

# **Liberalism and the Egyptian Society: Crisis and Evidence**

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## Introduction: Towards the Liberal Option

*Liberalism and the Egyptian Society* is both the title and topic of this book. Urgent needs arise due to the crisis witnessed at present and the requirement for a guide that envisages the future. These needs relate to visions and ideas that disclose themselves upon discoursing, to the ambitions of people when deliberating on the present and the future, while other needs spring from my reserve of personal lifelong experiences.

Looking back in retrospect, specifically the year 1987, a study of mine was published in one of the Egyptian papers, entitled “Inauguration of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. In this piece I prophesied the end of the era of ideologies. Early on around that time I knew that the time is over when the individual is able to live a vision assuming that the future of history could be disciplined to serve an ideology. Also, I acknowledged that the time is over when the individual may forsake his/her awareness and right to pose questions, give in to ideological answers that claim exclusive possession of the whole truth and relieve the individual from the burden of inquiring or even the effort of finding an answer. Because Liberalism is the opposite of ideology, I opted for the Liberal choice.

The Liberal choice acted as a standpoint against any form of ideology. It also came to espouse free consciousness – I still believe and reiterate that ideology irrespective of its type is the grave of consciousness. Thus, it is our right, individuals and groups, to pose new questions and search for new answers. Keynes was right when he described his liberalism in his article entitled, “Why am I a liberal?” as being liberal in the sense of being open to all new ideas rather than being captive to regressive intellectual programs, and as having an open mind to all that is new. In his book **Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics**, Anthony Giddens was right to make a society’s liberalism pending on being receptive to innovations, and freeing oneself of the captivity of all that is old, in order to comprehend the changing reality against the ever-renewed information; and pending on dealing with reality with a new way of thinking predicated on the information inflow.

Free consciousness is what liberalism seeks to achieve. It is a consciousness that is expressed by both the individual and the society. It frees the person from all forms of ideological coercion, but not from options and duties. There cannot be a liberal without social, political, and cultural choices, simply because the liberal is a responsible person. Moreover, there cannot be a liberal without commitments opted for and undertaken through conduct, simply because a liberal is a committed person. Such choices and commitments are essentially social and decline being reduced to individual selfishness. Those who are self-absorbed – whether through isolation or through hegemony over society – are not liberal, as in both cases they stop to be free. The person imposing isolation upon himself/herself allows for the exclusion of the other by force. This is not a liberal standpoint. On the other hand, he who seeks to dominate others accepts to coexist in a non-free society, and again this is not a liberal attitude. Perhaps what is meant here is that free individuals cannot live in a non-free society, and vice versa. Such is the liberal social equation for both the individual and the society.

The free individual and the free society are not subject and predicate in a written statement, they are real needs for the people, the people’s future, and the future of the coming generations. The past history testifies to slaves – under the yoke of lashes –

have built bridges, paved roads, cultivated lands and so on so forth. However, they were not able to defend their accomplishments; they might have not even been willing to defend them, hence stopped to be free. However, in the future of history liberalism wants for people to accomplish and defend their products; so that they would be free in the social liberal sense of the word.

Because liberalism seeks to achieve freedom for the people, it is aligned with the principles of civil society. Such principles reject social marginalization, be they social, political, religious-based, or ethnic. These principles reject poverty and corruption as well, because poverty strips the individual of his/her freedom and his/her right to be perceived as a human being by himself/herself and by others. Moreover, corruption is rejected because it entails the exclusion of law and the principle of equality, which is never tolerated by liberalism. Such is the case not only due to the fact that equality before the law is the very first stance that liberalism took vis-à-vis feudal hegemony, but also because inequality before the law means that some will monopolize the circulation of privileges, and that some people will cross the thin line between making and looting money. This thin line is very tough, however, where social liberalism is concerned. Under this frame of reference, the individual is entitled to work to amass a fortune, but is not entitled to plunder it.

Equality before the law, as advocated by liberalism, protects the poor, the vulnerable, as well as the state sovereignty. Indeed, unlike what is propagated by many, there is no conflict between liberalism and the state, nor the state and civil society. Liberalism calls for a civil, democratic, and effective state, having commitments towards society and playing the role of the guard of the idea of freedom. Moreover, it advocates for the presence of an active free civil society with social and political commitments and playing the role of the guard of state sovereignty. However, if the state shares sovereignty with institutional corruption – what sovereignty remains to be protected by civil society!

Hence, liberalism objects to the sharing by the state of sovereignty with groups representing institutional corruption. Furthermore, it finds reprehensible that the state sovereignty is delegated to an executive power that monstrosly turns sovereignty to absolutism and tyranny. In either case, both the individual and the society will not be free, the law will be absent, not simply in the sense of not being respected, but also in the sense of not being just. Corruption and absolute power will never respect the law and will not hesitate to legislate unjust laws. In fact, they will deprive people of their right to discuss laws in their pursuit of justice and serving public interest – whereas liberalism advocates this right and codifies it.

As people participate in discussing the laws, in managing their affairs, in free and honest elections, etc., they participate in establishing the correct formulae for the future. The aim is progress for the individual and society. Progress is the ideal of liberalism. However, it carries with it the risks of a crisis, and the degree of risk is much higher then. It is true that risk is everywhere, and those who seek absolute security, will only find it in the silence of death but never in the din of progress.

Because progress carries with it risks and crises, no society opting for it will ever be able to deal with and overcome crises without free positive, proactive, and responsible individuals. That is to say, only free societies are able to overcome the crises of

progress. This type of society is the one capable of turning qualitative variation among free individuals (in terms of capacity and skills) into competitiveness rather than combativeness. This margin of effort saved is an investment for the overcoming of progress crises. Also, this type of society is the one capable of modernization at a faster and more efficient pace. Given that modernization is the one of the mechanisms of confronting progress crises, this free society that acknowledges the right to competence as part of the overall right of citizenship, and that grants each individual his/ her duly deserved position, will be more efficient in accomplishing the mission of modernization. It will be more efficient than other societies that offer positions for individuals not qualified, and that allows such incapable individuals to exploit their positions to gain rewards and unjustified and not-earned- for privileges. By way of digression, in one of the non-free societies an official announced the disbursement of extravagant incentives for those participating in modernization and development. As time elapsed, people did not see any modernization or progress, however, they are still wondering about those who received the pay! In free societies we do not encounter extravagant rewards for those who participate in development, because the participants are practically “everybody” who contribute with their own free will in their capacities as both individuals and a society. Their reward is that they get to see modernization and development come true in reality and not in the daydreams.

Talking about reality that is made by the free will of individuals and society, I am not focused on a utopian liberalism pursuing a mirage. On the contrary, I am focused on a social liberalism that holds the strings of the possible. Confidence in people is possible, the call to free elections is possible, eradication of poverty is possible, controlling corruption is possible, participation by people in the management of their affairs is possible. It is understood that this “possible” will be precluded at times, because it can obliterate the privileges of some. Nevertheless, although historically there had been enemies to freedom, still some of those who obstruct the road have legitimate fears and are entitled to express and discuss them, particularly that some have tried to define liberalism as a separate ideology excluding the “other”. Once again, liberalism is the antonym of ideology and rejects exclusion.

It is true that there are some disadvantages resulting from economic reform policies and programs, which were condemned by various liberals. I would like to add in this regard that there is a difference between economic reform policies fostered by liberalism, and other policies under the same name applied by governments and recommended by advisors and institutions. Social liberalism denies monopolistic relationships because it opts for just competition, and rejects slow non-transparent legal procedures in litigations concerning market transactions because it only acknowledges the rule of law. In its vision concerning economic reform, privatization is not simply the long list of sales that acts as an end in itself, rather it is a mechanism for ascending the technological ladder. Privatization is a mechanism for re-investment in more developed industries and for raising the level of productivity. Ascending this ladder, some may lose their jobs, but new jobs will be created for others.

In its vision, economic reform can only be complete through the legalization of property rights, including the rights to property for the poor. Moreover, the disclosure of the source of wealth is another element requisite for economic reform; no wealth can be legalized, if the sources thereof are outside the boundaries of law. Some may believe economic reform to mean ‘let the rich amass more fortune, and let the poor to

their destiny'. However, this is not the mindset of social liberalism, which believes that economic reform calls for speeding up the rhythm of growth, hand in hand with increasing the income of the poor. It also calls for allowing individuals the opportunity to make a fortune. Nevertheless, it precludes the looting of such a fortune via corruption, abuse of power, exploitation of monopolistic privileges, etc.

I am aligned with social liberalism. I am aligned with the ambition for a better future society, where freedom, accountability, law, development and progress, citizenship rights, efficiency, self-confidence, free and honest elections, peaceful delegation of power are always present. I believe in a free society with free individuals who believe in combating poverty, and resisting corruption. I feel that the Egyptian society and the Egyptians are worthy of all of that. Without such, Egypt will lose its identity. Indeed the Egyptian identity is the objective correlative of Egyptian modernity. Hence, when Egypt fails to interact with the spirit of its age, it will lose its identity; and because the spirit of the times is freedom, then Egypt that does not interact with freedom is the non-modern Egypt – is Egypt with no identity.

This Egyptian society, which deserves a better life, is living a crisis with liberalism indicated by the words of the first line of my introduction. This is why the first chapter of this book tackled the illustrations and the roots of this crisis in an attempt at having a closer look thereat and to answer some of the questions surrounding it. Chapter One also re-reads the historical heritage of Mohammad Ali state, in order to apprehend the dialectic of the relationship between the constants of the state and the concepts of liberalism. The second chapter addresses liberalism and its social role, the attitude and the responsibility thereof towards poverty and its resistance, the confrontation of institutional corruption and dilapidating bureaucracy, the role of the responsible individual as a liberal value, and finally liberal political choices seen through a divergent democratic perspective.

The third and last chapter is itinerary that delineates a bridge for the future of liberalism in Egypt. It attempts to explore the mechanisms for building confidence between liberalism and the Egyptian society. The people's self-confidence was found to be the key. Thereafter came the choice between prioritizing building a liberal political society, on the one hand, and the formation of liberal parties, on the other. The chapter also proposed terms for the liberal media discourse, as well as a new reading of the Liberalism-Islam problematic – which is indeed a decisive milestone on the future path of liberalism in Egypt.

## **Chapter One**

### **Liberalism in Egypt: Manifestations and Roots Of the Crisis**

To begin with we have to admit that indeed there is a crisis with respect to liberalism in Egypt having several manifestations, such as the following:

1. The recent legislative elections (2005) witnessed a clear and acute withdrawal of liberalism-oriented parties, only receiving 1.8% of the total number of seats in the People's Assembly. Moreover, all parties (liberal or otherwise) put together only totaled 35% of the seats
2. All political parties, after defeat, seemed incapable or unwilling to undergo any intellectual revisions. On the other hand, since revision in itself is an expression of liberal dynamism, irrespective of the political orientation of the party, the absence thereof casts shadows of suspicion on the existence of this vitality to start with in the Egyptian society.
3. Some restrictions are still present and pressuring political reform internally. The political equation still accepts exclusion; and as long as exclusion is acceptable, this means that liberalism is in a crisis.
4. The Egyptian culture still seems to be more biased towards ideological references, and is in turn more closed upon itself, which deepens the crisis of liberalism.
5. There is space that fosters the thriving of marginalization in the Egyptian society. The reference here is not merely to social marginalization suffered by the poor, but extends to other form of marginalization, including that of the public opinion.
6. The time taken by the Egyptian citizen in finishing the business thereof in government affiliated agencies is very long. On the other hand, services offered are worsening, and at times, reaching limits below the minimum requirements of quality specifications. Thus, the Egyptian becomes the captive of wasted time and poor service, which restricts the liberal freedom of the individual and places both the human being and liberalism in a crisis.
7. The concept of liberalism does not have an impressive presence in the Egyptian mass media (visual and audio). Moreover, even in the limited space offered to it, the interviews do not deepen it, nor is it permitted to become a topic for discussion in talk shows where live phone calls are taken from the viewers/listeners. On the contrary, the voice that is heard more clearly in the media is one that incessantly attacks liberalism and deals with it as a cultural and a political rival.

Such and similar manifestations of the crisis of liberalism in the Egyptian society are surfacing and call upon us to try and unravel the roots of the crisis. It is high time to try; by way of trying we shall pose questions that call for answers:

- a. Is the culture of the Egyptian elite harmonious with liberalism?
- b. Does the popular Egyptian culture carry negative impressions about liberalism?
- c. Are there mistakes committed by Egyptian liberals in their presentation of liberal thinking?
- d. Can the Egyptian historical heritage since the time of the establishment of Mohammad Ali's state and up to now be developed towards liberalism, or are the constants thereof biased against it?

#### **First – Crisis Questions: Attempts at Answers**

I believe that the answer to the first question is yes. The Egyptian elite do not seem to be harmonious with liberalism. However, I do not particularly mean all those who belong to it, but the predominant majority thereof. Moreover, I do not mean the ruling elite only, but the opposition as well. I would like to address the reasons for this:

1. It is the elite where the majority does not believe in the people, but even in some cases fear them<sup>1</sup>. One of the statements reiterated by them is that the Egyptian people are not yet mature enough to practice democracy. In fact, one of its mainstays is that the choices of the people cannot be trusted due to the high levels of illiteracy<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, many times are the people insulted. In this regard I will give two examples from the late legislative councils elections. After the announcement of the results, some of the candidates explained their loss by the fact that their rivals had bought the votes with money, forgetting in the process that it were those people who gave them their votes with absolute majority in previous elections. They also forgot that those people refrained from giving their votes to them because they were practicing their right in political and parliamentary evaluation of the performance by the MPs. Thus, instead of acknowledging the right of the people to evaluation and selection, those who lost started accusing the people with bribery. At the same time, in another example, I was surprised to hear from a person belonging to the cultural elite and whose reform intentions are very credible that he will not go to the ballot boxes. I was not astonished at the choice, which is a personal choice that must be respected, but at the justification. He told me to my surprise that he cannot stand in the same line and in front of the same box with illiterate voters, because his vote cannot be equal to theirs.

2. Because it is an elite that does not believe in the people, it does not address their consciousness, but their instincts. This is why it sometimes tries to attract such instincts through the use of demagogic statements that include explicit or implicit attacks on liberalism maintaining that liberalism is against our values and traditions and calls for atheistic secularism etc...

3. It is the elite that did not free its culture of the mistaken understanding of the Pharaonic era in Egyptian history, which maintains that Egypt as of the onset of history had been governed by the will of the despotic Pharaoh, and that every Egyptian is essentially a small despot, which entails the impossibility of turning towards liberalism. Unfortunately, there were many writings that entrenched this mistaken understanding and raised to the level of the common sense that has for long impeded people's self-confidence and their ability to achieve the turn towards liberalism<sup>3</sup>. Hence, people did not find anybody telling them the truth – that the Pharaonic era was not in itself absolutely despotic, but witnessed popular uprisings against the unjust despotic ruler. In fact ancient Egyptians, required their rulers to have two characteristics: justice and mercy. Even the pyramid that had remained a symbol of despotism, in its representation of the Pharaoh's relationship with his/her

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<sup>1</sup> One of the phenomena of the contemporary political history of Egypt show that the major political events were not launched by the elite followed by the people, but by the people followed by the elite. This is why sometimes, some of the individuals of the elite fear the movement of the people, which can be a step ahead leading to the creation of a new elite replacing the existing one.

<sup>2</sup> The law itself does not preclude the illiterate citizen from administering the wealth thereof, so how can anybody preclude the illiterate person from administering his/her vote.

<sup>3</sup> I believe that one of the main tasks of liberalism is the re-reading of the history of the Pharaonic era and emancipating it of the misguided conception of the relationship between ruler and ruled, and in turn freeing people of the illusions of the despotic pharaonic genes in their hereditary structure! Indeed, these illusions are circulated by many writers.



people, was not so. On the contrary, and metaphorically, it was an oral social contract between the Pharaoh and the people. This contract is based on a religious conviction that the Pharaoh believes that when the Pharaoh dies, his soul will ascend the vaults and the corridors up to the pinnacle of the pyramid where Horus will be waiting to take the soul up to Heaven. When the Pharaoh's soul rests in Heaven, then all the souls of the Egyptians will end there through his intercession. Thus, we have a contract where obligations are shared: the Egyptians committed themselves to build the pyramid to help him go to Heaven, in return the Pharaoh is committed to open the gates of Heaven before all Egyptians. This could be a strange contract according to our own modern standards, but it could not have been an illustration of despotism at the time.

Yes is again the answer to the second question as well, which says "Does the popular Egyptian culture have a bad impression about liberalism?" Indeed, popular culture correlates liberalism and libertinism, liberalism and the contempt of religions, liberalism and irresponsible individualism, liberalism and social and familial disintegration, liberalism and ferocious accumulation of wealth, liberalism and the increasing rates of poverty. All of this was further entrenched by the fact that:

- a. The elite deepened the idea that liberalism is an idea imported from the West, and because the West applies wrongful policies in the region, the popular culture, liberal in nature, condemned western policies and linked both.
- b. The elite, of all backgrounds, have dealt with economic reform programs, as the "sole liberal model", and because of the shortcomings of such programs, all of these shortcomings have been projected on to liberalism by the people. Thus, they did not get the opportunity to realize that liberals themselves have censured such disadvantages, and from a social liberal point of view, their criticism was even harsher than that of others.
- c. The idea of despotism as an inherent psychological trait in the Egyptians inherited from the time of the Pharaohs was entrenched; hence, the impossibility of the shift to liberalism. This has placed the Egyptian before two choices: either condemning the self and the history, or liberalism. Certainly, the Egyptians opted for condemning liberalism to avoid the embarrassment of self-censure.
- d. Some, under the name of liberalism, have appropriated the democratic rights of the poor, which was done publicly. The justifications went as follows: the taxpayers are the ones who have a democratic right to voting so that they would be able to monitor the manner with which the government spends their money. Because the poor do not pay taxes, but are rather paid subsidies, then their right to vote lapses. Thus, the poor, a significant category in the Egyptian society, have found themselves confronted by claims stripping them of right to citizenship, under the name of liberalism. This, of course, left them with a negative impression, which was emphasized further when the advocates of the theory of appropriation in the name of liberalism continued to advise the poor with patience until economic policies succeed in eradicating poverty, and then they would be able to go to the ballot boxes.

In fact, liberalism has become a notorious concept in the Egyptian culture, due to negative heresy, and coercive options. Egyptian liberals have tried to find an outlet, however, their attempts were somewhat limited and faulty.

This leads us to the third question: Are there mistakes committed by Egyptian liberals in their presentation of liberal thinking? I believe that for third time in a row is “yes”, there have been mistakes; Egyptian liberals did not try to have a social base<sup>4</sup> of their own, and did not come closer to the people by offering them services and entering into a dialogue with them. It is true that there have been exceptional liberal cases that tried to overcome the problem, but they remain to be an exception.

Distance from people was not the only mistake, nevertheless, another mistake existed. Egyptian liberals presented their project as an “abstract model” that could only be wholly accepted or wholly denied. Therefore, they deprived themselves, liberalism, and the people, of having their project discussed, because it was not offered for discussion to start with. Egyptian liberals, in general, did not present an intellectual contribution to solve the problems of their reality, such as the relationship between liberalism and the social dimension, liberalism and religion, liberalism and moral commitment, etc.

Egyptian liberals committed yet a third mistake. It seems to me that their abstraction of the model of liberalism, on the one hand, and their awareness of the withdrawal of the Egyptian culture into closed or semi-closed circles, on the other, had tempted them to try and theorize liberalism in the form of an ideology. I believe that this mistake is a complex one, both tactically and methodologically: with respect to tactics, the transformation of liberalism into an ideology does not allow it to stand in confrontation of other ideologies in the Egyptian society. Other ideologies are more intact and infiltrated into the dominant cultural surroundings, more compatible with the composition of the elite, and do not have the negative impressions facing liberalism in the popular culture. Indeed, this shifting of liberalism into an ideology made it lose the battle tactically before starting it.

At the same time, methodologically the molding of liberalism in an ideological cast defies the very nature of liberalism. I could even say that it is a denial of liberalism by liberals. Indeed liberalism is the antonym of ideology, for the following reasons:

1. Ideology by definition is a firm control system that starts with beliefs that reject discussion and ends with inevitable results that require acquiescence. However, liberalism lists its introductions on the agenda for discussion, and places its results in the midst of investigation.
2. Ideology decides by itself and for itself ultimate goals at which the history ends and thus denies crisis. This is why ideology can reconcile itself with the example of a “absolutist society”. Liberalism, on the other hand, does not seek such ultimate goals nor does it yield to the denial of crisis. For liberalism the goal of history is to remain within history, and crisis is a phenomenon inherent in the past and future of history that cannot be denied. Therefore, liberalism does not reconcile itself with the example of “absolutist society” and more importantly with being an ideology. Hayer was right to say that liberalism respects free activity without committing it to ultimate goals. Those who commit themselves to ultimate goals, are only risking the creation of an absolutist society<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> I almost agree with Fokoyama in saying that focusing on economic reform policies only does not lead the poor to vote for a liberal political movement.

<sup>5</sup> Hayer, F., **The Constitution of Liberty**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press , 1960.

A fourth mistake was also committed. Egyptian liberals did not focus early in their career on the crisis of the middle class, which has for long suffered the accumulation of weakness, and the feeling of insecurity – more accurately, the feeling of defeat. Because the Egyptian liberals did not pay attention to this crisis, they were unable to monitor the tendencies towards violence and extremism that started to thrive within the middle class<sup>6</sup>. When these tendencies were expressed, the crisis of the middle class was reaching its peak accompanied by the crisis of liberalism. This class is the carrier medium of liberal ideas and its crisis, is by nature leading to a crisis within liberalism in any time or place.

Egyptian liberals focused on condemning violence and extremism – both of which are condemnable. Nevertheless, they did not fathom the depths of their relationship with that of the middle class crisis. The relationship is linked to economic, social, cultural, and political factors. The crisis of the middle class has indeed led to the superficiality of the Egyptian culture. Extremism in particular is one of the manifestations and the results of this superficiality. It is difficult to imagine the growth of extremism except within a superficial culture or a cultural made superficial.

Yes was the answer for the first three questions, leaving us with the fourth which takes us from the domain of history to the vistas of the future. I repeat the question: Can the Egyptian historical heritage since the time of the establishment of Mohammad Ali's state and up to now be developed towards liberalism, or are the constants thereof biased against it?

### **Second – Historical Heritage: The abortion of liberal fetuses**

I believe this to be an important question when trying to unveil the liberal crisis in the Egyptian society. In my attempt to answer I will stop at my own vision (which is open for discussion) where I maintain that the Egyptian society has been living for two centuries in the state of Mohammad Ali. The term connotes the structural construction created by Mohammad Ali for his state, which I believe is still existent, despite the various political eras that came since (the khedives, the monarchy, the republican). The Mohammad Ali state is a big house established by one of the great grandfathers, wherein the sons and grandchildren live have lived for generations. Every generation would have refurbished the house from the inside, however, the house itself did not change, neither the number of the rooms, nor the structure, changed. The 1952 revolution was not an exception. The revolution ended the rule of Mohammad Ali's family, but did not confiscate the constants thereof, it only tried to revive it. Everybody remembers that during the Nasserite period, Mohammad Ali was celebrated in the history books taught at schools, which categorized him as the founder of Modern Egypt.

I believe that my vision is lacking comparative testimonies. The constants of the Mohammad Ali state maintained that Egypt is Cairo and Cairo is Egypt. All the events take place around the center city/capital. The situation did not change up to

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<sup>6</sup> In 1994 the Society called “Al-Nida’ Al-Gadid” published a notebook entitled **The Crisis of the Middle Class and the Value of Violence (Azmat at-Tabqah el-Wosta wa Kimat al-Onf)**, wherein I warned against the waves of violence and extremism to which the middle class will be taken. I also warned against the fact that the Egyptian cultural cycle is no longer able to be renewed, and as such will not be able to absorb the violence and extremism created.

now. Indeed, the bureaucratic system was and still is the ideal of administrative performance. Upper Egypt is an annex to the state rather than a province therein. Indeed, Upper Egypt has remained neglected for over two centuries. Education is the means of social dynamicity and as such is a reflection of a functional value to the side of which cognitive value steps. With this logic in mind, the educational system has exempted itself of the responsibility of eradicating illiteracy, and of creating a scientific basis. This exemption has remained valid for two centuries up to the present.

However, where liberalism is concerned, we are only interested in the pillars on which the foundation of this state was constructed. Indeed they have remained dominant throughout. The first pillar is “unaccountable proxy”. In the outset there was a disagreement between Mohammad Ali and Omar Makram. This disagreement concerned a “liberal issue”: Makram believed that Ali was “delegated” by the people and by nature of delegation he was accountable to them. Ali, on the other hand, believed that he was made “proxy” of the people and thus is not accountable to them. When Mohammad Ali had the last say, the principle of representation by proxy was victorious over that of delegation, and the right of the people to hold the ruler accountable was appropriated. In other words, the fetus of liberalism was aborted. The intellectual theorist of the state, Rifa’ah Rafi’ At-Tahtawi, was aware of all of that. Thus, when he translated the French Constitution, he added to the Constitution a statement saying: “As for the king/ruler, he will be held accountable by God.” This statement later became a tradition, thus the coming state constitutions did not incorporate any provision regulating the manner of holding the head of the state accountable, be he a khedive, a king, or a president – all of whom were to be held accountable before God, and not the people.

This state, as such, was not severed from liberalism. There was a liberal fetus always forming in the womb of the state and always miscarried. The first miscarriage was witnessed after the disagreement between Mohammad Ali and Omar Makram, and the victory of the former over the latter. This attitude leading to the miscarriage of liberalism was cloned later due to another statement launched by Tahtawi: “freedom... but.” This was the second pillar in the foundation, “partial freedom.” Tahtawi commended civil freedoms, “but” he was conservative in making freedom absolute under the pretext that the people are “not up to this license due to the incomplete civil upbringing.” He called upon expansion in education “but” not among the grassroots. This “but” remained active from age to age, for example:

- a. During the time of the monarchy, and after the 1919 uprising, there was a statement maintaining that the Egyptian farmer/peasant loves his land, “but” would not accept a diet except *mish* cheese (a type of cottage cheese that is preserved in hot pepper and much salt to last for a very long time without rotting). This statement acted as a social exclusion of the farmers/ peasants from the cycle of market exchange. This kind of exclusion is rejected by freedom.
- b. During the republican rule, and after 1952, a statement saying “Freedom all freedom to the people, “but” no freedom to the enemies of the people.” Again, this statement acted as a form of social and political exclusion of some social categories, which is rejected by freedom.
- c. Currently, the statement says “Democracy is the best choice, “but” it must be postponed because the people are yet immature.” The statement this time is excluding all the people, which is not acceptable to freedom.

The liberal fetus is aborted once again. I beg to differ with many studies, local and international, proposing that Egypt has witnessed a liberal era prior to 1952, and the revolution drew the curtains down on it. My vision takes another angle for analytical monitoring. Before and after 1952, there were liberal fetuses that were aborted.

Before 1952, there was a liberal party (Al-Wafd) that enjoyed massive popularity, however failed to reach power except for a few times due to rigging the elections. There was a Constitution that accepted multiple political parties, but refused the separation of powers and rather tightened the King's grip over all such powers without providing for a system of accountability. When one of the liberal intellectuals, Abbas Al-Aqqad, under the dome of the Parliament, wanted to raise the Constitution above the power of the King, he was taken to prison with the accusation of slandering the royal monarch – as such, another liberal fetus was politically miscarried.

This abortion was not only political, it was social as well. Farmers/ peasants participated in the 1919 uprising, played an influential role therein, and acted as a supportive backing to its leaders. By virtue of all of this they were entitled to some “liberal rights”, such as: the right to a better living standard higher than that of abject poverty, better healthcare, better educational opportunities for their children that could take them up the social ladder, the right to codifying their relationship with the landlords etc... . However, none of this happened, they found themselves at an extreme point of social marginalization. I repeat here the statement that says, they love their land but would not accept a diet except *mish* cheese. In other words, they are nationalistic with revolutionary duties, but not citizens with liberal rights. The peasants/ farmers were not alone the witnesses to this social abortion of the liberal fetus, the Middle class and the laborers were so as well.

The Middle class had its liberal economic project led by Talaat Harb. However, economic monopolies aborted it, the same monopolies that resisted the liberal rights of the laborer/citizen: the right social security, paid leaves, specific number of working hours, the formation of unions, etc... . As such, the liberal fetus was miscarried socially.

After 1952 there was a liberal fetus that was aborted as well. This is not controversial. The revolution canceled several forms of liberalism and restored civil society to its guardianship. However, it is also true that many of its social policies represented a social democratic project, which in principal targeted the enlargement of the middle class and its expansion within social coalitions that allow for expansion with the least degree of friction.

Upon considering policies such as agricultural reform, tuition-free education, adjusting public spending to the necessities of consumption patterns of the larger market and so on, we find that such are policies feeding into the expansion of the middle class. During this era in specific, the culture of the middle class started to spread to become the predominant culture in the sociological sense of the word, rather than being a socialist culture in the ideological sense of the word.

These policies have, in my estimation, created a social consciousness with liberal connotations for the lower classes, and not a social consciousness with leftist connotations. I remember when I was younger accompanying a relative of mine during his visit to one of the factories, I asked one of the workers about his aspirations. He retorted, “I want my son to pass the high school exams and to join the Faculty of Engineering, so that he will be an engineer in this factory and I would work under his management.” Upon contemplating this answer now, I feel that this worker had a liberal social consciousness. His son has become his private project and his objective is having this son join the ranks of the middle class that had been expanding and growing then.

I know beforehand that this analytical vision will be met by reservations from others. I respect their viewpoints, but I differ. The social discourse of that stage practically adopted social welfare as an objective on the list of aspirations. It was a discourse that included a car for every family, the importance of making household accessories more widespread (refrigerator and television) within lower classes, saving a “surplus income” that allowed the middle class and other social categories to recreationally consume spare time and so on. It is also implicitly understood that social welfare criteria represent the ideal of the extended middle class society, which is by nature inclined towards liberalism.

This extended middle class was the liberal fetus of the time. Its natural course would have led it to demand liberal rights, both civil and political, such as: multiple political parties, freedom of expression, freedom of the civil society, the resort to market relationships and ballot boxes, etc. Indeed, these demands were voiced in the mid-sixties of the previous century. The voice was clearer in the cultural and artistic expressions, which started to witness a type of cultural multiplicity. The various forms of artistic creativity (theater, cinema, novel and so on) formed a vent for free conversations within the middle class, which represented the growth of the liberal tendency therein. The conversations reached the point of criticizing the ruling regime, at the time, and forecasting its decline. This prophesy was symbolically announced by a liberal novelist, Nagib Mahfouz, in his novel entitled *Miramar* (1966). It is noteworthy that this novel was celebrated by **Al-Ahram**, where an extended discussion was conducted around it, acting as an inception of a liberal labor.

However, with the defeat of 1967, the middle class dwindled and started to become weakened under the yoke of economic crises. It also knew the path to immigration in pursuit of a better living standard, although the remaining individuals were the main reason for pushing towards more features of liberalism known by Egypt during the seventies of the twentieth century. But due to exhaustion, it was unable to push the fetus in its womb, which ultimately led to a deformed partial liberalism. There are arbitrary limitations on the formation of parties, there are parliamentary and municipal elections that are not honest, there are market relationships outside the boundaries of the law that usurp wealth through plundering public property without any value added, etc. – once again, the liberal fetus is aborted.

As such we approach an answer to the question. The pillars of the Mohammad Ali state, and for two centuries have been biased against liberalism. However, despite the several abortions of liberalism, the Egyptian society has not become sterile yet. Indeed, the several cases of pregnancy with liberal fetuses only deepens the crisis of

liberalism, and I do not believe that the society can overcome the crisis except by turning against them. This will happen through the founding of a new state, civil, democratic, and liberal: a state that will restore the dignity of Omar Makram in the face of Mohammad Ali; that supports the principle of delegation giving people the right to hold the ruler accountable; and supports freedom in the future without any “but”.

The current illustrations of the crisis of liberalism in the Egyptian society, the latent roots thereof, and the stakes placed on a new society established on civil, democratic and liberal values, call for a re-definition of liberalism and opening the files of some of the issues relating to it. This is important to allow the people to review these issues and engage in discussions relating to them; people are entitled to receive answers to questions relating to the extent of social commitment promised by liberalism, its standpoint from poverty and corruption, its relationship to the individual and what it means by describing the individual as being free, its political vision when offering democracy as a weapon for change, its options offered to open a third route gathering both the individual and society in an equation that rejects the uncurbed ego as much as the absolutist society.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Individual and Society: a talk about social liberalism**

Contrary to what many say time and again, liberalism did not coincide with the birth of the capitalist system, but has preceded it and has had its roots in the trading system. At that time, the civil society was created in the womb of the bourgeois concept of the market, which was different from all previous markets. This new market was dominated by monetary payment and all other forms of bartering or exchange known in the past were canceled; it rejected the suppression of desire under the impact of social privilege – in past markets, ordinary people had to refrain from expressing their desire to purchase something, if the prince or the feudal lord showed a desire in purchasing it<sup>7</sup>.

It is possibly noticeable that this market is closer to the idea of the law, only acknowledging money as the standard unit of exchange, and recognizing civil equality with “desire”. The law in that case was not an arbitrary rule issued by the strong against the weak, but the general abstract principle before which everybody was equal. In other words, the law was not a mere provision, but an idea. The provision, for instance, may maintain that everybody is equal before the law, but some may not acknowledge this equality. The idea, on the other hand, means that everybody recognizes this equality and at the same time formulates the concept of civil society, which had meant then the politically organized society governed by the idea of law. Thus, the idea of law was the first discovery of liberalism on both the individual and social levels.

#### **First – Liberalism: a social introduction**

Liberalism in its roots was linked to the civil society, which confirmed its initial social features. It is not a utopian, but social liberalism. These social features were further emphasized when it aligned itself with the ‘nation state’ and was active in its institution. The nation state was one of the manifestations of the idea of the law to which liberalism aligns itself<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, liberalism continued to play a role as liaison between a free self and a free subject, when it tried to put native language (the social link among the people within the nation state) as the subject of new cultural creations composed by talented individuals and consumed by all strata of the society – only to reemphasize the social dimension of liberalism<sup>9</sup>. This helped to create a social value for everything circulated by society outside the boundaries of monetary exchange. Hence, there was no contradiction, as some reiterate between the state and liberalism, nor was there a contradiction, as some say, between the state and civil society: liberalism joined them both. The writings of most liberal intellectuals during the seventeenth century, in fact, denied the problematic of this dialectic contradiction. Rangeon maintains that civil society is that which is organized politically and socially, it is the society wherein the sovereignty of the state is confirmed<sup>10</sup>. Bossuet, also wrote that civil society is a society of individuals socially organized under the

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<sup>7</sup> Historically, liberalism started as if it were a proclamation of the end of feudal hegemony.

<sup>8</sup> The ‘nation state expressed the idea of the law because, then, similar to the idea of money, it represented the standard unit of sovereignty, excluding all other forms thereof.

<sup>9</sup> I am rather biased to the saying that the national sense was gradually but surly deepened when the liberal consciousness touched linguistic potential.

<sup>10</sup> Rangeon, F., *Société civile: Histoire d'un Mot*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.



leadership of one government and one laws<sup>11</sup>. Hobbes was probably even more obvious, when he openly said that civil society is the state<sup>12</sup>.

I believe that social liberalism in maintaining that there is no contradiction between civil society and the state, is more harmonious with itself and stronger in confronting its opposition. Even those who cited Adam and Smith as a basis for marginalizing the role of the state cannot deny that in their writing the role of the state was not limited to maintaining internal and external security, collecting taxes, and offering public service, but extends to some public work, particularly when individual initiation is lacking. That is to say, that Smith acknowledged the role of the state in managing the market, forcing the enrollment of children (especially the children of the poor) in schools, the establishment of popular festival, and encouraging individual behavior seeking enjoyment and recreation – in short he acknowledged its role in managing the civil society.

Moreover, the most ardent defenders in liberal writings of private property rights, such as John Locke, were not severed from the concept of the state. When John Locke and Adam Smith later on wrote about such rights, they had a driving desire to separate the property of the ruler from that of the state, so that the ruler would not go to debt using the state property as collateral. This call for separation mainly targeted the fortification of the state political independence.

Social liberalism, as such, is not against the state as a social phenomenon in history and does not seek to relegate it from the future of history. Indeed liberalism looks beyond the classic definition of the state as the sum total of the power, the people, and the land. African tribes had known the three put together, but did not know the state. This is why from a social liberal perspective I redefine the state as the power, the people, and a project into the future. This project seems to be totally compatible with the adoption of the idea of progress by liberalism, and the deeply liberal expression of the French intellectual Andre Marleau: “the nation is its dreams.”

Opposition of liberalism did it injustice when they claimed that it seeks the marginalization of the state, and when they projected on it all the negatives of the capitalist history. Liberalism came prior to capitalism; they developed in parallel, but never united. It is true that the founding fathers of classic economics, such as Adam Smith and Ricardo were liberal, but it is also true that in their first drafts of capitalist theorization they adopted liberal concepts and sought to make them innate to capitalism. The most important of such concepts was the rejection of the land proceeds, because liberalism opposed granting privileges to some while denying others access to them. These proceeds, for the founding fathers, represented revenue not earned by work. However, capitalism was the one that turned its back against liberalism, when it turned into monopolizing capitalism seeking the proceeds for itself, granting privileges to major monopolists, and then suffocates competition, and with it the idea of progress.

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<sup>11</sup> See: Maspétiol, R., *Archives de philosophie du Droit*, Hachette, Paris, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Sirey, Paris, 1971.

## **Second – Liberalism and the Combating of Poverty: responsibilities and mechanisms**

Poverty was one of the early results of the capitalist system. Moreover, the founding fathers of classic economy could not free themselves from the mechanism of “minimum wages”. They tried to circumvent it with a social liberal solution that secured the lowering of working hours and fixing the monetary wages of the worker while lowering the price of the food commodities, particularly wheat<sup>13</sup>. Later, this solution took priority in the demands of labor unions<sup>14</sup>, who always insisted on lowering the number of working hours and keeping the monetary wages without any cuts.

Furthermore, social liberalism have never surrendered to nor coexisted with the phenomenon of poverty. Combating poverty takes top priority on its agenda for the following reasons:

1. Within the social liberal perspective, civil society is not only a synonym to a wide and active network of NGOs, but a society that acknowledges the civil rights of all individuals thereof, particularly the right to freedom. It is a society that rejects the circulation of social privileges within a closed circle of elites. As such, it is a society that refuses social marginalization.
2. Within the social liberal conception, the free individual is the one competent of developing and later expressing his/her capabilities. Tarzan, for example, as delineated through the cinema was not a free individual. It is true that he could express his capabilities, but could not develop them.
3. Therefore, poverty here seems to be the opposite of civil society, because it leads to the social marginalization of the poor. It is the opposite of the idea of freedom, because precludes the poor from opportunities to develop their capabilities.

Perhaps what I am trying to say in this regard is that the more rife poverty is, the more at risk liberalism is. This is why social liberalism adds to human rights the right to freedom from poverty. Everybody is responsible: the state, the civil society, and the poor. The poor are responsible in the sense that they should seize the opportunity, no matter how minimal it is to develop their capabilities and those of their children. Conquering poverty is not an end in itself; it is conquering it with free citizens.

Civil society is also responsible within the framework of social liberalism. The right to freedom from poverty cannot be entrenched along the same line of other economic and social rights incorporated in the International Declaration of Human Rights. The right to employment and fair wages, for example are granted to the worker, but they are preceded by his/her right to join a labor or a professional union. Such unions, in their capacity as civil society institutions defend the aforementioned rights on behalf of the individual who is member therein. But there is no civil institution that carries an artificial personality and has the mandates of defending the right of the individual to freedom from poverty. There is no union for the poor – despite the existence of institutions that grant their care to the poor. Then it is inevitable, within the framework of social liberalism to refer the right to freedom from poverty to, child rights as well as other rights to civil institutions, and to consider such rights as

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<sup>13</sup> This period coincided with allowing for the importation of cheap wheat.

<sup>14</sup> Labor unions is one of the civil society institutions, together with others it reflects a social liberal expression of the legitimate interests of all categories of society.

complementary rights for which the state is held accountable. Thus, when the state acknowledges the right of poor children to tuition-free primary education, this means that it must allow for the right of civil society to formulate associations and organizations for holding the competent minister accountable for the provision of this opportunity and its quality. Such organizations, also, in defending complementary civil rights will effect a civil awakening of the public power, fostered by liberalism. Such organizations can also struggle for empowering the poor to legalize their private property, and to have access to bank credit, and so on<sup>15</sup>.

The responsibility of the state raises the problematic of subsidy received by the poor. Indeed subsidies are one of the means used to combat poverty, some, however, believe that it must be cancelled because it makes the poor lazy. On the other hand, another liberal vision demand the continuation of subsidy with some rationalization, and I more inclined to it, not only because the sudden canceling of subsidization places the poor under unbearable living conditions, but also for the following reasons:

- a. Cutting subsidy, in view of liberal justice, calls for the termination of all forms of support received by other social categories. Therefore, when an investor receives a land plot at a token price to establish his/her projects thereon, this is a form of subsidy; when local producers enjoy protection via increasing the customs tariffs to preclude the inflow of imported commodities into their markets, and this is a form of subsidy. It will, therefore, not be liberally acceptable that the poor do not get their subsidies, while having to purchase local products at prices much higher than those of similar imported ones, should trade be free.
- b. Subsidies are not a social privilege for the poor. It is well known that liberalism rejects the approval of social privileges. Privilege is the equivalent of proceeds, but subsidies cannot be perceived as such, because they are not linked to private property, but subsidies are not similar to such rights.

Subsidy-giving is not all what the state can offer by way of combating poverty. The state cannot claim that it is combating poverty, only because it is providing for subsidies and is incessantly reminding of that. Social liberalism is by nature opposing monopolies, which lead to the bankruptcy of small producers and their exclusion from the production activity circle, and ultimately the reduction of the market and turbulence in the inflow of income. Monopoly also leads to the increase in prices above fair competition prices so that the purchasing power of the individual dwindles. All of the abovementioned are but streams feeding into the deepening of poverty. Economically, monopolies lead to the concentration of wealth; and when calculated, the concentration of wealth by 1% leads to deepening the phenomenon of poverty by 1.7%. Therefore, the state is responsible for passing and enforcing antitrust laws. The civil society is also responsible to discuss such laws, ensure their serious, and monitor their enforcement. Both responsibilities of the state and civil society are mandated by social liberalism.

Because liberalism is aligned with market relations, while rejecting social marginalization at the same time, the market must turn into a focal point for social attraction not repulsion<sup>16</sup>. This is why I find myself more biased to proposing the

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<sup>15</sup> It could be better when such organizations include in their membership activists from among the poor so that they would be partners in defending their causes.

<sup>16</sup> One of the basic ideas of social liberalism is the enlargement of the marketplace.

model of “survival competition”. I mean by this model, one that dedicates competition to illustrate the performance of economic projects, without issuing final sentences of bankruptcy on less qualified projects, but gives it a second chance through institutions that intervene on their behalf to put them on the right track again. By way of digression, survival competition does not mean that the market should lose its dynamicity. It does not give an eternal right of survival without efficiency, but only offers a second chance. Nevertheless, this necessitates regulating laws as well as flexible response from the projects.

Postponing the exit out of the market may help restricting the entrenchment of poverty without affecting negatively the market relationships. Survival competition believes in production democracy where all patterns of production (such as vanguard technology, large, medium and small industries, as well as workshops) coexist and are equal before the right of survival. The state, in this regard shall play its liberal role of legal regulation, i.e. the granting of legal status<sup>17</sup> to weaker patterns, such as workshops. This legal status helps such entities to defend their rights and deal with financial institutions. Market relations are not just mutual relations in accordance with the balance of powers, but reciprocal relations within a legal framework. Legal organization also allows small grocery stores, for example, to stand competition with supermarkets; this can happen if the state stipulates that supermarkets close relatively early, while permitting grocery stores relatively longer hours of work. This kind of competition can help find the most efficient means for combating poverty, i.e. the achievement of higher growth rates of real domestic product, and the increase of real income of the poor at the same rate.

**The civil society has still a role to play through its institutions and organizations**<sup>18</sup>, which I believe is one of the offensive strategic weapons of social liberalism. It is its role on emphasizing that the right to competence is part of the right to citizenship. We can combat poverty by the various previous means. However, defending the rights of the children of the poor to allow them the opportunity to ascend the ladder of social dynamicity, and ultimately be free of poverty, is the most pertinent. Liberally, the poor must feel that that poverty is not their destiny. Liberally, given that the free individual is most capable of developing the self and fulfilling the potential thereof to a maximum, the deprivation of the right to hold posts to which s/he is qualified – only on the basis of belonging to a poor family – is no longer an aggression on the right to citizenship but on the idea of freedom itself. Civil society with all its institutions and organizations must be active to fend off the attack. The more active it is, the more efficient it is in freeing the children of the poor from the snarls of poverty, which an expression of commitment to the rights to competence<sup>19</sup>.

Social liberalism opposes poverty and corruption and cannot coexist with either.

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<sup>17</sup> Legal status is not less important than the infrastructure because economic relations cannot be managed without either of them.

<sup>18</sup> Civil society institutions can play, for example, the role of the guarantor for the poor, before financial institutions, which facilitates the disbursement of loans for the establishment of private projects.

<sup>19</sup> The Egyptian history still remembers the suicide of a young man by drowning himself in the Nile because he managed to pass through education with flying colors, only to be denied access to a job after qualifying to it solely because of belonging to a poor family.

### **Third – Institutional Corruption and Dilapidating Bureaucracy: liberal resistance**

Social liberalism resists institutional corruption, not only for economic considerations maintaining that institutional corruption is only responsible for reducing the domestic product by 1% below the projected rate, and is as such one of the reasons for poverty and social marginalization. The higher the growth rates are, the lower the levels of poverty and the larger the middle class. Indeed, social liberalism combats corruption for reasons relevant to the concept of liberalism itself and its relationship with the state. Liberalism, as aforementioned, allots the issue of state sovereignty great importance. Sovereignty is a special legal status that licenses the state alone to determine its mandates, which is an indivisible distinction. Institutional corruption, however, demands for itself a form of sovereignty that is extraneous to the legitimacy of the state. As such, when the state is at peace with corruption, it accepts to share its sovereignty with it, and this is liberally rejected. I take this discussion further as follows:

1. I have illustrated beforehand that liberalism is capable of gathering both the state and the civil society in a relationship of coexistence. Civil society is the guardian of the state sovereignty, and the state is the guardian of the idea of freedom.
2. When the state accepts to share its sovereignty with institutional corruption, or to transfer its sovereign mandates to the executive power, as many autocratic states have done, coexistence between state and civil society seems to be impossible. The state will not have any sovereignty to be protected by civil society, and there will be no “freedom” to be protected by the state.

The position of liberalism opposing corruption puts also in a position opposing dilapidating bureaucracy. This requires some reference point. Every state has its bureaucratic/ administrative body. It is not correct at all that liberalism desires to put all the civil servants serving in the administrative body of the state to retirement. Social liberalism, nevertheless, refuses to turn state bureaucracy to a mere power whose posts are subject of dispute by some individuals in pursuit of personal interests – one of the forms of corruption. Social liberalism is against turning these posts to proceeds-producing posts where top bureaucratic officials receive unlimited bonuses and benefits without performing any corresponding work. I would like to borrow what President Clinton said in his 1992 campaign criticizing the status of the USA, by saying that top American officials get paid salaries that are one-hundred times more than the wages and salaries of the workers and employees put together<sup>20</sup>.

Once more, liberalism is not against bureaucracy as an administrative body, but is aligned to what is described by Quermone<sup>21</sup> as “mission management”. In other words, the administrative body must be aware of the achievement tasks, rather than busy itself with privilege hunting. In that case only, the bureaucratic institution balance sheet will cease to be the sum total of the budgets distributing bonuses and benefits down-top. Under allocation budgets, which spend the money requisite for operation (maintenance, replacement, and operational capital), institutions lose approximately 47% of their competence (13% for operational default + 33% for low competence + 1% for emergencies). Liberalism, nevertheless, seems to be more

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<sup>20</sup> Clinton, N., *How We Can All Change America*, Times Books, Division of Random House, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Quermone, S., *Les Regimes Politiques Occidentaux*, Seuil, Paris, 1986.

aligned with operating budgets, and deems the needs thereof a red line that cannot be trespassed.

I may add here that operating budgets supported by social liberalism help greatly in the “good governance” in the management of the state and institutions, which creates trust by the citizen and moves him/her to be an active participant. I have seen several examples and illustrations within institutions managed by allocation budgets, where staff went on silent strike: a form of passive protest that leads ultimately to the passivity and indifference<sup>22</sup> of the individual. In these institutions some of the workers impeded the work, while others have completely stopped to work, and others performed their function but without the requisite seriousness demanded by necessary standards of quality. As such, this feeling of frustration and passivity was contagious and transferred to the individuals dealing with such institutions, when they discovered that to deal with these institutions, they have to take passive initiatives at the backdoors thereof, because the positive initiatives were rather blocked by allocation budgets<sup>23</sup>.

Liberalism as such demands a transparent management of the state and the institutions, so that individuals will have the opportunity to make positive and creative initiatives. This leads us in turn to talk about the individual and his/her initiatives. There is a common mistake about liberalism and its relationship with individuals, reiterated in the writings of many when they formulated the statement that “liberalism is calling upon the individual to be free of any commitment”<sup>24</sup>.

#### **Fourth – The Responsible Individual: a liberal value**

I will stop initially at the common mistake that liberalism calls for freedom from all sorts of commitments. I believe that this mistake has its roots to the misunderstanding of Hobbes’s definition of freedom as the absence of external impediments to movement, which applies both to inanimate and animate beings and things alike. Some explained this statement by Hobbes that the individual, like the animal, is free to do whatever s/he likes, and because animals by nature follow their instincts without any moral commitments, the individual (so-called liberal) is invited to adopt the same individualistic instinctive behavior. This sounds like a much distorted explanation, however, and did not seek a deep understanding of what Hobbes meant. This statement was not tackling behavior, but rather the law of movement. The inanimate things do not have a behavioral choice, but are governed by the law of movement, such as the law of gravity. Therefore, for example, if a stone falls, its movement will

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<sup>22</sup> This is contrary to positive protest through organized and announced strike, which expresses the individuals’ awareness of their rights, a responsible courage for defending them, and a democratic call for others to participate in the dialogue about such rights. Indeed, courage and dialogue are the components formulating positive individual behavior.

<sup>23</sup> There is a simple example of this paradox. In one of the developing countries, allocation budgets have focused on the bonuses disbursed to the university leaderships more than the establishment of reliable laboratories, which precluded, despite the provision of the law to the contrary, researchers from having access to the materials requisite for their research. Some of those researchers wasted their time and effort to find their needs through negative approaches, which compromised their ability to review textbooks and hold scientific discussions; others made positive initiatives and were in turn unable to receive the required material. The outcome was loss for everybody. Social liberalism is not a lose-lose situation, it is a win-win situation.

<sup>24</sup> Such writings have in that case made liberalism, anarchy, and absurdity synonymous; and I do not believe that this standpoint can be defended.

remain free as long as the law of gravity is active, and no obstacle puts a stop to it. This is what Hobbes meant, and it applies to individuals as well.

The free individual, according to the aforementioned definition, is the one seeking to develop the capabilities thereof. Hence, the development of capability is the law of movement for the free individual in a social liberal context. Freedom, in that sense, means that the individual is not hindered by obstacles that impede his/her development of capabilities. The law of movement, in this context, does not allow for absurdist nor amoral individuals, but calls for a committed responsible individual who is:

1. The individual responsible to himself/ herself through commitment to the development of capabilities; and responsible to society through commitment to investing the potential opportunities offered by the society for this purpose;
2. The individual capable of postponing some of his/her desires, and accepting their fulfillment on phases;
3. The individual desiring to belong to civil society organizations, and in turn dedicating part of the spare time thereof to civil service instead of full dedication of this time to the consumption of cultural and recreational services with the aim of attaining personal enjoyment.

Responsibility then is the title of the relationship between the social liberalism and the individual. Because responsibility is a moral value in itself, liberalism does not relieve the individual from any moral commitment, but leaves it to the individual's conscience. Freedom is only made complete with free individual conscience.

This free individual is the one who is approached by liberalism. Individual initiative is not just an economic project wherein the person participates and undertakes responsibility. But it is more than that. It includes every idea proposed by the individual in the workplace or during a discussion; every effort exerted by the individual to put into effect his/her skills and capabilities, and every proactive initiative, etc... . In my view, individual initiative applies to the following liberal intervention:

1. According to the liberal ideas we are all equal before the law, and we must all recognize that.
2. However, due to our making as individuals, we are neither alike nor equal in our capabilities and skills, which means that we have to recognized that as well.
3. This recognition of the variance in capabilities and skills may lead individuals to succumb to others more distinguished in terms of capabilities and skills, or to hate such individual. Both cases are not acceptable liberally – neither succumbing nor hatred.
4. Therefore, there is a liberal problematic that must be solved, and the solution comes through individual initiative. When the individual feels that s/he has rights and freedom of taking initiatives, and that such initiatives will produce a type of self-satisfaction and social appreciation, in that case, the individual will not feel forced to succumb or hate the other due to his/her distinction.

To summarize this argument, I will go as follows: social liberalism when pushing towards activating individual initiative, the variance in capabilities and skills is

referred to competition, and neutralizes its position as a source of conflict. This referral and neutralization secure more the stability of society and its progress<sup>25</sup>.

This responsible individual and his initiatives are among the active fermentation agents for decentralization. Decentralization is inseparable from the liberal concept. However, the liberal connotations thereof require awareness with its historical roots. It has started in autonomous-rule areas under pressures of the fear of separation from the state<sup>26</sup>. Because social liberalism rejects social marginalization, decentralization is linked to fear of social separation from the civil society. This fear calls for developing the capabilities of the more vulnerable groups, developing cities, launching creative initiatives therein, and unleashing the freedom of expression for local cultures. In other words, adopting “the strategy of development where we are.” It is the right and the duty of human beings wherever they reside to pursue the development of this place. With this definition in mind, decentralization can only be achieved through a responsible individual that does not hesitate to take initiatives. One of such initiatives is defending, together with others, the rights of the place wherein the individual lives to development and non-marginalization.

This responsible person, as well, is what liberalism places its future stakes on. Social liberalism does not assume the annulment of disbelief in the future of history, because it does not depart its liberal consciousness that deals with crisis as a structuralist phenomenon in history and its future. This is why artificial intelligence is not fully depended on, because this intelligence alone, as Bonnet maintains is not capable of sorting information according to importance<sup>27</sup>. This is why social liberalism is betting on developing human intelligence that cannot be developed in the absence of the responsible individual.

All the social liberal arguments can be politically rephrased under a main heading, which is: public interest is a private matter for every individual. This heading is the topic of the political discussion on liberalism.

### **Fifth – Liberal Political Options: democracy of participation**

Initially, liberalism, on the political level, supports multiple party democracy, and backs free and honest elections and nothing else, moreover, social liberalism proceeds to the following:

1. Given that public interest is a private business for all individuals;
2. Given that democracy is historically linked to granting individuals the right to protecting their private interests; and given that public interest has become a private business; democracy must grant individuals rights to defend public interest.
3. Thus, political work should not remain limited to political parties only, but must be practiced by civil society organizations as well, with only qualitative difference in performance. Political work as practiced by civil society organizations, unlike that of the parties, does not seek to reach power, but only defending public interest.

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<sup>25</sup> Because the cost of competition is less than that of conflict, the social liberal society can employ the difference of cost as investment in development.

<sup>26</sup> As the case of Sicily in Italy.

<sup>27</sup> Bonnet, T.A., *L'Intelligence Artificielle: Promesse et Realites*, Inter.Edition, Paris, 1984.



4. Ultimately, higher the number of voters going to the ballot boxes is the main target of social liberalism. It is more aligned to the extended political market. Therefore, it believes that when the number of voters dwindles, all the political parties will be losers, irrespective of the result of the elections. This extended political market does not mean more voters, but the freedom to form political parties as well, as long as the principles thereof do not contradict the basic principles of the Constitution nor violate the rights of citizenship. This market also entails refraining from marginalizing political minorities and their deprivation of their political rights. A political minority in this context does not mean parliamentary or party-related minorities, but a minority with visions for the democratic development of political life, which are not yet supported by the public opinion majority.

In this extended political market, political parties are as such not class-oriented, nor ideological, but public opinion parties. Therefore, they are always invited to review their historical and ideological constants. Review is needed liberally, because this is a form of political revival that rejuvenates the party life cycle. On the other hand, parties that hesitate in engaging in review sentence themselves to political death.

All of this means liberal victory for the participatory democracy, or what can be described as real time democracy. Taking the political decision, discussing it and accepting or rejecting it is almost done on the same time. Hence, the decision should not solely fortify itself with legitimacy but also with its validity. Whereas the legitimacy of the decision remains attached to its commitment to movement through official channels, its validity seems to be pending on the support received from the public opinion, i.e. the participatory democracy.

This participatory democracy is not a negation of the public ballot democracy or representation democracy, nor an alternative thereto, but it reiterates what Duverger said that crisis begins when the majority in the parliament does not respond to the desire for change within the majority in the street<sup>28</sup>. In light of social liberalism, a number of comments stop us:

1. It is wrong to ignore public opinion in political decisions. The statement that public opinion must be disregarded when taking the political decision is behind not before time.
2. The political elite must be open not closed, open to new ideas and inclusive of men looking forward to the future with calculations of the present and capable of holding a dialogue with the public opinion concerning such ideas, with the attitude of exposing truths<sup>29</sup>.
3. The programs of parties in liberal democracies have a wider space of agreement, whereas disagreement is the domain of issues relating to civil rights and social margins. This means that political work attracts social margins and minorities demanding their civil rights, only to give the word civil a political dimension, and the word policy a new liberal dimension.

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<sup>28</sup> Duverger, M., *Echec en Roi*, A.Michel, Paris, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> The French intellectual Michel Rocard had a longstanding statement, which I admire so much: “we have to acknowledge truths before we are buried under them.”

These comments are streams that pour into the extended political market wherein the circle of dialogue among all active parties is widened. This dialogue is automatically generated and must do so. Without it, it is impossible to overcome political crisis. Without it, the participatory democracy is impaired. However, this dialogue is subject to certain conditions, such as:

1. Acknowledging the right to access correct information, as a basic right to the individual and society; dialogue cannot be conducted on the basis of incorrect and misleading information; hiding correct information means the lack of acknowledgement of the public opinion power, and at the same time diverges dialogue away from its objectives leaving everybody, democracy included at point zero.
2. Developing the culture of “experience”. I stop at an example: during a meeting for the Board of Parents, school administration, and educational experts, in one of the schools, the topic of discussion was evaluating the educational process. It was very clear that the dialogue among the various parties involved had many gaps: experts were busy explaining education theories, while some of the parents, or most of them, did not have a cognitive background about educational theories. The meeting extended for a long time, without evaluating the educational process, or indicating specific tasks for each party concerned. This situation could be replicated in other boards and concerning other various topics where the public, civil society, and individuals would be invited for dialogue within the framework of participatory democracy. How do experts converse with laypeople? This is one of the main questions posed by liberalism. My answer is that the culture of “experience” must be developed towards turning its cognitive content into tangible facts understood by others, and towards recognizing that others have comments that must be taken into consideration and questions that must be answered. They must be even encouraged to ask more questions and take part in giving answers to them<sup>30</sup>.
3. Dealing with the media within this communications revolution and multiple satellite channels, must be straightened. Free and independent media is a liberal objective that shall not be compromised. However, there are liberal fears from turning the media into a tool for disseminating demagogic culture, which is predominated with exaggeration. Dialogue cannot be conducted within a demagogic culture, because dialogue by nature is a conscious process not an emotional one. Moreover, the spreading of demagogic culture precludes the society from solving its cultural crisis. Thus, liberalism poses another question: how can intellectual endeavor and the media engage together?

The answer simply resides in having the “media” allocate time spots for intellectuals and hold free and direct dialogue between them, on the one hand, and the public, on the other. This dialogue’s significance will show when some of the concepts are reviewed. If we accept that culture represents the answers given by society to the question posed to it<sup>31</sup>, then intellectual endeavor, by definition, comes at the top of cultural activity, it is a new answer to an old question, or even a new answer to a new

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<sup>30</sup> I will resort to my personal experience in this regard and remember that when I was a student in the university, I had asked one of my professors a practical question. He advised me to try and find the answer myself. I had met him three days afterwards with my attempt at answering the question. He looked at it, thanked me, and discussed this answer with me. I realized that my attempt had really helped me apprehend his answer more deeply.

<sup>31</sup> Customs, traditions, values, etc. are ultimately answers to questions.

question. Because the public opinion within the framework of participatory democracy, and the growth of civil society as well as the extended politics market, will pose new questions and will recall old questions demanding new answers for all, the presence of intellectuals in the “media” and the continual dialogue between and the public shall enrich the efficiency of social liberalism through the following dimensions:

1. Politically: this dialogue shall foster the power of the public opinion in the political formula, because it will allow for creating a free consciousness precluding the fall of the public into the snarls of demagogic culture<sup>32</sup>.
2. Methodologically: this dialogue shall represent a qualitative leap in defining the concept of politics itself. In the past, politics was defined as “the art of the possible”, but in the future, I more inclined to define it as the art of managing development. This definition carries within it and expresses the spirit of liberalism. Development is a liberally strategic goal for individuals and societies<sup>33</sup>.
3. Socially: dialogue means a guarantee for the unity of the socio-cultural fabric of society, by way of avoiding dissenting cultural margins and their enclosure in a limited circle.

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<sup>32</sup> Demagogic culture can take the public opinion to supporting irrational policies, so that this public opinion itself precludes its control mandates, because how can the person control something irrational to start with!

<sup>33</sup> In short the main difference between the art of the possible, on the one hand, and the art of managing development, on the other is that in the former, the political decision takes the best available choices under the assumption of similar costs. However, in the latter, the political decision is inclined to the choice that can develop a future towards a better situation, provided that the cost is feasible. Borrowing the logic of investment, the art of the possible by reference seems to be the desire to achieve the highest revenue in a short term, and vice versa in the case of the art of managing development.

This last dimension takes me to a later addition. Social liberalism, not being an ideology closed upon itself, acknowledges the facts of contemporary societies and seeks to deal with them. One of these facts is the growth of the self cultural consciousness among ethnic and religious minorities. Social liberalism, loyal to its principles acknowledges the rights of minorities to expression; however, again loyal to its principles, it does not wish for the minorities to be separated from their societies forming separatist margins. As such, we are facing a cultural multiplicity that is essentially witnessed by contemporary societies posing two possibilities:

1. It is a multiplicity that restores to every culture the responsibility of solving its problems. In that case, minorities will turn into separatist cultural margins.
2. It is a multiplicity that refers to the society at large the responsibility of solving the problems of incoming cultures. In that case, minorities will turn into integrated cultural components.

I, therefore, believe that concepts posed by social liberalism seem acceptable in principle to the Egyptian society. I believe that talking about them will help build a bridge of trust between liberalism and people, but this bridge needs a guide in order to foresee the future of liberalism in Egypt.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Future of Liberalism in Egypt: Movement Guide and Confidence Building**

The movement guide towards the future of liberalism in Egypt requires introduction, review, and new ideas. It will take us from the opening to options relating to the precedence, up to the liberal media discourse with its proposed vocabulary, and finally a new reading of the Islam/liberalism problematic.

#### **First – People’s Confidence in Themselves: Guide Opening**

I believe that the introduction to the guide on the path towards building confidence in liberalism relates to the restoration of self-confidence to the people. People only regain their confidence when they come to believe that they are capable of change and are efficiently achieving it. The democratic option, which calls upon people to practice their right of voting in free honest elections, is a main heading in this introduction.

This democratic option will restore self-confidence to the people. They, in turn, will preserve it, because it is their weapon to change, as well as the option that will end a cycle in Egyptian history<sup>34</sup> and mark the inception of a new cycle of delegation and accountability under a new state. This new state is civil and democratic. It is the type of state that must take its position on the priorities of the liberal agenda. On the one hand, this type of state gives people hope in the future, and on the other, it frees them of the captivity of false consciousness that makes them wrongly presume that liberalism calls for abolishing the state<sup>35</sup>, or at least reduce its presence.

This cycle of “delegation and accountability” shall increase people’s confidence in themselves and in liberalism, particularly when they come to realize that liberalism calls for curbing “executive power”, and building a state ruled by law without losing sight of its social commitments. Liberalism does not advocate the cancellation of traffic lights on roads, but rejects the presence of a corrupt traffic officer who lures car drivers to disrespect the traffic light for a sum of money. Moreover, it refuses to have drivers who imagine that they are above the law as per a social privilege that justifies their disrespect for the traffic lights or the pedestrians.

The state ruled by law means so much for the Egyptians. For over two centuries (the historical age of the Mohammad Ali state) Egyptians did not come to know a constitution that separates the three powers, executive, legislative, and judiciary. Furthermore, inasmuch as they have been proud of their judicial system, they have suffered much to have access thereto, particularly when their complaint pertains to damage caused by the arbitrary executive power. Liberalism shall be in the company of the people, when the state announces that the path to independent judiciary must remain open and accessible. The codification and protection of rights for the weakest categories in the employment and social hierarchy is the cause of liberalism.

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<sup>34</sup> The cycle referred to in Chapter I.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter II incorporated the propositions of the opposing hypothesis, which show that there is no dialectic contradiction between liberalism and the state. Indeed, the nation state, in its modern sense, evolved as a response to the demands of liberalism.

The support and the backing offered by liberalism to the most vulnerable social categories with the objective of change and restoring confidence to the people is a matter of social commitment. Liberals must prove to these categories that they are dedicated to commitment. The enforcement of this commitment may be aided by proposals such as the establishment by civil society of an organization named “lawyers of the poor”, that offers legal counseling to the poor; and another entitled “democrats for the poor”, that focuses on urging the poor to have election cards issued, and help them in completing the procedures thereof, this in addition to introducing the poor to social liberal commitments vis-à-vis combating poverty. In brief, this introduction aims at maintaining the following: all the people must be consciously aware that democracy is their right, and they must believe in their capability of practicing it. It is not true that democracy is a political luxury not affordable nor achievable by the people, on the contrary it is their weapon to change for a better society. As such, they need it as much as they need self-confidence.

Because the talk is still on the path of restoring confidence to the people, some of the liberals, on the way of securing confidence building, must avoid declaring their fear of people’s choices when they deliver their votes at the ballot boxes<sup>36</sup>. This fear is ungrounded, and would necessarily place them before the test of the critical question by the people: if they are truly liberal, why do they fear our voting options, aren’t we entitled to choice? They would also inquire, what is the difference between those who deny us choice, and those who fear our choice? This test will not benefit anyone with its questioning and answering process. Let the people make their free choice within democratic rules respected by everybody. Those who accede to power via free elections have to be always ready to leave it, if the people will so through free elections. Only then, there will be no justification for the fear of options made through voting. However, there is a justification for posing yet another question: which takes priority in this movement guide, building a liberal political society, or forming liberal political parties?

Prior to attempting an answer I confirm that the question though speaking about prioritizing, it still does not place the options in the balance of “importance”; both are important and essential, it is even impossible to imagine the future of liberalism in Egypt without them.

### **Second – Liberal Political Society and Liberal Parties: Prioritizing**

We have ended up with a question on which liberals are divided. Some believe that priority should be given to the formation of liberal parties that confront other parties, and that the political victory of liberalism is pending on the success or the failure of the liberal parties in this confrontation.

Honestly, this is a viewpoint that deserves discussion. It expresses what could be described as the “gold-square” strategy. It is the square around which the conflict revolves. Once more, this is a simple strategy that can be compared to linear mathematical equations. However, in life, as in mathematics, these equations may not fulfill the demands of the solution, and remain confused at a dead end.

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<sup>36</sup> Some of the Egyptian liberals expressed this fear after the significant withdrawal of liberal parties in the recent legislative elections (2005), and the rise of other political powers. I believe that this fear is unjustified: the lesson learned is that liberal parties, or others for that matter, will not get people’s confidence as long as they are far from them.

In the case of Egypt, the formation of liberal parties settling the “golden square” conflict for their interest remains a faraway goal. There are restrictions on the formation of parties in Egypt; there is a yet not fully evolved civil society where the cycle of freedom is concerned; there are more deeply rooted political and cultural forces; and more importantly the speedy confrontation with the golden square might lead to the transformation of liberalism into an ideology, a mobilization force, which is something that calls for reiterating my early warning against becoming an ideology.

In the case of Egypt, and by way of answering the question, I am inclined to give priority to the establishment of a liberal political society. This priority does not stop at trying to create liberal parties, but that a whole liberal political community will pave the way for strong liberal parties. This implementation of this priority has the following targets:

1. The activation of liberal currents within all Egyptian political forces and parties, irrespective of their orientation or point of reference. In this regard it will be useful if:
  - a. Such currents push their parties and forces to put in place the rules of the game of liberal-democracy, where no one is excluded, where power is delegated by democratic and honest elections conducted under constitutional principles and rules approved by referendum;
  - b. Such currents can lead their parties and forces to undergo intellectual review, which will deepen liberal vitality therein<sup>37</sup>.
  - c. Such currents become a support for the liberal parties still being born, through what can be dubbed “liberal activation.”
2.
  - a. The success of such organizations in appropriating their right to political work in defense of public interest shall create a supportive public opinion. I would like to digress here about the suspicions expressed by some liberals in their faith in the Egyptian public. The bet did not stand, however, because one of the reasons for the problem was the focus of liberals on supporting civil society which did not coincide with supporting liberal political society, and there was a separation of the two sides, although they are faces of the same coin.
  - b. The success of such organizations in delineating the intersecting circles between civil and political rights shall enrich the liberal experience. I will digress again here by referring to the recent legislative elections in Egypt where the parties, including liberal parties did not nominate a significant number of women on their rosters. At the same time, the total number of female nominees was very minute. The results then came to lower this already diminutive representation to the minimum. Later on feminist organizations within the civil society led campaigns against these results. I noticed that in their discourse they had condemned the community of the “males/ man”, forgetting that the issue was the lack of a “free” community, and oblivious of the fact that

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<sup>37</sup> I remember a conversation I had with some Nasserites about “national capitalism”, which prevailed during the rule of Nasser, and acknowledged a role of national non-exploiting capitalism. I had called upon them to review this expression and develop it in the direction of distinguishing between corrupt and uncorrupt capitalism. Every capitalist who made his/her wealth by the rule of law, must be accepted in the new society, because he did not exploit anybody; but, the capitalist who resorted to illegal means, is the one who cannot be accepted because he exploited the people and harmed them.

the woman's rights shall always be granted at their minimum, as long as the society is not "free."

4. The talk about liberal social commitments, and hence the avoidance of this zero choice, which places them in a choice between bread and freedom. It is clear that when people feel that they can get both, the grassroots supportive of liberalism shall increase, and I believe that this can happen if the Egyptian liberals pay special attention to two dimensions, a political and a movement-related one:
  - a. Politically – there is a public call within liberal media concerning the importance of canceling the compulsory 50% representation provided for by the Constitution for laborers and farmers in the People's Assembly and other elected councils (Consultative, and municipal councils). I personally support this idea, which was provided for during an interim period and was justified by granting this category special immunity for supporting their rights. However, I believe that this incubation period extended longer than it should have, and the law has also permitted non-farmers, and non-laborers to belong to the two categories. Thus, liberals are right in this demand. However, they should not stop at that, otherwise they risk rivalry from these two categories, which would negatively affect their support for the liberal political society and their confidence in liberalism as a whole. This request should be accompanied therefore by another demanding the right for the laborers and workers to formulate political parties, if they wish so, or to join the political parties they find expressing their social interest.
  - b. On the movement level – must focus on offering social services to the people, especially the marginalized. The social service network, will not only transfer liberals to the focal point of activity, but will also offer evidence for the credibility of the social commitments undertaken by liberalism.

This attempt at building a liberal political society will also lead to parallel pressures towards freeing the Egyptian media from strong hold of the government. Ultimately, this would entail equal opportunity for presence on the media, which leads to the coming discussion.

### **Third – Liberal Media Discourse: proposed components**

No one can deny that the Egyptian media is to some extent moving in the right direction. Opposition opinions are voiced in the media. Some programs engage in arguments and debates. However, no one also deny that the liberals in Egypt are deprived of an opportunity in the Egyptian media. Still there is a ceiling for that media whose red lines preclude interaction between the public opinion and liberal ideas.

However, as I said before, building bridges of trust and confidence with the public is not just about opportunity, it is also related to the investment in the opportunity through an updated and more popular media discourse. I have the following propositions for the formulation of this discourse:

1. The discourse should not be a closed ideological one, not only because liberalism is the opposite of ideology, but also because if it becomes one, it will be doomed. Moreover, as aforementioned, liberalism as an ideology has a



very slim chance of winning in the confrontation with other ideologies more entrenched in the Egyptian reality. On the other hand, the closed ideological discourse will only turn liberal ideas into molds that are either accepted or rejected. Therefore, the media discourse must unveil the option of dialogue, which accumulates trust across time.

2. The media discourse must come close to the concerns and dreams of the people to effective.
3. The media discourse is conscious of the facts of the Egyptian reality. By way of example, I was giving a public lecture on the topic of freedom; I had a comment/question from the floor about the results of an opinion poll conducted by and Egyptian research institution around the concerns of the Egyptians. The results showed that 46.4% of the people were concerned about poverty, whereas only 16.7% mentioned freedom. The conclusion was that freedom does not represent a priority for the Egyptians. I maintained that I agreed with the results of the poll, but disagree with the conclusions drawn: those who talked about poverty were not turning their backs against freedom, they were rather demanding the combating of poverty in their pursuit of freedom.
4. This discourse must shed light on the principle of equality as an approach to citizenship rights. The desire for equality is ingrained in the Egyptian psyche, and was really invested in by the movie-makers who produced films showing a young man and a young woman belonging to two different social classes and gathered by love, while their love becomes victorious.
5. The discourse of the media must re-enact the introduction of the “human rights” culture, so that it would not appear as an alien culture with coercive dictates, but rather part of the human evolution. I believe that this should happen by inviting the Egyptian individual to look at himself/ herself as a human being first, before asking others to do so. When this happens, s/he will be ready to acknowledge the other as a human being, which will create a case of mutual recognition. It is true that the Egyptian history had witnessed eras of social and bureaucratic oppression of human beings, but still the Egyptian culture did not experience the phenomenon of the outcasts, whereas slavery had been long abolished from the Egyptian social system.
6. This media must enjoy the spirit of free self-criticism. For example, it must readily recognize some of the negative outcomes of economic reform, and to announce at the same time that there are liberal mechanisms to correct these results.

This discourse shall take the people across the bridge of trust in liberalism. Will every step taken, the negative impressions will be gradually dissipated. However, this discourse will not be able alone to overcome the problematic of liberalism and Islam in the Egyptian culture. This needs special treatment, so that the guide to movement does not lose sight of the track. This problematic is indeed one of the main milestones on the road to the future of liberalism in Egypt.

#### **Fourth – Liberalism/Islam Problematic: towards a new reading**

To begin with, liberalism cannot ignore Islam for the following main reasons:

- a. Religion is a major component in the Egyptian culture and cannot be reduced to the duet liberalism-people;

- b. The negative impressions in the Egyptian popular culture against liberalism, linking it to atheism at times and libertinism at other times have a reference point in religion;
- c. There is a misunderstanding in the west, especially after 9/11, that led to negative impressions about Islam as an intolerant religion that calls for extremism. The problematic became more obvious when we recall what some of liberals say that there is no conflict between religion and liberal democracy except when religion opposes tolerance and equality.

There have been attempts at solving the problematic through the expression of Islam in a Sufi framework. I do not believe that the attempt succeeded, but rather took us back in history to the crisis witnessed by the Islamic world in the twelfth century after the famous disagreement between Imam Ghazali and the philosopher Ibn Roshd (Averos). The disagreement in essence relates to the origin of knowledge: spiritual, as Al-Ghazali maintained, or rational and causal as Ibn Roshd maintained. When Al-Ghazali's views prevailed the Islamic world started to know the knowledge crisis which is still persists.

This led to a crisis in the Islamic culture. Muslims believe that they have the correct understanding of religion, in believing in Islam the last divine inspired religion and Mohammad the last prophet<sup>38</sup>. The crisis, however, resides in the fact that they have a great belief in their capability, with a very humble contribution to the intellectual history over the past eight centuries. The crisis as such represents a structural weakness in the Islamic culture, sensed by some Muslims. Some of the phenomena known in the Islamic world relate to this weakness, and I stop at two of them:

- a. The extremist religious mindset has many social, economic, and political reasons, as well as cultural reasons. Those who took extremes in religion wanted to take refuge at the superiority of their religion and to invest this to the maximum to balance the negative feeling of knowledge inferiority<sup>39</sup>.
- b. Religion is held on to on the level of formalities rather than essence, this relates to the crisis in the sense that interest in formalities is a mechanism for concealing weak contribution to knowledge.

Indeed, the talk about the development of education and the establishment of civil society and a new state, liberal, civil, and democratic is relevant to the Liberalism/Islam problematic, because it is directly linked to the approaches for resolving the knowledge crisis, and in turn the cultural crisis in the Egyptian society. I would like to conclude here with a statement that I have reiterated time and again: as long as the Egyptian universities rank very low on the list of world universities, the Liberalism/Islam problematic shall persist.

This problematic, therefore, calls for a deeper reading of Islam. When there was a disagreement between Al-Ghazali and Ibn Roshd, the former was Islamically wrong, and the latter was Islamically right. Prophet Mohammad, said "my religion is

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<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly, Christians and Jews have the same perception of their religions.

<sup>39</sup> The extremist trends could never occupy the center during the golden ages of Islamic culture. These ages have witnessed creative products that contributed to the knowledge of the human race at large. If this happen again all extremist religious trends shall dwindle.

rational”. I believe that this reading must seek to unveil the unity between liberal-civil values with Islamic-religious values. This civil-religious unity can be the path to overcoming our problematic here and lead to reconciliation between the parties involved therein. Indeed this is possible for the following reasons:

1. The responsible individual is a liberal-civil, and a religious-Islamic value. Islamically, the individual is responsible before his God and others. His responsibility does not stop at performing the religious rites, but extends to his responsibilities before others.
2. The rights of the people that must be overseen by the responsible person are not the sole point of unity between civil-liberal and religious-Islamic values, there is also the value “benefit of the people”. The liberal responsible person is invited to join civil society organizations, and defend the interests of the people, which is also called for by Islamic religious values. There are several prophetic traditions to this effect, and giving preference to those who spend their time in helping people, than those who spend all of their time performing religious rites. There is a verse that repeats itself in the Holy Bible and the Quran saying “the fruitless work is in vain, whereas the beneficial work has an everlasting impact on earth.”
3. The reference point of the human consciousness is also important. It was stated by the Prophet in his tradition “consult your heart, even if you are given advice”. The consciousness here is synonymous to the heart. It is a reference point that is further confirmed when the Prophet was asked, whether the believer could be a liar or not, and he answered, “No.” The connotations of the answer are clear. The liar betrays the human consciousness when dealing with people, and as such is not a believer, because he loses his consciousness.
4. The aforementioned discussion about the recognition by social liberalism of the rights of competence as an inseparable part of citizenship rights leads to another point of unity. Recognition has repercussions in the Prophetic tradition where he decisively announces that whoever takes charge of Muslims in any of the walks of life, and then allows somebody who is not qualified or competent to rule, he would have betrayed Allah and the Prophet. This acknowledgment by Islam of competence rights, is a recognition of citizenship rights. Competence is not the monopoly of Muslims, or men and not women. Citizenship rights are confirmed in another form of unity between Islam and liberal values, relating to equality before a just law. There is a Quranic verse maintaining, “if you rule the people, rule justly.” This verse is recognition of the principle of equality of people before the law, irrespective of their religious or ethnic orientation, or social status. It also recognizes that justice is law. Thus, changing the unjust law is a right granted to the people, and is Islamic as well.
5. Another point of unity is the domain of “freedom”. In liberalism, human beings are born free, and in Islam as well, Omar Ibn el-Khattab minatined that we have been created free by Allah. As such, the idea of the victory of freedom is both liberal and Islamic. A closer look at Islam shows that Islam never incited hatred for anything but injustice. God denied Himself and people injustice. Because injustice is the opposite of freedom, then injustice is non-freedom and vice versa. The victory of freedom historically is echoed by the Prophet in his saying: “rule can last among associators of gods with Allah, but not among the unjust.” Moreover, when the individual is free, with the same frame of reference of social liberalism of developing capabilities, s/he is very

much similar to the individual referred to in the prophetic traditions, the individual who needs to relinquish injustice in order to be able to develop his capabilities. The traditions also have cross-references to the free choice by the individual when he is addressed by the Prophet: “Take wisdom from whichever venue produces it.”

All of the aforementioned will not only create a path for overcoming the problematic of Islam-Liberalism. However, it can also open a vent for the rediscovery of civil Islam, which in essence does not contradict the liberal example of the civil and democratic state. The theocratic state had never been an Islamic ideal. Moreover, the history of Islam had never known this type of rule, and there is nothing that justifies its establishment in the future. As such, the relationship between democracy and Islam places itself in the midst of the guide to movement.

I believe that it is high time to have a reading that openly declares the absence of any provision in the Quran restricting the right of people to electing their ruler and holding him accountable. In fact, even the verse frequently cited as evidence is in essence counter-evidence. The verse says, “Obey Allah, the Prophet and those in charge amongst you”, it did not say “those taking charge of you”. The difference is great. The verse, as it means that the ruler was selected by the consent of the people, therefore, obedience to him is closely linked to his accountability to the people. This is why, Omar Ibn el-Khattab did not object when one of the people told him: “If we see in you deviation, we will straighten it.”

It is time that we know that Islam granted us the right to free choice of the ruler, and to hold him accountable. But it is also time to know that Islam did not offer, either in the Quran or Prophetic traditions, a theory for the delegation of power. Moreover, Islamic history had witnessed several forms for this process, which makes us ask: what precludes the delegation of power democratically? I believe that liberals and everybody believing in democracy must pose these questions to the people, to help them discover the answer themselves. When this happens they will realize that there is no contradiction between Islam and democracy, and that their relationship does not necessitate interpretation. Neither Allah, nor His Prophet will be disenchanted if the people go to the ballot boxes to choose their ruler and hold him/her accountable. I believe, as a Muslim, that this leads to their satisfaction.

Once again the Liberalism-Islam problematic can be resolved through the joint efforts of liberals and others. Among those others invited to work are the Islamic-oriented political forces. This effort can be fruitful on two conditions:

1. The compliance of the Islamic-oriented political powers with the rules of the liberal democratic game;
2. The prevalence of the jurisprudential rule: “wherever the interest of the group resides, is the law of Allah.” This rule was embodied by Omar ibn el-Khattab and replaced by the other rule “wherever the law of Allah is, resides the interest of the group.”

We hope that the guide to movement and the confidence building mechanisms are illuminating and send rays accompanied by liberalism, to emphasize its presence in the Egyptian future. The future will not be won except by free individuals feeling the importance of responsibility, and pursuing a free society looking up to development.

### **Conclusion: Vision in Brief**

This book wanted to delineate a path and hold its compass: a path that is indicated by the evident liberalism crisis in the Egyptian society. This evidence reflected the serious withdrawal of political parties (liberal parties in particular) from the legislative elections, the inability of the parties to hold intellectual revisions, withdrawal of the liberal concepts and the liberalists in the media, the widening of the marginalization space in the social component etc...

These evidences did not evolve from vacuum. The roots of the crisis are still alive. There is the elite that is not in harmony with liberalism: the elite does not believe in people, and addresses their instincts rather their consciousness. Moreover, their favorite topic is the attack on liberalism. This elite arbitrarily projects the Pharonic era to give evidence on the impossibility of the liberal transformation in the Egyptian society. Their impact extended to the popular culture, which is still dealing with liberalism as a notorious expression and equated it with irresponsible individualism familial disintegration, and libertinism. Ultimately, liberalism found itself required to pay bills not of its own: the bill for the people's rejection of some of the West's policies, the bill of some of the negatives that were associated with the economic reform program, and so on.

There has been a vicious circle combining both evidence and roots. Egyptian liberals have been trying all the time to break this circle. However, they had mistakes of their own. One of them was that they did not get closer to the people and did not create a popular foundation for them. They failed to present their project for discussion with the people. Some of them tried to theorize liberalism as an ideology. Moreover, they failed to pay attention early on to the crisis of the middle class, despite the fact that it is carrier medium of liberal thoughts.

The roots of the liberal crisis are not solely an issue of the elite, or the absence of a supportive popular culture, but also reside in the historical heritage, which had been for two centuries embodied by the state of Mohammad Ali. This state did not align itself with liberalism, but again the Egyptian society was not yet deemed liberally sterile.

Talking about the liberal crisis is closely linked to the definition of social liberalism. There are issues that must be reviewed and discussed by the people. There has been continuous emphasis on the link between liberalism and civil society: liberalism is not utopian, but social, and does not seek to abolish the state, but is an active agent for its establishment. As such, there is no contradiction between the state and civil society, because liberalism combined both. Social liberalism rejects monopolistic capitalism and criticizes it. It deals with capitalism as a developed phenomenon. In the background, liberalism remains the capitalist point of reference and not the other way round.

This redefinition revealed the standpoint of social liberalism resisting poverty, not only because it rejects the circulation of privileges, is predicated on the rule of law, and refuses social marginalization, but also because it believes in the free individual as the one able to develop his/her capabilities. Because poverty may hinder the individual from developing his capabilities, it also impedes the path of freedom. Hence, the right to freedom from poverty was deemed a full civil right surrounded by

the responsibility of the poor to develop their capabilities, the responsibility of the civil society to form institutions to defend this and other rights, with which the responsibility of the state converges to extend beyond the provision of subsidy to the poor to other tasks including the enactment of antitrust laws, the management of market relationships within a model that allows small producers the opportunity to survive in the market, and so on.

Also, we see the standpoint of social liberalism resisting institutional corruption and dilapidating bureaucracy. This resistance to institutional corruption is by extension an opposition to poverty, the more widespread corruption is, the more the poverty. It is also a form of defense of the state sovereignty. Social liberalism rejects the condoning by the state of institutional corruption so that the state will not lose its sovereignty. As for the rejection of bureaucracy, this is not a predetermined attitude vis-à-vis the state administrative body. Every state, naturally, has its administrative body, but liberalism is against the transformation of the public posts to posts where bureaucratic top officials receive privileges and bonuses without justification, while offering individuals only the minimum level of services.

The negative behavior of the individual is the subject of reservation of social liberalism. It calls for positive behavior that is proactive. There was a review of a common mistake concerning the advocacy by liberalism for the individual to be free of any commitment. Liberalism is not related in any way to absurdity or anarchy, instead it calls upon the responsible person to be committed to the development of his/her capabilities. Because the individual is responsible, s/he is necessarily moral. Social liberalism calls upon taking active initiative in order to secure the stability of the society, and to secure guarantees of development by making the talents and skills an arena of competition rather than rivalry.

The stakes placed on the development of human intelligence is one of the future bets, just as the participatory democracy is. This participatory democracy deals with the public interest as a private business, recognizes the right of civil society organizations to political work in defense of public interest, and deems the large number of voters turning at the ballot boxes an indication of activity, acknowledges the power of the public opinion and that people are the source of legality with their free interaction in forming a public opinion, and puts the political elite at bay through placing restrictions on them and through linking the political and civil domains etc...

The redefinition of liberalism confirms that the dialogue among all the politically and socially active parties is the engine of the system. This dialogue, however, can only be held on condition of the availability of correct information, the development of the culture of experience so that people can take part in the management of the activities of their life. This cannot happen unless the media allocates time spots for the intellectuals to engage in a dialogue with the public opinion.

The broad lines for the redefinition of liberalism wove the fabric of introductions as a movement guide that extends the bridge towards the future of liberalism in Egypt. The restoration of self-confidence to the people is the starting point, and shall not happen except through democratic practice as a weapon for change and through free honest elections without fearing the making of choice, as long as everybody respects the

rules of the democratic game. Towards the achievement of this goal of self-confidence there were proposals for the formation of NGOs serving various purposes.

A question posed itself along the path of movement: which takes priority, building a liberal political society or the formation of liberal parties? Taking into consideration that both are important, I was more inclined to building a liberal political society for reasons relating to the necessity of activating liberal currents within all political parties and forces. The hope is that such currents succeed in holding intellectual revisions. This also relates to the importance of activating civil society organizations with the aim of appropriating their right to political work in defense of public interest as well as achieving intersection between civil and political rights. Also, I had in mind freeing the people of the zero choice that forces them to opt for either bread or freedom. Ultimately, the liberal political society will be supportive of liberal parties, provided that liberals exist among the people and haste towards offering social services and embody a true hope for a better future.

By looking into the future, the liberal media discourse will find its way to the Egyptian media after its freedom from the stronghold of the government. Most importantly, however, is the message delivered by this discourse. I believe that this discourse must be connected with the grassroots, and to that effect I have formulated some components such as its freedom of closed ideological visions, being closer to the people and their problems, etc.

Because Islam-Liberalism problematic is a milestone on the bridge of confidence between people and liberalism, the last pages of the book offered a new reading of this problematic. This reading attempted to reveal the knowledge crisis in the Muslim culture. For the eight past centuries, the Islamic world did not have a distinguished contribution to human knowledge. As much as the contribution was humble, the problematic deepened. The reading also dealt with the attempt at revealing the unity between religious values and civil-liberal values, relating to the responsible individual, the benefit to the people, the right to competence, freedom, and the shunning of injustice.

This unity, can lead to an intellectual reconciliation between the parties to the problematic and rediscover civil Islam. My attempt was to try and build a new vision for the relationship between democracy and Islam. This relationship should not remain captive to interpretation but free. There is neither Quranic verse nor a prophetic tradition that restricts the right of people to electing their rulers, and Islam had witnessed several forms for the delegation of power, therefore, there is nothing that precludes its delegation democratically. As such, the Islam-Liberalism problematic is not impossible to solve. The solution is possible and can be aided by the commitment from Islamically oriented political powers to the rules of the liberal democratic game.

In fin, I hope I have been liberal in this booklet. I have posed questions, and tried to answer them with a free consciousness. The questions and the answers were for the people and the files remain open for discussion. The people are entitled to discussion, to hold dialogue and to be free.

