes that the mental preoccupation with the subject of freedom became a core issue in the construction of modern ideologies, which makes the disassociation between the history of the concept and the structure of these ideologies nearly impossible. All modern ideologies evolved against

[2] Takashi Shogimen, "Liberty," *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), 1272–1279.

the background of certain preoccupations and interpretations of the issue of freedom: Nationalism relies on the collective, liberalism on the individual, and socialism on the class or the social aspects of freedom. These different interpretations of the same concept turned freedom into an inextricable component of various, sometimes contradictory, views of politics and society that might sustain intersecting meanings and sometimes might carry antithetical interactions.

Using conceptual history, this work aims to describe internal aspects of the emergence of modern ideologies by addressing the linguistic dynamics, the inconsistencies, and the dissonances that accompanied the construction of "freedom." By studying the particularity of the formation of modern ideas in a non-Western sphere, this approach emphasizes a frequently neglected aspect of research. Following the school of conceptual history,[3] the analysis of ideas is underlined by the premise that concepts maintain internal temporal structures. These structures encapsulate the full extent of historical experience, which can provide an illuminating perspective on the transitions of ideas. Concepts embed different meanings that transform over time and therefore evade any concrete definitions. Nietzsche articulated this insight by stating: "Only that which has no history is definable."[4] Concepts are expressed in semantic fields, and the scope of meaning is disclosed by the interconnections between words and associated concepts. Two lines of inquiry that constitute the core of conceptual history will be under scrutiny. The first makes use of synchronic analyses of language that focus on time frame and the interpretation of temporality of meaning. This aspect of the investigation aims to reveal stable structures of

[3] The history of concepts was developed by leading theoreticians of history such as Reinhart Koselleck, Otto Brunner, and Werner Conze. For further details see Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, and Frank Van Vree, "A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History – An Introduction," in *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, and Frank Van Vree (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 2; Melvin Richter and Michaela W. Richter, "Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck's 'Krise' in Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (April 2006): 348.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in *On the Genealogy of Morals; Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 80; Jorn Leonhard, "From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalisms: The Semantics of 'Liberalism' in European Comparison," *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*, no. 8 (2004): 38.

concepts that exceed the meanings of individual words. The second line of inquiry uses diachronic analyses, which follow changes in concepts over time and disclose their multiple layers by illuminating temporal differences between chronological units. This line of historical interpretation seeks to reveal the evolving semantics of "freedom" in the Arabic language and to identify the chronological frame in which freedom evolved into a consistent set of political principles or ideologies. Because of the chronological framework, the historical analysis in the following chapters briefly discusses the concepts prior to the eighteenth century. Certain concepts that might have sustained vibrant, vigorous states in the past were extinguished and lost their luster with time and thus fell into a static state. Assuming that these ideas underwent significant invigoration by the end of the eighteenth century, the historical analysis emphasizes the points of transition in the history of the concepts under scrutiny, especially in relation to their near-past state in the eighteenth century.

Survey of Literature and the Study's Contribution

The period between the early 1800s and the 1860s is considered in prominent works of scholarship to be early for the formation of modern ideas. Some of these works, which outline the emergence of modern political and religious thought in Arabic, evade the investigation of this period. Majid Khadduri begins his survey in his work *Political Trends in the Arab World* late in the second half of the nineteenth century.[5] Similarly, in his work *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, Hisham Sharabi identifies the years between 1875 and 1914 as the "formative period" of modern ideas in Arabic.[6] The scant interest in this period, as compared to interest in the end of the nineteenth century or the twentieth century, among many historians is justifiable: The years that preceded the inauguration of private journalism produced a minor amount of intellectual activity. Furthermore, many of the modern political concepts were not yet linguistically stable, a state that made the sphere of ideas most ambiguous. The following chapters, however, attempt to explore the uncertainties attached to the understanding of ideas during this period, arguing that the emergence of modern political concepts,

[5] Majid Khadduri, *Political Trends in the Arab World: The Role of Ideas and Ideals in Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1–9.
[6] Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875–1914* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), x.

or the "formative period," took place earlier than 1875, and especially between the years 1820 and 1860. In this period, which witnessed cultural acculturation unprecedented in the history of the encounter between *dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam) and "Christendom," Arabic evidenced not only the creation of political vocabularies that to a large extent constitute the political lexicon of modern Arabic but also major conceptual shifts that involve the increased politicization and abstraction of concepts. Some of the concepts that prior to these years were largely static gradually gained dynamic retrospective and prospective dimensions and were frequently used to describe processes.

Beyond the discussion of time frame, the modern concept of freedom in Arabic has not received much attention in scholarship. Other than in an encyclopedia entry composed by Bernard Lewis,[7] the semantic history of *ḥurriyya* (freedom) has not been studied extensively – certainly not in the larger context that outlines its interconnections with other associated concepts. By using similar methodology, Mourad Wahba explores the early history of the concept of socialism in a short article, concluding that the formation of the Arabic term *ishtirākiyya* (socialism) took place only toward the end of the nineteenth century.[8] A pioneering work that explores political ideas through investigating the evolution of Arabic in overlapping time frames is Ami Ayalon's *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East*.[9] Ayalon's book, which makes broad use of primary sources, including early journalism, covers early transformations of ideas such as "subjects," "citizens," and concepts derived from forms of government and the structure

[7] In another short article Lewis uses linguistic methodology to explore the idea in Turkish. See Bernard Lewis, "Ḥurriyya: The Ottoman Empire and After," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 589–594; Bernard Lewis, *Political Words and Ideas in Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008), 11–17.

[8] Prominent historians of the idea of socialism in the Middle East begin their discussion of the history of the concept at the end of the nineteenth century. See Mourad Magdi Wahba, "The Meaning of Ishtirakiyah: Arab Perceptions of Socialism in the Nineteenth Century," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 10 (1990): 42–55; Donald Reid, "The Syrian Christians and Early Socialism in the Arab World," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 2 (1974): 177–193; Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, "Ishtirākiyya: The Arab Lands," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 125–126; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 35–59.

[9] Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

of communities. The following pages make extensive use of Ayalon's work, extending the research to concepts that were not under its focus. Additionally, this work emphasizes the early history of concepts such as liberalism, socialism, anarchism, and communism, utilizing a broad approach that reveals the interdynamics between all the vibrant political concepts that temporarily played an active part in shaping the political worldviews in the Arabic-speaking regions during the 1860s and 1870s. Another work that utilizes the "linguistic turn" and explores the realm of ideas from the perspective of the symbolic expression of language is Yasir Suleiman's *The Arabic Language and National Identity*. Although this work covers later periods, mainly the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the approach Suleiman employs found very relevant to this study.[10]

In addition to the attempt to cover the early history of central concepts in political discourse, perhaps the most significant contribution this work aims to make is in the field of the history of political and religious thought. Viewing the construction of political ideas through linguistic lenses brings into focus the confusion that beleaguered the meaning of ideologies in the same cultural realm. The unexplored early history of Arabic ideological idioms left scholarship with a variety of narratives that address the same political idea but that did not necessarily have the same ideational content. Thus, questions involving the genealogy, history, and particular features of ideas such as "liberalism," "socialism," "constitutionalism," "republicanism," "secularism," "progress," and "democracy" in the cultural space of Arabic remained extremely vague.

Because of the centrality of "liberalism" in studying and understanding the state of political thought in the nineteenth century, the next pages of this introduction focus only on its use, outlining the paradoxes of meanings that arose from the way it was employed in scholarship. This frequent use of "liberalism" in a way that preserved a state of detachment between the language of historiography and morphological history is used as a case study that clearly presents the dissonance that intellectual history generated in the field of the history of modern ideas in a non-Western context.

[10] Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

Use of the word "liberalism" is widely accepted in research to describe the history or the political atmosphere in a few Arab countries during the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the century's second and third decades.[11] It is reasonable to assume that this near consensus among historians regarding the use of "liberalism" might be derived from the fact that at this time Arabic witnessed not only the use of this term as a neologism and in its Arabized form but also its significant theorization and employment in politics, especially in Egypt. A prominent contribution to the domestication of this term was made by Egyptian politician Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid in the years prior to World War I. On the pages of his newspaper *al-Jarīda*, he championed the ideas of *madhhab al-ḥurriyya* or *madhhab al-ḥurriyyīn* (school of freedom or liberalism), perceiving it as the most appropriate ideology for contemporary Egyptian politics.[12] With the establishment of the Liberal Constitutional Party (*ḥizb al-aḥrār al-dustūriyyīn*) in 1922, al-Sayyid hoped to apply his liberal orientation to Egyptian politics, arguing that the party should change its name to *al-ḥurriyyīn*

[11] For a selected biography that employs "liberalism" to indicate a political category during the first half of the twentieth century (or part of it), see the following sources. The subject of the decline of liberal thought stood at the center of scholarly discussion, especially in the Egyptian context where a few scholars argued that Egyptian liberalism underwent a "crisis of orientation" in the 1930s. For more details see Baber Johansen, *Muhammad Husain Haikal: Europa und der Orient in Weltbild eines Ägyptischen Liberalen* (Beirut: In Kommission bei F. Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1967), 61–75; Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 204–235; Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of 'Crisis of Orientation': al-Risala's Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933–39," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 4 (November 1999): 551–576; Abdeslam Maghraoui, *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 13–29; Katerina Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights: Implications for International Relations* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 76–113; Christoph Schumann, "Introduction," in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: Late 19th Century until the 1960s*, ed. Christoph Schumann (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–11; Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3–13.

[12] See his article titled "*al-Ḥurriyya wa-Madhāhib al-Ḥukm*" (Freedom and ideologies of governance), which he published in December 1913 in *al-Jarīda*: Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, *Turāth Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyīd*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub wal-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 2008), 424–427.

al-dustūriyyīn because he felt the phrase more accurately identified the ideological platform that he advocated.[13] When works on the intellectual history of the Arabic-speaking countries examine the years prior to World War I, the use of "liberalism" becomes highly controversial, expressing a deep ambiguity that is characterized in some cases by paradoxes. A quick glance at the state of research reveals the linguistic dissonance generated by the use of "liberalism." It is important to emphasize that many of the works of scholarship that used this term were written in the 1950s and 1960s. It is reasonable to assume that these two decades, which witnessed military coups in important Arab states, the foundation of republican regimes, the destruction of the parliamentary systems, and the spread of the single-party model by the influence of Nassirism and Baʿthism, left a deep impact on the state of scholarship and on the perception of pre–World War II politics. In the antiliberal, anti-Western, and anticapitalist revolutionary sphere that was dominated by socialism and pan-Arab nationalist slogans, many scholars regarded "liberalism" as the most suitable concept for depicting the early political norms that preceded Cold War politics.[14] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who published his work in 1957, uses the combined term "Islamic liberalism" to designate – "perhaps ineptly" and in a "deliberately broad sense" – an inconsistent intellectual phenomenon that reinterprets Islam predicated on three intellectual traditions: Sufism, rationalism, and Western thought. For him liberal Islam is not an established system of ideas and probably not a consistent ideology; rather it is a wide-ranging phenomenon supported, in the Arabic-speaking countries, by scholars such as Muhammad ʿAbdu and Taha Hussain.[15] Jamal Ahmed, Albert Hourani's student, whose *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* was published in 1960, follows Smith's approach by using the combination "Islamic liberalism" to portray the intellectual biography and

[13] ʿAbas Mahmud al-ʿAqad, *Rijāl ʿAraftuhum* (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 1992), 191.
[14] See, for instance, the influence of this historical context on Albert Hourani's 1962 publication. In introductions to later editions of his book, Albert Hourani elaborated the impact of Cold War politics on content. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), vii.
[15] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 55–73.

the thought of Muhammad ʿAbdu.[16] Nadav Safran, who published his book *Egypt in Search of Political Community* in 1961, makes a distinction between "reformist Islam," which is represented by intellectuals such as Muhammad ʿAbdu and Rashid Rida, and "liberal nationalism," which evolved with the generation of Mustafa Kamil and Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid.[17] A comparison of these works, which address the same concept, reveals that their use of "liberalism" presents inconsistencies related to both the narrative this concept came to demarcate and its intellectual content. This conclusion is illustrated especially when addressing questions about the identity of the adherents of ideas described as "liberal" and in the alleged correlation between the intellectual streams of Islamic reformism and liberalism.[18]

The most influential work to contribute to the dissonance created by the use of "liberalism" in publications on nineteenth-century intellectual history is Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, published in 1962.[19] Hourani's book, which probes Arabic thought through analyzing biographies of the most prominent Arab scholars, thinkers, and intellectuals, brought to the historical scholarship broad discussions of focal stations in the evolvement of Arabic thought. Hourani's immense knowledge of the early modern social, cultural, and political history of the region equipped his analysis of ideas with comprehensive historical depth and makes his book frequently cited. His masterpiece, which covered almost a century and a half of streams of Arab thought, served for many generations as the fundamental source for the study of modern ideas. Although Hourani's

[16] Jamal Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 35–48.

[17] See chapters 5 and 6 in Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community: An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804–1952* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

[18] For additional early works on intellectual history, see Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad Abduh* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); Raʾif Khuri, *al-Fikr al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Makshūf, 1943); Hamilton A. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947).

[19] For the vast influence of Hourani's book on scholarship as compared to other works on intellectual history published before 1970, see Donald Reid, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: Twenty Years After," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14, no. 4 (November 1982): 549–550.

work largely shaped the methodological approach to the study of Arab liberalism, the hope is that after the passage of over fifty years, questioning the methodological approach of his book would be making a contribution to the field.

Hourani uses the combination "liberal age" to indicate the intellectual history of the Arab regions (predominantly in the Levant and Egypt) between the years 1798 and 1939. After Hourani's book, the combination "liberal age" and consequently "liberalism" came into widespread use in Western historiography for describing the intellectual atmosphere or political streams of certain defined historical categories not only in Egypt but also in the other Arab countries. Perhaps one of Hourani's most important contributions was that he firmly planted the methodological foundations for conceptualizing the political ideology "liberalism" in research.

Many historians criticized Hourani's use of the term "liberal age" and wondered if it could be accurate to designate an age that witnessed despotic rulers such as Muhammad ʿAli, ʿAbd al-Hamid II, and the Young Turks as "liberal." Other comments addressed the methodology that blends the study of systematic thinkers with the study of journalists and politicians.[20] Subsequent work criticizes the "arbitrary" chronological frame that Hourani chose to demarcate the beginning and end of the liberal age.[21] Additionally, one might question the book's conceptual anachronism, which uses "liberal" to describe a historical period that was only partly acquainted with the morphology or the ideological principles of liberalism. In the same sense, encompassing under one political category socialist-positivists such as Shibli Shumail, pan-Arab nationalists such as Satiʿ al-Husari, and early apostles of Islamism such as Rashid Rida might raise questions about the justification for narrating the intellectual history of these scholars

[20] For selected early criticism, see Elie Kedourie, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939," *The Political Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1963): 217–219; Peter M. Holt, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 27, no. 1 (1964): 222–223; Malcolm Kerr, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 84, no. 4 (1964): 427–429; Hisham Sharabi, "The Burden of the Intellectuals of the Liberal Age," *Middle East Journal* 20, no. 2 (1966): 227–232; Reid, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: Twenty Years After," 550.

[21] Christoph Schumann, "Introduction," in *Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East: Ideology and Practice*, ed. Christoph Schumann (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.