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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**IMAGINING EGYPT:  
NATIONALIST ART IN THE ERA OF STATE-BUILDING, 1900 – 1934**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Middle East Studies Department  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts

By  
Ruth Marcus  
BA, Columbia University, 2004

May/2009

The American University in Cairo

Imagining Egypt: Nationalist Art in the Era of State-building, 1900 – 1934

A Thesis Submitted by  
Ruth Marcus  
To the Middle East Studies Program

May/ 2009  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Imagining Egypt: Nationalist Art in the Era of Nation-building, 1900 – 1934

by Ruth Marcus, Advised by Dr. Malak Rouchdy

This thesis analyzes the relationship between nationalism and modern art in Egypt during the first three decades of the twentieth century, looking in particular at how that relationship unfolded in the career of sculptor Mahmud Mukhtar. Through a methodology based upon Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art, the thesis presents the "mood of the age," or the historical, socio-political and economic context in which Mukhtar worked, along with Mukhtar's biography, before moving on to analyze some of his most significant sculptures. The conclusion drawn is that nationalism and modern art were mutually dependent during the early twentieth century. Artists like Mukhtar drew upon nationalist support and worked within a nationalist symbolic system; nationalists incorporated the arts into their discourse and projects of reform. Therefore the understanding of either one (Egyptian nationalism or Egyptian modern art) would be incomplete without attention to the other.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would never have been able to complete this thesis without the help of a graduate research grant from The American University in Cairo. I am indebted to the guidance and support of my advisor, Dr. Malak Rouchdy, and the members of my thesis committee, Drs. Pascale Ghazaleh and Adrienne Pine. Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi kindly gave me his time, his insight and several essential resources, in particular many of the illustrations herein. Rania Samir in AUC's Middle East Studies department was an imperturbable source of information about how to navigate the thesis process, and my tutor and translator, Mona el-Hashemy, capably conducted me through the intricacies of Arabic grammar. I thank Mustafa, AUC's computer expert, for salvaging my hard drive after my computer crashed four days before I needed to submit this thesis. Finally, I am so grateful to my good friends Kaitlyn J. Laird and Elyce Petker. Kaitlyn lent me the computer on which I finished my work, Elyce was my editor extraordinaire, and they both let me play with their adorable dogs whenever I have the chance.

## NOTE

Unless otherwise noted, I performed the translations herein with the capable assistance of Mona el-Hashemy. All errors in translation are my own. When transliterating Arabic words, I have attempted to follow the standards of the International Journal of Middle East Studies, but have eliminated most diacritical marks.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: EGYPT'S FIRST ARTIST SINCE THE TIME OF THE PHARAOHS

On May 20, 1928, Cairo's elite gathered in front of the city's main train station to participate in a ceremony eight years in the making. On that day, Mahmud Mukhtar's granite monument, *Nahdat Misr* (Revival of Egypt), was finally revealed. Egypt's Prime Minister Mustafa Nahhas spoke to the assembled crowd, which included King Fu'ad, members of parliament, government leaders, the press and the head of England's occupation forces, High Commissioner Lord Lloyd. Nahhas proclaimed:

All sections of the Egyptian nation, government, parliament and people celebrate the commemoration of [the nation's] revival by means of a sculpture that from today will become a living, glorious symbol, which imbues all Egyptians, whatever their affiliation, with the inspiration of revival for all generations to come . . . It was inevitable that the Egyptian sculptor who wished through his art to symbolize eternal Egypt would incorporate numerous eras, many successive periods, into his conception. He had to do so in order to represent a nation in the bosom of whose glory history was born . . . [this monument is] the thread that links the various stages of Egyptian history, its past, its present and its future, a symbol that draws its glory from the past, its energy from the present and its hope from the future.<sup>1</sup>

Once Nahhas had finished his introduction and a poem had been read, King Fu'ad and a team of soldiers wrested the huge veil from atop the monument. The king then honored the artist himself with a handshake and an expression of gratitude for his "contribution to the nation."<sup>2</sup> The event did not go as smoothly as its organizers might have hoped, however: it took the king several tries to lift the covering from the monument and, at the last moment, Mukhtar could not be found. The artist was so incensed at the repeated delays both to the creation of the statue and to the ceremony itself that he did not make

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in James Jankowski Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Egypt*, Chicago Studies on the Middle East (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2004), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 73.

himself available at the event The King's agents had to search for the artist among the assembled guests.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1: Mukhtar (far right, in light-colored hat) stands with dignitaries, including Sa'd Zaghlul, in front of *Nahdat Misr*. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

In the days that followed, the nationalist press sang the praises of the monument and of the artist, repeating the interpretation of the sculpture offered by al-Nahas. Mohamed Hussein Haykal, influential editor of the newspaper *al-Siyasa al-Ushbu'iyya*, wrote a glowing review of the statue and of its popular reception.<sup>4</sup> Haykal describes the moment when the assembled crowd got its first look at the monument as one of triumph

<sup>3</sup> Bedr el-Diin Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar* (Cairo: El-Dar el-Qawmiyyah lel Teb'a wa el-Nasher, 1964), 35.

<sup>4</sup> The spelling of Haykal's name that use in this thesis is a hybrid of his preferred spelling, Mohamed Hussein Haekal (as reported to me by his daughter), and the standard spelling used by his biographer, Charles D. Smith. Faiza Haikal, e-mail, March 26, 2009.

and unity of spirit. His newspaper printed the following appraisal of the event: “Each member of the crowd was possessed by a great and amazing feeling that brought together in his short life the past thousands of years [that have] departed and the future to thousands of years that remain [ahead] in this hour of magic. . . .”<sup>5</sup> Thanks to this sort of critical reception, the sculpture was and remained a tool that aided the nationalists’ mission of expressing and unifying the Egyptian nation. In this way, both *Nahdat Misr* and the career of Mahmud Mukhtar were integral to the project of Egyptian territorial nationalism during the early twentieth century, and to this day Mukhtar is celebrated as the first Egyptian sculptor since the time of the Pharaohs.<sup>6</sup> The nationalist interpretation of the statue has retained its potency, despite the intervening years and regimes, because of the strength of the discourse that surrounded the events of May 20, 1928.

### 1.1 The Meaning of *Nahdat Misr*

*Nahdat Misr* consists of two figures, one male and one female, who pose together while looking forward into the middle distance (Figures 1, 2, 3, 8, 20). The male figure takes the form of a sphinx and, as such, has the body of a mature lion. The female is a young peasant woman. Both wear headgear – the sphinx has a crown with a cobra at its center. This snake, typical of Pharaonic crowns, was meant both to protect the monarch and to symbolize rejuvenation.<sup>7</sup> The peasant woman wears a loose veil, which she is in the act of drawing away from her face with her left hand, while her right hand rests upon the crown of the sphinx. By the 1920s, these archetypal figures were widely accepted

<sup>5</sup> “Timthel Nahdat Misr Qad Raf’a el-Setar ‘anhu,” in *el-Siyasa el-Ushbu’iyya*, May 26, 1928, as reprinted in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> The idea that Mukhtar was the first Egyptian artist since the Pharaohs is stated repeatedly by his biographer. See, for instance, *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Hope B. Werness, Joanne H. Benedict, Scott Thomas, Tiffany Ramsay-Lozano, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), 378 - 79.

symbols of the Egyptian nation, even though the artist and his cohort had to battle naysayers to get the monument erected.<sup>8</sup>

The circuitous route that *Nahdat Misr* took, from the artist's first design in 1920 to its erection eight years later, demonstrates the sculpture's (and the sculptor's) relationship to the social, political and cultural tides of the era to which Mukhtar's work reacts and which it expresses. The process by which the sculpture came into being was undeniably social and political. Mukhtar was inspired to create his design by Egypt's 1919 Revolution, and as soon as a model of *Nahdat Misr* had been displayed for the first time, the sculpture rapidly moved from the personal to the public and institutional spheres. Nationalist thinkers published articles heralding the work as a symbol of Egypt and pushed for its installation in Cairo with a press campaign, which in turn inspired Egyptians from all social groups to donate their time and money to the cause.<sup>9</sup> The project was later taken over and shaped by the Department of Public Works, whereupon its advancement became tied to institutional processes and rivalries.<sup>10</sup> The internal strife rampant in Egyptian politics during the early twentieth century blocked the artist's progress. Changing administrations had varied relationships with the monument and with the sculpture, and Mukhtar was forced to fight not only for his creative independence but even for the ability to work. Mukhtar and his creations were widely associated with the Wafd party and, as such, whenever the Wafd was out of power, Mukhtar was out of luck.

The impact of politics on *Nahdat Misr* was such that the meaning associated with the monument was highly politicized. Mukhtar himself was well aware of the

<sup>8</sup> Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 77.

<sup>9</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, 228.



propagandistic nature of his monument, and the nationalists who supported his work did so in appreciation of its expression of their conception of the Egyptian nation. There never was consensus among the intelligentsia as to what exactly the Egyptian nation was or how it should be represented, so while international reception of the sculpture was overwhelmingly positive, the sculpture did not receive this same unadulterated adoration from the Egyptian press. Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini was upset by Mukhtar's tampering with the archetypical figure of the sphinx, particularly since the manner in which the creature was raising to his feet was, according to the critic, physiologically impossible.<sup>11</sup> He also suggested that the joining of two figures in the sculpture was artificial and unnecessary. Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, an Islamist, objected to the disproportionate stature of the female figure, which towers over the sphinx. He also complained that the human face Mukhtar gave his sphinx was too modern and looked out of place.<sup>12</sup> In response to al-Mazini's criticism in particular, Mukhtar published an article of his own in *al-Siyasa al-Ushbu'iyya* wherein he elucidated the monument's symbolism and significance:

The sphinx – the symbol of the Pharaonic city and Pharaonic magnificence – is rising, and the Egyptian nation stands beside it, proud of its glorious past that shines in eternal glory, removing the veil and showing the Western countries that which remained covered for centuries. . . That is the rising of Egypt, everything in the sculpture, each sign, each posture, each position, the motion of the arms, the pleat of the clothes, all these match the prevailing, comprehensive idea, and prove the idea of *Nahdat Misr*. Each part establishes the whole without separating any part. Try to cut the sculpture into two pieces: the woman and the sphinx. Neither of them can be complete within itself as a moral, sensory, harmonic shape . . . The sphinx is a symbol for the glorious Pharaonic past, and a symbol for the near future which rises while Egypt uncovers the thick veil that had hid it for thousands of years, and the woman's fingers which she places delicately upon the sphinx refer to the succession

<sup>11</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79 -80.

or the chain and the connection of the past to the present of this Egyptian nation with its glorious civilization.<sup>13</sup>

Mukhtar's explanation of his sculpture continues as the dominant understanding of *Nahdat Misr*. While public monuments like *Nahdat Misr* "do not have fixed, frozen meanings," the sculpture's overt symbolism, and the celebration and repetition of that symbolism in the nationalist press, have codified interpretation of the sculpture both in popular understanding and in scholarship.<sup>14</sup> Along those lines, Gershoni and Jankowski read the sculpture as a commemoration of "the contemporary reawakening and rejuvenation of the Egyptian nation in the wake of the anti-colonial revolution of 1919."<sup>15</sup> In this context, the piece signifies "liberation from foreign rule but also freedom from the shackles of tradition and the tyrannical burden of a long era of degeneration."<sup>16</sup>

This idea is supported by Ostle's description of the sculpture: "A peasant girl stands proudly erect, drawing aside her head covering (hijab) with one hand, while the other rests firmly on the head of the sphinx beside her. The iconography of the peasant figure buttressed by the power and the glory of the Pharaonic past expresses a vision which inspired the country's political and intellectual elite after World War I."<sup>17</sup> Baron looks at visual arts from the context of gender studies, and yet her conclusions about the

<sup>13</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "Abu el-Hul wa Timthal Mukhtar: Rad el-Mathal Mukhtar 'ala el-Ustedh el-Mazini" in *al-Siyasa al-Uzbu'iyya*, June 16, 1928, as reprinted in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 120 - 25.

<sup>14</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 5. In the prologue to their book, Gershoni and Jankowski recount subsequent visits to the current site of *Nahdat Misr* during which they quizzed passers-by about its meaning. After receiving some confused explanations (one man said the sculpture dated to the Pharaonic age, another attributed it to the time of Muhammad Ali), the authors were reproached by a policeman who told them that the sculpture "symbolizes the national revival of Egypt following the revolution of 1919." This conversation confirms the hegemony of the nationalist interpretation of *Nahdat Misr*. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 19. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Robin Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57, no. 1 (1994): 186.

sculpture fit the mold perfectly: “The Sphinx and the woman both represent Egypt: the sphinx rising suggests a rebirth of Egypt’s ancient grandeur; the peasant woman lifting her veil symbolizes the liberation of the modern nation. The linking of the two figures – the woman’s hand rests on the Sphinx’s head – connect antiquity to the present. The sculpture thus reinforced nationalist claims to territorial continuity, a common theme in the rhetoric of nation-building.”<sup>18</sup>

Sharouny offers an even more simple interpretation: “The sculptor uses the motherly villager in this statue to refer to the Egyptians who call their homeland ‘our mother Egypt.’ . . . The sphinx refers to the glorious periods in Egypt’s history. The message is to draw inspiration from past glory to overcome hindrance and attain revival.”<sup>19</sup> This scholarly consensus is difficult to argue with, and I do not attempt to prove anyone wrong. Instead, in the course of this thesis, I offer some new insights inspired by Bourdieu’s sociology of art approach into the broader meaning of this and other of Mukhtar’s sculptures.

## 1.2 Egypt in the Early Twentieth Century

According to Bourdieu, changes in the art world are lasting only when associated with social changes.<sup>20</sup> Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt was a time of great social change, and in keeping with the sociology of art approach, I look at the entire context in which Mukhtar’s art was created and presented rather than merely examining the work itself. During the 1920s, Egyptian intellectuals and artists were involved in a cultural renaissance in which artistic and literary production flourished. The reasons for this

<sup>18</sup> Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> Sobhy Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, trans. Ramadan Abdel Kader (Cairo: El Dar el Masria el Lubnaniah, 2007), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Susan Emanuel, trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 127.

artistic explosion were manifold. First of all, the appearance the *effendiya* group within Egyptian society's upper stratum signaled the primacy of education as a social marker.<sup>21</sup> Western-style education became a status symbol, as did the trappings of Western culture, including an appreciation of modern arts. Population expansion and the growth of Egypt's economy due to the cultivation of cotton lead to the appearance of larger groups of people who could understand and afford art.<sup>22</sup> To accommodate that need, and to further promote appreciation and consumption of the arts, Prince Yusuf Kamal opened the School of the Fine Arts in 1908.<sup>23</sup>

Religious and secular thinkers across the spectrum were involved in the rejuvenation of Egypt's art field. As Ostle recounts, "Qasim Amin [the writer] had returned from a visit to Paris dazzled by the works of art which he had seen in the Louvre; Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid wrote enthusiastically in *al-Jarida* about the plastic arts and voiced regret that they did not yet figure in the cultural life of Egypt. No less a religious authority than Muhammad 'Abduh<sup>24</sup> expressed the view that representational art had a place in Islamic society and that it was unnecessary to maintain the traditional interdiction against it, as Islam had long since eradicated all trace and danger of polytheism."<sup>25</sup> At the same time, nationalists were striving to define their nation and to

<sup>21</sup> The *effendiya*, from the Turkish honorary title *effendi*, were a group of men who parlayed their new, "modern" education into powerful positions in the government or in the public sphere. This concept will be more fully defined in Chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," 184 - 85.

<sup>23</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh was Egypt's mufti, or lead jurist of sharia law. He was appointed to this post by Khedive 'Abbas in 1899 and worked to promote education and Islamic reform. 'Abduh was not a nationalist, although his teachings inspired some nationalist thinkers. He was suspicious of nationalists and preferred to work with the British administration. Although he died in 1905, before the School of Fine Arts was founded, his influential writings aided intellectuals' arguments for the institution. Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 19, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," 185.

wrest control away from their opponents, both local and foreign. Art became one of the tools of nationalism.

The first art form that was utilized for the nationalist cause was literature and, more specifically, poetry.<sup>26</sup> This was an “age of singing,” during which nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel intoned: “My country, my country, you have my love and my heart,”<sup>27</sup> and the poets of the age worked to glorify their country and its long heritage.<sup>28</sup> Visual artists soon took up the cause as well, and together Egypt’s artists and intelligentsia established a new and unique art movement: Neo-Pharaonicism. Neo-Pharaonicism is defined by Gershoni and Jankowski as “that body of opinion which postulates the existence of a unique and durable Egyptian national essence persisting from the Pharaonic era to the present.”<sup>29</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar was the most successful and celebrated artist of this movement. In a letter to Haykal, Mukhtar argued that “art is a national force, and nationalisms demand of their art that it coherently represents their particular qualities and characteristics.”<sup>30</sup> Mukhtar’s greatness came from his ability to represent Egypt’s Pharaonic, peasant and modern character as one cohesive whole.

### 1.3 Chapter Breakdown and Literature Review

This thesis contains five chapters, counting this one. Each chapter approaches the content from a different direction. Chapter Two explores the methodology with which I approach Mukhtar’s work, Chapter Three offers the historical context in which Mukhtar worked and by which he was affected through a look at Mukhtar’s biography, and

<sup>26</sup> See Mounah A. Khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt (1882 - 1922)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> These are the first words of the national anthem.

<sup>28</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> James Jankowski Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 164.

<sup>30</sup> As translated in Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 65 – 66.

Chapter Four concentrates on analysis of some of his sculptures. Chapter Five is the conclusion, which looks briefly at Mukhtar's continuing legacy. Altogether, these chapters argue the hypothesis that the art field and the politics of nationalism in early twentieth-century Egypt were intimately connected, particularly in the career of Mahmud Mukhtar.

In Chapter Two, I explain the three interlocked discourses that dominate this thesis: nationalism, modernity and the development of art. For that reason, the chapter is divided into three parts by those topics. In the first section, I examine nationalism and offer an explanation of the work of some of the most distinguished theoreticians on the topic: Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Anthony D. Smith.<sup>31</sup> In keeping with these scholars' work, I conclude that nationalism is a modern invention, although the groupings upon which modern nation-states are based often have ancient heritage, as is the case in Egypt.

In this section, I also explore the political, economic and social roots of Egyptian nationalism. My primary resource for information concerning Egyptian nationalism during the early twentieth century has been the work by Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, particularly their book *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, which comprehensively explores Egyptian nationalism from the turn of the century until 1930.<sup>32</sup> These authors explain that Egyptian political discourse during the end of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century was divided into factions who subscribed to different understandings of what their nation was and how it should be represented. During the

<sup>31</sup> The books used are Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2006), E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). And Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*.

period that Gershoni and Jankowski examine, however, “one [nationalism] was dominant, others were subdominant, incipient, or vestigial.”<sup>33</sup> They call the dominant discourse territorial nationalism or “Egyptianism” and define it as the communal “identification as part of a geographically distinct, historically unique Egyptian nation rooted in the Valley of the Nile.”<sup>34</sup> This term, along with “territorial nationalism” is used throughout this thesis. Egyptianism was the product of increased knowledge about Egypt’s Pharaonic heritage, which it also encouraged. In addition, it was inspired by the growing international consensus on the importance of nation-states and the work of a generation of men with modern educations who were frustrated in their attempts to seize power from their colonial overlords.

The subdominant nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included “religious” nationalism (or Islamism) and ethnic/linguistic nationalism (or Arabism).<sup>35</sup> According to Gershoni and Jankowski, these two movements could not contend with the omnipresence of Egyptianism during the 1920s, but by the mid-1930s the tides began to change. Islamism and Arabism gained ground in the years leading up to World War II, while Egyptianism suffered from the failure of the liberal project to improve peoples’ lives.<sup>36</sup> This thesis follows Gershoni and Jankowski’s timeline, and for this reason my inquiry into Egyptian nationalist art looks at the period from 1900 to 1934 (which is also the year in which Mukhtar passed away).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski examine the events of the 1930s and 1940s in their sequel to Egypt, Islam and the Arabs. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930 - 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

The fact that the Egyptianists dominated public discourse during the early twentieth century does not mean that their opponents were silent. In his book *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Jamal Mohammed Ahmed gives a comprehensive account of the rival nationalisms in Egypt at the time, concentrating on the Umma Party, the Nationalist Party and the Constitutional Reform Party.<sup>37</sup> He also points out the importance of newspapers in the development and dissemination of nationalist thought. *Al-Jarida*, for instance, was the mouthpiece of the Umma Party whose editor, Lutfi al-Sayyid, considered the paper as a means by which Egypt could “formulate a public opinion.”<sup>38</sup> Ahmed’s work is a bit dated, unfortunately, and subscribes overmuch to the Orientalist conception of Middle Eastern history, which holds that the “oriental” states were in decline for centuries before European incursions awoke them from their slumber.<sup>39</sup> This is not the outlook I follow, for there can be no single date on which a nation becomes “modern.”

Albert Hourani’s celebrated study of public discourse and politics in the Arab world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, adds to the intellectual perspective of the changes underway during that period.<sup>40</sup> With methodical attention to published writings, Hourani cycles through multiple generations of thinkers, operating under the assumption that these men, although “a small group of writers, who were set apart from those among whom they were living by education and

<sup>37</sup> Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 70, 76, 80.

<sup>38</sup> As quoted in *Ibid.*, 69. The Umma Party later was transformed into the Wafd, a group which has been called the most important political party in Egypt’s modern era. Robert L. Tignor, “The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: New Directions in the Egyptian Economy,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 3, Special Issue on the Middle Eastern Economy (1976): 41.

<sup>39</sup> Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, 1, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).



experience, nevertheless could express the needs of their society, and to some extent at least their ideas served as forces in the process of change.”<sup>41</sup> For the most part, Hourani’s interpretation of events is convincing: during the era under study, politics and public discourse were very much an elite arena. Mukhtar was himself a member of the elite, as were the other artists and writers with whom he is associated. The work of such scholars as Beinin and Lockman, however, allows for a fuller picture of modern Egypt, which includes not only the merchants and intelligentsia but also the peasants and workers.

Chapter Two moves on to explore modernity in theory and in the Egyptian context, then ends with an explanation of the methodology with which I am approaching Mukhtar’s work. I explicate key points of the sociology of art approach, as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu, and adapt that approach to the context of modern Egypt. In his influential books, including *Distinction*, *The Rules of Art* and *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu argues that real understanding of a work of art requires attention not only to the artwork itself but also to the socio-political context in which that work was produced and presented, including the influence of meaning produced by people other than the artist himself, such as curators and critics.<sup>42</sup>

Following Bourdieu’s lead, in Chapter Three, I offer an analysis of the socio-political context in Egypt during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with special reference to Mukhtar’s life story. I begin with a brief chronology of nineteenth- and twentieth-century events before analyzing the complicated social stratification of

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

Egyptian society at the time, with special attention to groups of workers, peasants, intelligentsia and *effendiya* as they developed during that era. Because of the problems inherent in translating the language of class systems (which was created for the European context) into a discussion of Egypt, I have endeavored to address social stratification through the social groups themselves, rather than lumping them into classes. This approach also pays heed to the manner in which the people saw themselves, and each other.

Zachary Lockman's work on nationalist movements and workers sheds light on the complicated social stratification of early twentieth century Egypt.<sup>43</sup> As he demonstrates, Egypt's social groups had yet to form what may be called cohesive classes during the early twentieth century, although labor organization and education contributed to an increasingly Marxist understanding across the spectrum of the differences between groups. The importance of labor to social stratification is emphasized in Joel Beinin's writing. He tackles the economic events that contributed to the political and cultural changes he observes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt.<sup>44</sup> By exploring Middle Eastern history through the lens of economic theory, Beinin is able to avoid some of the drawbacks that come with excessive attention to concepts of culture, such as assumptions about the essence and nature of a society. Beinin asserts that many of the changes to the social stratification and political systems of the Middle East were the result of economic change. The region was subsumed into the world market over the course of centuries.

<sup>43</sup> Zachary Lockman, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (1988). And Zachary Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899 - 1914," *Poetics Today* 15, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>44</sup> Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also: Joel Beinin, "Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923 - 1952," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume 2, Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Starting in the nineteenth century, the changes to agricultural holdings, associated with the rise of land-holding notables and production of crops for export, altered both land relations and politics.<sup>45</sup> Egyptian politics were shaped by the “general trend toward increased state control” of people’s lives and livelihoods under the steady hand of Muhammad Ali.<sup>46</sup> Economic relations became further politicized during the twentieth century when strikes and labor activism, often against foreign-owned companies, took on an anti-colonial meaning.<sup>47</sup> Although in later eras the division between workers and the elite often was too great to bridge, during the 1920s almost all Egyptians shared a common enemy: British colonialism.

Among the more affluent groups, however, many people valued and even emulated European culture and politics. Magda Baraka writes about the changes, which reshaped what she calls the Egyptian upper class in the era between Egypt’s 1919 and 1952 revolutions.<sup>48</sup> Although Baraka overstates the difference that the twentieth century brought to social relations, her analysis of the creation and cohesion of new social groups is sound.<sup>49</sup> She shows that members of social groups in the upper echelons of Egyptian society were differentiated from the workers and peasants for more reasons than their wealth alone. They were identifiable due to their education, conduct and kinship to

<sup>45</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Lockman, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," 448, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Magda Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, St. Anthony's Middle East Monographs Series (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Baraka contends that the gap between the rich and the poor widened in the twentieth century because the wealthy were able to move out of the old neighborhoods into new suburbs, taking advantage of new methods of transportation. The problem with this contention is that it assumes that the rich and poor were in some way united by living in the same areas, and this conclusion is difficult to accept. Even if a millionaire lives next door to a pauper, this does not mean that they will discuss politics over tea each morning. See *Ibid.*, 103, 20 – 21.

powerful families.<sup>50</sup> The groups of Egyptians with high status congregated in “social clubs,” purchased imported luxury goods and enjoyed “high” culture entertainment – by participating in these practices, the groups were able to classify and perpetuate themselves.<sup>51</sup> This elite group was also the source of the leaders who shaped Egypt’s political life. Members of the elite took up a mission of changing their country, and its people, to meet their conception of the nation. Although some members of the intelligentsia argued that the British influence was positive and should be extended, the nationalists who gained the most popular support and thus were most able to cross the lines of social stratification were those, like Sa’d Zaghlul, who demanded an independent Egypt.

In the course of my discussion of Egypt’s social stratification, I cover the issue of women’s liberation, known at that time as the “woman question.” For this topic, I turn to the work of Lisa Pollard, who contends that the power struggle between the Egypt’s intelligentsia and administrators and the British colonists led writers like Qasim Amin to take up a debate with European interlocutors as to the condition of Egyptian women.<sup>52</sup> According to Pollard, the use of women and the family in this debate did not signal the intelligentsia’s dedication to feminist causes but instead demonstrated that writers like Amin used women as a symbol of their nation in reaction to European critiques of Muslim family politics.<sup>53</sup> By calling for the liberation of women (which could be taken as

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 189, 266.

<sup>52</sup> Pollard points out astutely that Amin was “very much the product of Egyptian state-building projects and state schools,” and was not an iconoclast or revolutionary. Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 153.

<sup>53</sup> Amin’s first book was an explicit response to British criticism of the treatment of women in Muslim society. Leila Ahmed, “The Discourse of the Veil,” in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

proof of Egypt's maturity and capability for self-rule), nationalists were really calling for national independence.<sup>54</sup> Pollard gives an excellent interpretation of images of Egypt from the cartoon press, but she does not extend her argument to look at works of art such as those created by Mukhtar. It is here that Baron's work fills in the gap.

Beth Baron examines the imagery on everything from postage stamps to official seals to trace the development of representations of Egypt, and in so doing dispels some myths about the sanctity of this imagery – the representations of Egypt in all these contexts are subject to the times.<sup>55</sup> This means that, just as the images themselves changed, so did the understanding of their meaning. Baron discusses *Nahdat Misr* because of the sculpture's use of a woman's body to symbolize the nation, concluding that Mukhtar's use of a woman was in line with the trends in nationalist iconography of his day, and therefore the monument "became the preeminent symbol of the national struggle for Egyptians" of the early twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> Again, this does not mean that Mukhtar's sculpture was a feminist work but rather that the woman was becoming a standardized symbol of the Egyptian nation.

That symbolism had its roots in nineteenth-century imperialism and dissent. I discuss these topics, beginning with the 'Urabi revolt of 1882. For this I rely to a large extent on the work of Juan Cole and his book *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East*.<sup>57</sup> Cole gives a comprehensive background of Egypt's social system and the changes it underwent during the nineteenth century, starting with the innovations initiated by

<sup>54</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 181.

<sup>55</sup> Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. And Beth Baron, "Nationalist Iconography: Egypt as a Woman," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, 77.

<sup>57</sup> Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Muhammad Ali. Those changes included the creation of modern educational institutions, which, in turn, led to the appearance of educated Egyptian bureaucrats and army officers who began to chafe at the restrictions placed upon them by colonial influence, both Ottoman and British.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, three “great forces” impacted Egyptian socio-political and economic life during the last third of the nineteenth century: capitalism, population growth and state reform.<sup>59</sup> The country’s move into the world market resulted in the transfer of agricultural land to the production of staples like cotton for export. This benefited the landowners but not the peasants.<sup>60</sup> The increase in the population carried with it a greatly increased population share, which can be considered marginal. The lot of marginal populations was worsened by inflation.<sup>61</sup> In this context, the problems faced by Egyptian army officers (withheld wages and limits on who could be promoted) were typical, but thanks to their new education and status, these officers were inclined to do something about their problems. Ahmed ‘Urabi led a revolt among the Egyptian officers of the army, couching his movement in nationalist rhetoric. His nationalism was only skin deep. In his book, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, Owen is as skeptical about the reasons for the ‘Urabi movement as Cole is. Owen declares that those reasons were more economic than they were nationalist despite ‘Urabi’s refrain, “Egypt for the Egyptians.”<sup>62</sup> Although the upshot of the 1882 revolt was greater British interference in Egypt’s economy and administration, ‘Urabi’s motto would find purchase nearly four decades later when the masses of Egyptians rose up against their English overlords during the revolution of 1919.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 31 – 33.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> E. R. J. Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 123.

Since Mukhtar grew up in the period between Egypt's two anti-imperial revolts, I discuss his early life and education here. I look at Mukhtar's move from a village to Cairo where, in 1908, he enrolled in the School of Fine Arts. Although many books dealing with the events and themes central to twentieth-century Egypt mention Mukhtar and *Nahdat Misr*, most of the references are glancing. The books that deal either extensively or exclusively with the artist are few and only one of those books has been translated into English (although some have been translated into French).<sup>63</sup>

The biographical data herein are accumulated from the Arabic-language biographies and the available English-language pieces, most of which present Mukhtar among other artists and public figures.<sup>64</sup> All of the writers who deal with Mukhtar, both in English and in Arabic, have as their principal resource the two masterful biographies of the artist written by his relative, Bedr el-Diin Abu Ghazi. The first of Abu Ghazi's books, *Mukhtar: Hayātuhu wa Fenuhu* (Mukhtar: His Life and His Art) is a straightforward biography of the artist, which the author researched by retracing the steps of Mukhtar's life from Egypt to France, interviewing the artist's friends and collecting all the papers, objects and ephemera related to Mukhtar.<sup>65</sup> Abu Ghazi's second work, *el-Mathāl Mukhtar* (The Sculptor Mukhtar), reiterates the artist's biography and augments it with republished newspaper and magazine articles, personal letters and photographs.<sup>66</sup> This second book, therefore, is a veritable encyclopedia of all things Mukhtar and is a

<sup>63</sup> Sharouny's book is presented half in English and half in Arabic. Abu Ghazi's work has been translated into French. There is also an English-language BA thesis about Mukhtar, but this has never been published. Lubna 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 1954).

<sup>64</sup> Karnouk's books deal with generations of Egyptian artists, while Gershoni and Jankowski use Mukhtar's career and products as evidence for a wider inquiry into nationalism and commemoration.

<sup>65</sup> Bedr el-Diin Abu Ghazi, *Mukhtar: Hayātuhu Wa Fannuhu* (Cairo: 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*.

matchless resource for the researcher.<sup>67</sup> In his introduction, Abu Ghazi explains the extent to which his life's work is linked to his research of and love for Mukhtar:

Thirty years ago I had the chance to stand in the small house to have a view of the wide space of the desert which is located near *Misr el-Gedida* (Heliopolis).<sup>68</sup> I collected papers and clothes and small pieces of furniture, all of which were in the house in which Mahmud Mukhtar lived in the last days before he died.

I brought these abandoned things to my house and since that day I have lived with them and listened to their pulse. I see in them the life and struggle and characteristics of the [artist's] story which passed in our life like a twinkle, with a deep impact behind it.

And these abandoned things connected me with the life of Mukhtar. I felt toward them as in the words of Tolstoy on Dostoyevsky when he said: "I didn't see this man in his life, but after his death I felt that he was the dearest person I had, that he was the ultimate necessity of life to me."<sup>69</sup>

This passage demonstrates Abu Ghazi's abiding devotion to Mukhtar and to Mukhtar's mission (see section 3.4.1). This devotion enabled the writer to lavish what was no doubt years and even decades of hard work on his research and writing, but it also carries with it a certain exaggeration of tone. Abu Ghazi heralds Mukhtar as the first and finest Egyptian sculptor since time immemorial whose appearance was "like a miracle because of the silence from the arts before him," and lauds *Nahdat Misr* as the exemplar par excellence of Egyptian modern art.<sup>70</sup> This reverence for his subject leads Abu Ghazi to forgive some of the man's flaws and to brush aside any weaknesses in the artist's work. The hyperbolic treatment of Mukhtar's persona is also symptomatic of the author's nationalism. Quotations like those quoted above will therefore be interpreted in reference to Mukhtar's reputation and the reception of his achievements in his own time. The

<sup>67</sup> See Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 40.

<sup>68</sup> This is a neighborhood in Cairo.

<sup>69</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 1 - 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 8.



heroic picture of Mukhtar has retained potency and is reiterated in the more recent books, which build upon Abu Ghazi's work.

In 1991, Mahmud al-Nabawi al-Shal published *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'amalahu Al-Faniyyah* (Mahmud Mukhtar: Pioneer of Modern Sculptural Art in Egypt and an Evaluation of the Works of Art).<sup>71</sup> The first half of the book is dedicated to a narration of the artist's life, while in the second half the author offers brief interpretations of thirty of Mukhtar's sculptures. These interpretations, written in bullet points, range over the works' harmony and beauty with reference, for instance, to body positioning, line and costume, but they do not offer much concrete information to do with the size of the works or the dates they were made.

Sobhy Sharouny's book *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar* [sic] follows much the same format, but offers more comprehensive information, including the measurements, materials and date of every work discussed.<sup>72</sup> Sharouny also introduces a rather clever innovation: his book can be read from either the front or the back cover (front and back being relative terms dependant on the reader's language). In one direction the book is written in Arabic, and in the opposite direction this text is translated into English. The two languages meet in the middle of the book with a showcase of the author's beautiful color photographs of forty of Mukhtar's works. In a particularly commendable gift to his reader, Sharouny presents several of these sculptures through multiple photographs taken from several angles, thus allowing for an appreciation of the dynamism of the pieces. For an English-speaking audience, however,

<sup>71</sup> Mahmud al-Nabawi al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'amalahu Al-Faniyyah* (Cairo: Rabitat Khirriji al-Ma'had al-'Ali lil-Tarbiyah al-Fanniyah, al-Jam'iyah al-Misriyah lil-Funun al-Shabiyah, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*.

Sharouny's book suffers from an inexpert translation, which is pockmarked by spelling, grammar and word usage mistakes, which make the overall reading experience rather confusing and, at times, downright bizarre. Furthermore, the narrative of Mukhtar's life offered both by Sharouny and by al-Shal scarcely deviates from that found in Abu Ghazi's texts. This same criticism can be levied against Liliane Karnouk, whose two books on Egyptian modern art present a short summary of Mukhtar's life and times.<sup>73</sup>

The narrative (and in fact many of the words themselves) of Karnouk's two books are identical when dealing with what she calls the "first generation" of Egyptian artists – that group which graduated first from the School of Fine Arts, among whom Mukhtar and his painter colleagues Mahmud Said and Muhammad Nagy were most prominent.<sup>74</sup> I therefore deal mainly with Karnouk's 1988 book *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, for her later work repeats her initial mistakes.

Karnouk's work suffers from its adherence to the Orientalist frameworks of history and the development of art. She insists that Egypt was stagnant because of its long history of occupation, and claims that Napoleon's 1798 invasion of the country was the turning point after which modernity developed.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, she reiterates Haykal's theories about the influence of Egypt's ecology upon the essential nature of the Egyptian people as if they were scientific fact and without interrogating either the validity of such assertions or the reason why thinkers like Haykal promoted such ideas during the early

<sup>73</sup> Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style* (Cairo The American University in Cairo Press, 1988). And Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910 - 2003* (Cairo The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Karnouk's 1988 book is quite short and deals only with the first half century of Egyptian modern art. In her second book, she expands on her first both in scale (the book is considerably longer) and in ambition. The 2005 book is concerned with artists from the turn of the century until the contemporary era.

<sup>75</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 3.

twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> In a similar fashion, she reiterates Abu Ghazi's take on Mukhtar's life story without attention to the author's biases. And although the vast number of images she supplies makes her books a priceless resource for readers who can find the works reproduced in very few (if any) other sources, some of the images are cut off and others have been mislabeled. But before I become guilty of over-criticizing what is generally fine work, it must be said that Karnouk's books do not set out to be the authoritative source for all data and scholarship on Egyptian modern art. Instead, she has succeeded in writing informative studies for the lay reader that offer an entertaining and engaging introduction to an underdeveloped field.

The other texts with bearing on the life and work of Mukhtar are those that operate within a broader context and thus deal with the sculptor as is effective in their particular frame. Foremost among those books is the work of scholars Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, who have dedicated their careers to researching and publishing information on Egyptian nationalism in the modern era. In *Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Egypt*, the authors dedicate a full third of their book to a careful and precise interpretation of Mahmud Mukhtar.<sup>77</sup> They do so in the context of the field of memory studies.<sup>78</sup> In the first part of the book, the authors address three of Mukhtar's sculptures: *Nahdat Misr* and the two monuments to Sa'd Zaghlul (Figure 13). Part two covers the funerals and attendant rites surrounding the demise of nationalist heroes Mustafa Kamil and

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9 – 10.

<sup>77</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*.

<sup>78</sup> Memory studies is a field which, to the authors, connotes a scholarly consideration of the way in which groups share in the preservation and veneration of past events and people. The primary method by which the memories are honored and perpetuated is public commemoration. Commemorative sites have definite locations and creation dates, yet public understanding of their symbolism develops and changes over time. For this reason, Gershoni and Jankowski believe that monuments and their reception can be interrogated in reference to the development of the Egyptian collective memory. Ibid., 5, 10.

Muhammad Farid, while the third and final section discusses commemoration of the 1952 revolution. Only part one is of concern to this thesis, although the rest of the book is equally fascinating.

Since this book approaches commemoration from the perspective of the Egyptian nation, the discussion of nationalism is central to the authors' writing. They see nationalism as one of the "key reference points" for the creation of modern collective memory.<sup>79</sup> By associating past events with moral lessons, nationalists put forward a "purposive, teleological account of history."<sup>80</sup> In Egypt, the authors point out, the commemorative process is influenced by its close ties to politics, but can also be taken over by popular forms and processes.<sup>81</sup> For this reason, the authors differentiate between "official" and "vernacular" memory.<sup>82</sup> The former promotes the status quo and is often broadly nationalist whereas the latter reflects a more personal understanding of events and can therefore be considered insubordinate by those in power. Gershoni and Jankowski also effectively highlight the ways in which the Neo-Pharaonicist movement was "part of Egyptian elite culture," which contributed to the consolidation of Egyptian national identity through its utilization in a broader "intellectual endeavor."<sup>83</sup> Their introduction of the problems and debates of Egypt's social structure makes their work the most substantial and challenging of contemporary scholarship on Mukhtar, and of Egyptian nationalism in general.

Mukhtar's work was influenced not only by the conflict between his nationalism and his European education but also by two nineteenth-century cultural developments:

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 52.

the discipline of Egyptology and the expansion of Egypt's public sphere. For my discussion of Egyptology, I draw from the pioneering work of Donald Reid, who postulates in his book *Whose Pharaohs* that in modern Egypt control of antiquities was conflated with control of the nation.<sup>84</sup> Although Egyptology was originally a European discipline (and one closely related to colonial processes), during the late nineteenth century Egyptians were increasingly interested and involved in the field.<sup>85</sup> This interest was fed by nationalists who increasingly took their country's celebrated ancient heritage as evidence for the value and distinctiveness of their nation, and as an "essential ingredient of their modern national identity."<sup>86</sup> Thus, by the time of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922, Egypt's Pharaonic past had been comprehensively taken up by territorial nationalists, and the symbolism of this heritage was writ large in the artistic and journalistic works of the era. The Neo-Pharaonicist movement, of which Mukhtar was a pioneer, was both a product and a producer of the popular interest in Egyptology. Reid notes: "Identification with ancient Egypt found its way into mainstream nationalism in media as varied as Mahmud Mukhtar's statue *The Awakening of Egypt*. . . postage stamps, banknotes" and so on.<sup>87</sup> Other authors working on Egyptology's impact in Egypt have also analyzed Mukhtar's work. In his inquiry into the processes of Egyptology and modernity, Elliott Colla dedicates a chapter section to *Nahdat Misr*.<sup>88</sup> He concludes that although the dominant understanding of the sculpture's meaning was

<sup>84</sup> Donald M. Reid, "Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past: Egypt 1922 - 1952," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). See also: Donald M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 115 – 116, 118.

<sup>86</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 110, 289, 181.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>88</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 227 – 33.

supported by the nationalist press, the implications of the monument may not have translated into the greater field of public opinion.<sup>89</sup> It would be impossible for me to prove whether or not the general public understood the statue to have the meaning that Mukhtar and his nationalist colleagues intended, but the fact that there was a public sphere to which they directed their attention, and that it can thus be discussed, is a symptom of modern processes and of the changes that took place in Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The growth both in number and in influence of newspapers points to the expansion and development of Egypt's public sphere. I follow Habermas's definition of the public sphere as the domain wherein public opinion takes shape. In early twentieth-century Egypt, the public sphere had two interrelated components: the physical spaces created by the reordering of the city, which included museums, parks and educational institutions, and the arena of public debate, which was achieved by the flourishing news media. It was this news media which propelled Mukhtar's popularity through popular campaigns to purchase *Nahdat Misr*. For this reason, I discuss the 1919 Revolution and its aftermath with particular reference to the struggle to erect Mukhtar's monument. The chapter closes with a review of what I call Mukhtar's mission. The sculptor dedicated himself to elevating the status of the arts in Egypt, and this quest consumed his final years.

With this in mind, I move on to the fourth chapter, which is dedicated to analysis of Mukhtar's works and those of his colleagues in the Imagination Society. I move through Mukhtar's work chronologically, looking first at some works from his student days in Cairo before examining *Nahdat Misr*. I then scrutinize what I call Mukhtar's

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 233.

series of peasant women before evaluating the sculptor's two monuments to Sa'd Zaghlul. Chapter Four concludes by broadening the scope of inquiry to include Mukhtar's colleagues in the Imagination Society and the Friends of the Imagination Society. Mukhtar formed the former group in 1928 to include painters Mahmud Said and Muhammad Nagy, and then Mohamed Hussein Haykal assembled critics and other members of the intelligentsia into the latter group soon after. The information for this section is gathered from Karnouk's collection of images and biographical snippets about the artists, and from Charles D. Smith's masterful book *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* in which he explicates not only Haykal's life and career but also the socio-political forces of the era in which the author lived.<sup>90</sup> With this, the fourth chapter comes to a close and I move on to the conclusion.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

Through the examination of both primary and secondary texts and the analysis of works of fine art, this thesis seeks to show that modern art was central to the nationalist processes of early twentieth-century Egypt and, at the same time, nationalism was an integral feature of twentieth-century Egyptian modern art. The leaders of what has been called Egypt's first generation of modern artists were inspired by and expressed conceptions of the nation based upon the work of territorial nationalist writers and ideologues, who argued that Egypt's national identity relied upon the revitalized symbolism of both the peasantry and Pharaonic monuments. These trends are clearly demonstrated by the work of Mahmud Mukhtar.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: NATIONALISM AND MODERN ART IN EGYPT

Mahmud Mukhtar created monumental sculptures to honor a specific vision of Egypt: that of early twentieth-century territorial nationalism. His public works, especially *Nahdat Misr*, both represent an individual's artistic vision and reflect the larger ideological trends and movements of the time. In pursuit of a deeper understanding of the works of art under study, this thesis looks beyond the aesthetics of the works themselves (although this is also important) by examining the political, economic and social contexts in which the sculptures were created and received. This analysis requires special attention to three inter-connected discourses: nationalism, modernity and the development of art. Nationalism, as will be shown, is a modern concept with its roots in the nineteenth-century creation of nation-states in Europe and beyond. During the same period of modern development, the production and reception of art was also transformed by the events of the modern era and, more specifically, by innovations related to the nineteenth-century formation of movements gathered under the rubric of modern art. In the modern context of nation-states, nationalism has bearing on the arts, for every state encourages and even endorses "aesthetic representations of their nations through styles symbolic of guiding principles and ideologies."<sup>91</sup> In this way, the use of imagery and iconography has often been an integral part of nationalist projects, for "art is a national force, and nationalisms demand of their art that it coherently represents their particular qualities and characteristics."<sup>92</sup> This is certainly true of modern Egypt. Nationalists and intellectuals used imagery inspired by Pharaonic monuments and their romantic ideal of the Egyptian

<sup>91</sup> Vera L. Zolberg, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 34.

<sup>92</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 64 - 65.



peasant, such as the sphinx and the woman who are joined in *Nahdat Misr*, to represent both their conception of Egyptian history and their ideals for an independent nation-state.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each of which deals with one of the abovementioned discourses. The first section examines nationalism through an analysis of scholarly ideas and then situates those ideas into the context of Egypt. The next section attempts to do the same for the concept of modernity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the art field in which the development of modern art is encapsulated, followed by a description of the methodology to be used in analyzing Mukhtar's work. This methodology is based upon the sociology of art as expounded by Pierre Bourdieu, and calls attention to the social, cultural and political environments of the artist and the audience when discussing works of art.

## 2.1 Nationalism and the Land of the Nile

The birth and growth of nationalisms in Egypt can be linked to social, economic, political and cultural sources both internal and external to the country.<sup>93</sup> These sources include: social factors connected to the development of Egypt's social stratification, economic factors related to the country's absorption into the world market as a dependent state, and political events and realities such as the British occupation and cultural processes, including the flourishing of journalism and the arts. In this section I will consider each of the preceding topics in turn so as to establish the groundwork for the discussion of Mukhtar's work in the coming chapters. I will also explore established works on nationalism in the context of the Egyptian case by theorists, including Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Anthony D. Smith.

<sup>93</sup> As will be shown below, several different kinds of nationalism coexisted during throughout the period under study, therefore I use the word "nationalisms" in plural.

### 2.1.1 What is Nationalism?

In the contemporary world, the status of the nation-state as the primary unit of political division is considered a given and membership in a national group is a significant part of identity. During the nineteenth century, however, the idea that the world could and should be divided into nations was still new. People defined their nations both through the divisions imposed by modern states and institutions and through the supposedly ancient ties groups of people had to particular parcels of land. Because both aspects of this process of national definition required reification of complex processes, the nation cannot be seen as static. History influences the formation and interpretation of a nation; nationalists express loyalty to entities that change over time. With those caveats in mind, I will endeavor to settle on a working definition for this thesis, which can be applied to Egypt in the early twentieth century.

According to Anderson, a nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>94</sup> Before nations could be invented politically, Anderson contends, it was necessary for people to conceptualize or “‘think’ the nation.”<sup>95</sup> Additionally, before people could think of themselves as part of a nation, they needed an appreciation of simultaneity, aided by a rise in literacy and by the novels and newspapers that “first flowered” in eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>96</sup> By reading the daily newspaper, Anderson argues, people became aware not only that multiple events were taking place at the same time (illustrated by their being on the same page of the newspaper) but also that a group of people just like them existed in their surrounding area

<sup>94</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 – 45.

and were also reading and participating in these newspapers and news events.<sup>97</sup> In Egypt, the development of nationalism followed this aspect of Anderson's timeline, for the explosion of print journalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries allowed both for the creation of like-minded groups and also for the dissemination of ideas of national identity.<sup>98</sup> According to Hourani, "the 1870's were the period when national consciousness became articulated in Egypt. It was given expression by the new periodical press. . ."<sup>99</sup> By the start of World War I, literate Egyptians had 144 different journals to choose between.<sup>100</sup> Among these, *al-Jarida* portrayed itself as a "purely Egyptian paper"<sup>101</sup> through which editor Lutfi al-Sayyid hoped to "mould the moral consciousness of the Egyptian nation."<sup>102</sup> It is to be assumed, therefore, that the thinkers behind *al-Jarida* believed that such a nation existed. This newspaper was last published in 1915, whereupon its torch was taken up by *al-Sufur*, wherein thinkers like Mohamed Hussein Haykal endeavored to write into existence a collective and progressive Egyptian nation.<sup>103</sup> In this way, Egypt was indeed imagined as a nation to a large extent through the work of the nationalist press.

The fact that the nation must be imagined does not offer much insight into what, exactly, can constitute a nation. Hobsbawm answers this question liberally, declaring that

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>98</sup> Nelly Hanna would place the onset of literary community and the communal identity associated with it earlier. She claims that the existence of a book culture independent of the royal family proves that what she calls an independent middle class existed as early as the sixteenth century. In this thesis, however, I endeavor to show that the language of class is inappropriate for analysis of early twentieth century Egypt, so Hanna's excellent work will be put aside for now. Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004).

<sup>99</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 132.

<sup>100</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 133.

<sup>101</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 171.

<sup>103</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*. 34

“any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’ will be treated as such.”<sup>104</sup> The size of the nation is therefore central to its treatment by others, but the more important factor of nationhood is the group’s articulation of itself as a nation. Hobsbawm situates the impulse toward national grouping in the modern context, for he insists that nations are not “‘as old as history.’ The modern sense of the word is no older than the eighteenth century.”<sup>105</sup> The modernity of the concept of a nation brings it into conflict with the evidence often given for a nation’s validity: the ancient heritage of this particular, and unique, group of people. The opposition is clear in the case of modern Egypt. Haykal, for instance, attempted to construct an Egyptian nation based upon unique, shared and inherited features with roots in Egypt’s specific territory, the Nile Valley.<sup>106</sup> Haykal contended that “inhabitants of the Nile Valley share certain features which have distinguished them since primeval times; features of their bodily structure and, similarly, their mental and moral makeup.”<sup>107</sup> This kind of argument has much to do with the concept of *ethnie* as introduced by Smith.

Smith addresses the idea of the nation’s ancient heritage through his concept of *ethnie*, which he defines as “clusters of population with similar perceptions and sentiments generated by, and encoded in, specific beliefs, values and practices.”<sup>108</sup> The *ethnie* sounds an awful lot like the nation as defined by Anderson and Hobsbawm, but excised of the latter concept’s political connotations, which Smith sees as “‘Western’ features and qualities” having to do with modern political culture, and therefore relating

<sup>104</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>106</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 36.

<sup>107</sup> Haykal, *Fi Awqat al-Faragh*, as quoted in Ibid., 37.

<sup>108</sup> *Ethnie* have six necessary dimensions: a collective name, common myth of descent, shared history and distinctive culture, links to certain lands and, finally, a feeling of commonality. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 24 - 25, 97.

to the institutions of the modern state.<sup>109</sup> For this reason, Smith disagrees with the insistence of scholars like Hobsbawm upon the modernity of nations.<sup>110</sup> “Put simply,” he writes, “modern nations are not as ‘modern’ as modernists would have us believe. If they were, they would not survive.”<sup>111</sup>

Although Smith’s conception of the *ethnie* is compelling for nationalists and propagandists, he does not interrogate the reasons why an *ethnie* would fail to assert its independence before the modern era, and why so many groups began to do so during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For this reason, my adoption of the concept *ethnie* to refer to Egyptians as a historo-cultural group does not signify rejection of the modernity of nation-states: whatever their people’s pedigree, nation-states are a product of the modern political atmosphere. However, the concept is important because it stresses the profound connection people feel with what might otherwise appear to be arbitrarily constructed (and even imposed) group designations. This sort of emotion propels works of nationalist art as much as does the political atmosphere in which these works are created.

The great irony of the concept “nation” is that, although the ideology of nationalism strives for unity, the reality is often fragmented. With that in mind, the working definition of the word “nation” used in this thesis combines the theories of Anderson, Hobsbawm and Smith to understand Egyptian nationalism as follows: In its early stages, the nation was an elite construction that relied upon historic ties to land and

<sup>109</sup> These features are modern inventions such as national borders, birth certificates and passports. Ibid., 144.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 212.

customs to represent itself to the world at large.<sup>112</sup> In Egypt, this construction differed depending upon the social or political group doing the imagining. Although Egyptian intellectuals celebrated many successes such as the 1919 Revolution and the state's partial independence in 1922, nationalists of all social groups and loyalties never managed to achieve consensus as to what and who exactly the Egyptian nation was, although they did agree that such a nation existed.<sup>113</sup> What follows is an explication of the different understandings of the Egyptian nation followed by thinkers of the period.

### 2.1.2 Egyptian Nationalisms

There were several different nationalisms at play in Egypt during the time under consideration. These strands did not have equal footing, however, for “while one was dominant, others were subdominant, incipient, or vestigial.”<sup>114</sup> The three most prominent movements at the time were the religious, territorial patriotic and ethno-linguistic nationalisms, better known as Islamism, Egyptianism, and Arabism or Arab nationalism.<sup>115</sup> Egyptianism began to move to the top of the pack at the turn of the

<sup>112</sup> I emphasize the elite nature of the nation here because the writers and thinkers of Egypt's nationalist movements were all members of elite groups. Although Egypt saw popular nationalism, particularly in the form of worker and peasant participation in the 1919 Revolution, the discourse and rhetoric were dominated by the intelligentsia and elite, and it is their work that I analyze.

<sup>113</sup> James Whidden, "The Generation of 1919," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt: 1919 - 1952*, ed. Amy J. Johnson and Barak A. Salmoni Arthur Goldschmidt (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 21, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, xii, 3.

<sup>115</sup> Since Egypt was (ostensibly) an Ottoman province during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (see section 3.1), the Ottoman division of social groups must certainly have had some bearing upon the eventual development of nationalism. Ottoman society was segmented into millets, or groups so designated because of their faith. By allowing people to organize around their religious leaders, the Ottomans were able to practice “indirect rule vis-à-vis different confessional communities.” Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 19, no. 1/2 (2005): 16. Many religious groups within the Ottoman Empire identified as religious communities before they were understood, and understood themselves, as minorities or as nations. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that millets began to transform into “ethnic groups” and increasingly to demand independence under the rationale of ethnic difference. Fatma Göçek, "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993): 514. Although Egypt housed members of smaller religious groups (such as Jews), the two largest millets were Sunni Muslims and Coptic Christians. As nationalists endeavored to reject Ottoman structures in Egypt, some also worked against segmentation among millets: By uniting Muslims and Christians with a

twentieth century and reached its zenith between the years of 1925 and 1933,<sup>116</sup> whereas, after the mid-1930s, intellectuals turned toward a more Islamic-Arabist orientation.<sup>117</sup> To follow Gershoni and Jankowski's timeline,<sup>118</sup> Egyptian nationalism developed as follows: During the 1870s and 1880s, the most prominent nationalists were largely pan-Islamic, an inclination that leads them to lend their support to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>119</sup> For instance, although writer Rifā' Rāfi el-Tahtawi saw Egypt as a unique nation with historic ties to the Pharaohs, he was a proponent of continued support of the Ottoman overlords, and his sentiment was reflected in much of the period's poetry. Nationalist Mustafa Kamil also supported continued allegiance to the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century and demonstrated a "largely emotional tendency to see Egypt as an inseparable part of the Muslim community and Islamic civilization."<sup>120</sup> Lutfi al-Sayyid, on the other hand, explicitly discarded his contemporaries' inclination toward continued Egyptian-Ottoman bonds.

Lutfi al-Sayyid was the don of the Egyptianist school and his mouthpiece, *al-Jarida*, disseminated Egyptianist beliefs to the reading public.<sup>121</sup> He and his fellow "Egyptianists" based the legitimacy of their project on the contention that an Egyptian

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rhetoric of Pharaonic descent, Egyptianist nationalists were able to move beyond the millet and thus to express what they considered a true, and truly modern, nation.

<sup>116</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 95.

<sup>117</sup> ———, "The Evolution of National Culture in Modern Egypt: Intellectual Formation and Social Diffusion, 1892 - 1945," *Poetics Today* 13, no. 2 (1992): 328.

<sup>118</sup> Whidden supports this periodization. He states that the 1920s were a time during which territorial nationalism was the primary kind of nationalism followed but that, by the 1930s, Islamism and Arab nationalism began to gain popularity with both the elite and the lower classes. Whidden, "The Generation of 1919," 20.

<sup>119</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 6 - 8.

<sup>121</sup> Gershoni, "The Evolution of National Culture in Modern Egypt: Intellectual Formation and Social Diffusion, 1892 - 1945," 340.

identity (*ethnie*) existed and was traceable to the ancient Pharaohs.<sup>122</sup> This logic is supported by Smith, who discusses the ancient Egyptian *ethnie* at length. He writes: “Despite some regionalism, the unique ecology of the Nile Valley helped to diffuse the symbols of Pharaonic religion and royalty by a whole series of propaganda devices in artifacts and genres of painting, sculpture and jewelry. . . [and] enabled a greater ethnic homogeneity to develop, despite internal breakdowns and external invasions.”<sup>123</sup> When translated into the context of twentieth-century Egypt, the propagandistic ideology of Pharaonic heritage became central to the notion of modern Egyptian identity, although at no time was there a serious movement to re-impose Pharaonic culture or religion in Egypt.<sup>124</sup> The celebration of Pharaonic ruins gave Egyptianists a symbolic basis for self-definition, an internationally valid reason for national pride and an idea of their own distinctiveness as a group.<sup>125</sup>

This much balleyhooed ancient pedigree might indicate that Egyptian nationalisms could have developed at any time in the country’s history, and yet there was no inkling of nationalism in Egypt until the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire tried to engender loyalty among its subjects by promoting a pan-Islamic platform, but the opinion of nineteenth-century Egyptian intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire and, more importantly, of Egypt’s need for independence, were mixed and changed rapidly with socio-political events such as British occupation and the 1919 Revolution. As Anderson points out, “The world-historical era in which each nationalism is born probably has a

<sup>122</sup> “Egyptianist” and “Egyptianism” is a term used by Gershoni and Jankowski to designate territorial nationalists. See Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 43.

<sup>124</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 187.



significant impact on its scope.”<sup>126</sup> Nationalism was first created and popularized to suit a specific historical period and location: nineteenth-century Europe. “It is hardly surprising,” Hobsbawm writes, “that nationalism gained ground so rapidly from the 1870s to 1914. It was a function of both social and political changes [in Europe], not to mention an international situation that provided plenty of pegs on which to hang manifestos of hostility to foreigners.”<sup>127</sup> Hobsbawm’s argument brings up the impact of economics on the creation and consolidation of nation-states. From the sixteenth century onward, he claims, trade and finance developed “on the basis of territorial states” wherein the pursuit of a “national economy” sped the conceptualization of a nation-state.<sup>128</sup> On the side of culture, Anderson argues for the evolution (or devolution) of the “great-state religious communities” into nation-states as a process brought about by international exploration; the rise of vernacular language, which replaced sacred languages like Latin; and increases in literacy in those vernacular languages, which made it easier to amass “popular support” for political movements.<sup>129</sup> He continues to say that modern education was also essential to the development of nationalism in Europe.<sup>130</sup> Education not only increased the share of a population that could appreciate print media but also created channels for the dissemination of nationalist ideas: classrooms and textbooks. How nationalism came to be expressed outside of Europe, however, is a matter of intense debate.

<sup>126</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 63.

<sup>127</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 109.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>129</sup> Although few (if any) people spoke Latin conversationally, the majority of published and scholarly texts were written in the language before the changes which Anderson describes. These same developments contributed to the inception of modernity, discussed in the next subsection. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 16, 18, 80.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

### 2.1.3 The Political Roots of Egyptian Nationalism

Since nationalism was first developed by European ideologues and within the European socio-political structures, its movement outside of the continent has been a topic of debate. One theory sees nationalism as a belief system imposed on the non-European sectors of the globe by imperialists. A second allows that the nations of the third world purposefully borrowed nationalist rhetoric in a reaction to the incursion of foreign powers.<sup>131</sup> The first of the two theories I have just mentioned portrays non-Europeans as the hapless and helpless recipients of foreign thought; the second gives the so-called “natives” more initiative. In both cases, however, the ideas are exclusively European and have been, at worst, imposed and, at best, translated into new contexts. This argument brings to mind a simile in which colonialists and imperialists carried ideas, like germs, into their conquered lands and the natives were thus infected with notions of nationalism.<sup>132</sup>

The notion that the Middle East began nationalist activities only after the European example carries the argument into the problematic realm of Orientalism. The Orientalist conception of Middle Eastern history is related to ideas of modernity and is characterized by its essentialism and by the idea that the Ottoman Empire was in decline until the introduction of modernism by European forces.<sup>133</sup> This kind of essentialism has been criticized time and again, most famously by Edward Said, and is to be avoided

<sup>131</sup> Anderson would disagree with both of these questions, for it is his belief that nationalism was first invented in South America and that it only then moved into the European context: “It is an astonishing sign of the depth of Eurocentrism that so many European scholars persist, in the face of all the evidence, in regarding nationalism as a European invention.” (Ibid., footnote 9, 191). Whether nationalism began in Europe or in South America, however, it was still unfamiliar in the Middle East until the modern era.

<sup>132</sup> Although it is true that many Egyptian intellectuals were educated either in Western manners at home or abroad in European countries, it is important to note that most intellectuals did not simply swallow and regurgitate European opinions, rather they struggled to find symbiosis between their new ideas and the tenets and traditions of Islam.

<sup>133</sup> Bernard Lewis, “The Return of Islam” in *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

because of its reliance upon paternalistic and often downright racist beliefs regarding the backwardness and stasis of Middle Eastern states.<sup>134</sup> Egypt was not the same at the turn of the twentieth century as it had been a hundred or even twenty years prior, and the people of Egypt did not share identical self-perceptions or political inclinations. Countries of the Middle East, like all countries in the world, cannot help but constantly adjust in the face of local and international events.

In Egypt, nationalism did not develop exactly as it had, for instance, in France. For one thing, by the nineteenth century, Egypt had been twice colonized by European powers. Napoleon led the French expedition into Cairo in 1798 and, after a brief resurgence of (ostensibly) Ottoman control under Muhammad Ali Pasha and his offspring, the British occupied Egypt in 1882. Therefore, any nationalist movement had, first and foremost, to contend with the forces of imperialism. For that reason, Egyptian nationalism can be seen as a reaction to and rejection of foreign conquest by wealthy Egyptians and intellectuals who thought that they, and not foreigners, should be in control of the Egyptian state. According to Hourani, it was the British occupation that “fused Islamic modernism with Egyptian nationalism” to produce a new movement: Egyptianism.<sup>135</sup>

European incursions into Egyptian soil produced a two-fold response: Egyptians viewed the foreigners both as an immoral enemy and as an archetype of civilization and sophistication.<sup>136</sup> Writer Qasim Amin, for example, exalted Britain in particular and

<sup>134</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>135</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 194.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

Europe in general as his models of advancement and progress.<sup>137</sup> Others, such as Sheikh ‘Ali Yusuf, refused to accept any Western intervention, while still other intellectuals, particularly Mustafa Kamil and Sa’d Zaghlul, took a middle approach of “measured collaboration” with Western people and ideas.<sup>138</sup> In each of these examples, the type of nationalism or reform pursued by the intellectual was related fundamentally to the West and to British dominance of the Egyptian state. Political nationalists could no more escape British influence than could the Egyptian state.

The reason for the immediacy of British influence is simple. Although nationalists concerned themselves with improving their nation (whatever they considered their nation to be), the primary scourge with which they contended was the British occupation because as long as the British controlled the state, no Egyptian project or politician was safe from outside interference.<sup>139</sup> In the nineteenth century, intellectuals held onto some hope that the Ottoman Empire might rescue them from Western domination, but that hope was repeatedly dashed with each new humiliation suffered by the Ottoman state until it was disbanded following World War I. In the early twentieth century, nationalists and intellectuals also retained some faith in the prospects of French intervention on their side and against the British. But after France and Great Britain signed the *entente cordiale* in 1904, that expectation disappeared.<sup>140</sup> It was then that the nationalist intellectuals hatched a new plan. This plan required the reconfiguration of thought about the peasants and workers so that they were now respected as “an emerging new

<sup>137</sup> Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1992), 4, 46.

<sup>138</sup> Ahmed, "The Discourse of the Veil," 148 – 49.

<sup>139</sup> Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899 - 1914," 170.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.: 183.

constituency whose agency might . . . serve the national project.”<sup>141</sup> Nationalism had always been related to social status, but for a brief time in the early twentieth century, Egyptianism became the most popular discourse among diverse social groups.

#### 2.1.4 Nationalism and Social Stratification

The story of nationalism, much like society, is multi-leveled. As Hobsbawm points out, “It is clearly illegitimate to extrapolate from the elite to the masses, the literate to the illiterate.”<sup>142</sup> This does not mean, however, that societies like Egypt are so fragmented as to defy analysis. That analysis simply must take into account the social group of thinkers considered and the social structures with which they were faced. As Hourani contends, in Egypt “a small group of writers, who were set apart from those among whom they were living by education and experience, nevertheless could express the needs of their society, and to some extent at least their ideas served as forces in the process of change.”<sup>143</sup> The most important of these writers for the purposes of this thesis is Mohamed Hussein Haykal. The works of Mahmud Mukhtar will also be taken as a text through which nationalist and modernist ideas were represented and disseminated. Haykal’s mentor, Lutfi al-Sayyid was the author of what Gershoni and Jankowski call the “first formation of an exclusively Egyptian and thoroughly modern territorial nationalism unencumbered by residual Ottoman-Islamic overtones.”<sup>144</sup> His argument, put forward before World War I, was that Egypt was a natural unit, or nation, and therefore deserved independence. Lutfi al-Sayyid “seldom interrupted [his] campaign of propaganda to make

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.: 184.

<sup>142</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 48.

<sup>143</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, vii.

<sup>144</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 13.

the Egyptian nation aware of itself as such.”<sup>145</sup> Although Gershoni and Jankowski doubt that Lutfi al-Sayyid’s more radical ideas were accepted by many of his contemporaries at the turn of the century, they maintain that by the 1920s, Egyptianism was the foremost nationalist form among the intellectual elite.<sup>146</sup>

As Hanna points out, the existence of an educated, wealthy group in Egypt was not new.<sup>147</sup> What was new was the prominence of a group of young men educated either in the West or in modern schools in Egypt. These men were popularly known as the *effendiya*.<sup>148</sup> Their nationalist discourse was a “feature of [their] public culture.”<sup>149</sup> The consolidation of nationalism among the educated elite left the rest of the population largely out of the picture, except as objects of reform. Although workers and peasants were integral to the successes of the 1919 Revolution, the elite maintained primacy in matters of high culture and the national image by virtue of their material and symbolic wealth. Therefore, the understanding of nationalism explored by this thesis is the one produced by the intellectuals and members of the early twentieth-century’s intellectual elites and *effendiya* groups and not one of a broader base or of popular patriotism.

### 2.1.5 Economic Roots of Nationalism

Egypt’s 1919 Revolution represents the pinnacle of the country’s nationalist enthusiasm. It was a time when all groups of society were able to unite for a single cause.

<sup>145</sup> Charles Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image from Its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 222.

<sup>146</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 15. Baraka points to 1919 specifically as the year during which what she calls the upper and lower classes “were temporarily united” because of the power of Egyptianism during that time. Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 13.

<sup>147</sup> Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, 4, 15.

<sup>148</sup> Although many scholars consider the *effendiya* a middle class group, I refer to them as members of the broader category of upper classes. See Chapter 3.

<sup>149</sup> Beinín, “Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923 - 1952,” 314.

The social elite saw the revolution as an expression of their readiness to govern themselves and their country mates; to the poor, the revolution was a chance to break the webs of violence and poverty in which they were ensnared.<sup>150</sup> This connection of nationalist propaganda to economics was not coincidental: Most of the grievances of the urban and rural poor against the British occupiers related to the dire financial straits of those working in factories or living in rural areas, and wealthy businessmen bristled at the advantages given foreign traders in their country.

According to Owen, Egyptian nationalist movements appeared as a symptom of the economic changes taking place during the nineteenth century.<sup>151</sup> These changes were spearheaded by Egypt's escalating integration into the world capitalist system and eventually led to the country's bankruptcy and the imposition of a foreign financial regime.<sup>152</sup> Owen states that this foreign regime and the political and economic dependency it wrought were impetus for the development of a nationalist movement.<sup>153</sup> In other words, Egypt's incorporation into the world system altered Egypt's social structure, producing the new group of *effendiya* who benefited from Western education and who, in turn, affected the culture in which these changes were being wrought.<sup>154</sup>

#### 2.1.6 Nationalism and Culture

Intellectuals and *effendiya* alike circulated their ideas through the popular presses. Central to this project was support for arts and culture as proof of Egypt's regeneration,

<sup>150</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 71.

<sup>151</sup> Roger Owen, "Egypt and Europe: From French Expedition to British Occupation," in Albert Hourani, Philip Khoury and Mary Wilson, eds, *The Modern Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 111.

<sup>152</sup> Owen dates this to 1798, which, as has already been shown, is already been shown, does not reflect the true process of change. The argument is still strong, however. Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, 114.

<sup>153</sup> Owen cites Hobson and Hilferding to say that "expansion of Europe led, inevitably, to the creation of movements of national liberation." Since Owen's understanding of European expansion in Egypt is primarily economic, it follows that this inevitability be applied to economic sources. Ibid., 122.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 123.

vibrancy and political vitality. In 1900, Muhammad ‘Abdu had founded The Society for the Revival of Arabic Books, among whose tasks was the promotion of literate society through a concentration on literature with a social purpose.<sup>155</sup> As the century developed, societies like this were altered by the Egyptianist orientation of those working after the revolution. After the 1919 Revolution and the “Egyptian intellectual upsurge of the 1920s,” the *effendiya* believed that they were living in the throes of a revolution and that their work, therefore, could lead to the reformulation of society.<sup>156</sup> To Haykal, “the achievements of the political revolution itself would be threatened in the long run if not followed by cultural changes.”<sup>157</sup> In this context of total revolution, the most celebrated symbol was Mukhtar’s *Nahdat Misr*, which was read by members of all strata of society as the physical embodiment of their new, progressive and modern nation.<sup>158</sup> As Baraka rightly states, “Egypt became independent at a moment in world history when modernity meant access to new techniques.”<sup>159</sup> Modern art was one such technique through which Egyptians could express both their individuality and demonstrate their acceptance of and achievements in a modern context. What exactly this modernity signified, however, is not immediately clear.

## 2.2 Modernity: In the Heart or in the Head?

Had Egypt been in Europe, according to Hobsbawm, it would have been recognized as a “historic nation” and, presumably, granted the rights of self-governance

<sup>155</sup> Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image from Its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid*, 40, 46.

<sup>156</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 81.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>159</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 80.



and autonomy that attend that status.<sup>160</sup> The reasons why the country was not so understood by the colonialists are complex, involving racism and paternalism on the part of many European administrators and lawmakers, not to mention British economic interests in the country. At a deeper level, this lack of recognition has to do with the concept of modernity. Egyptians were not considered modern by opinion makers in Europe and therefore could not be expected to successfully rule themselves or to control their own economy.

Modernism, as a socio-political concept, is difficult to place chronologically for, as Toledano points out, social and economic processes generally resist periodization.<sup>161</sup> In Europe, modernity was associated with urbanization, education and technology. Despite some parallels, this model is not completely translatable into other eras because of its inbuilt European socio-political context. The following section explores modernity in the Egyptian context.

### 2.2.1 The Modern Era in Egypt

A common demarcation between the “modern” and “traditional” eras in the Egypt is the 1798 invasion of the country by Napoleon. The problem with this explanation is that, like the abovementioned ideas about the spread of nationalism, it can be read as a case of non-Europeans rendered helpless to the onslaught of Western superiority. Furthermore, the French invasion was not the first contact between Egyptians and Westerners, but rather represented the culmination of centuries of ongoing

<sup>160</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 137 Compare, for instance, the case of Greece. At the start of the nineteenth century, Greece was just another region in the Ottoman Empire. Like the Egyptians, the Greeks had historic ties and a famous ancient culture. Unlike the Egyptians, the plight of the Greek people so appealed to modernist Europeans that they supported the Greek war of independence.

<sup>161</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, "Social and Economic Change in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume 2, Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 252.

communication and trade between the regions now known as Europe and the Middle East. For that reason, this thesis holds that the modern era in Egypt and the greater Ottoman Empire cannot be traced to a specific date or event. Following world systems theory,<sup>162</sup> Islamoğlu and Keyder claim that the Ottoman Empire was incorporated in the capitalist world economy as early as the 1750s, nearly a half-century before Napoleon's invasion.<sup>163</sup> Beinín points out that there was "no clear break" between the industrial period and its pre-industrial past in Egypt, and Toledano declares that the French occupation "cannot be seen as having inaugurated the modern era in Egyptian history" because the use of this date ignores the influence of Ottoman reform in the country.<sup>164</sup>

It cannot be denied, however, that by the late nineteenth century, many processes in Egypt had become "modern." What, then, does modernity mean? According to Hobsbawm, a fundamental element of modernity is the impulse to categorize people and groups. This is often associated with the increased status and size of the state, for which the census is the ideal tool of both classification and control. Hobsbawm contends that the census forces people to think about themselves in elemental terms: man, Muslim, Egyptian. This contributes to the development of a modern, national identity and also perpetuates the modern impulse toward "homogeneity and standardization."<sup>165</sup> In this way, the policy of Muhammad Ali was crucial to the establishment of Egyptian modernity, which can be defined as follows: a socio-political process by which the Egyptian nation was codified to create a standard idea of Egyptian identity during the

<sup>162</sup> World systems theory holds that the world developed as a whole and it was the impact of capitalism that caused some countries to remain less developed (or on the periphery), not some lack of initiative on the part of the leaders and businesspeople of those countries.

<sup>163</sup> Çağlar Keyder Huri Islamoğlu-Inan, "Agenda for Ottoman History," in *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu-Inan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 35.,

<sup>164</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 16. Toledano, "Social and Economic Change in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'," 253.

<sup>165</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 93, 100.

twentieth century, with its political and economic roots in nineteenth-century policy. Although there is much debate as to whether Muhammad Ali should be considered a nationalist hero or a loyal servant of the Ottoman Empire, there can be no debate concerning the modernity of his practices and goals.<sup>166</sup> His administration drastically increased the participation of the state in the daily and private lives of inhabitants. The state's incursion manifested itself in the codification of a particular concept of private property and the associated concept of public space, education, and the creation of museums to regulate people's understanding of history and of themselves, and in such intrusions as conscription and the census.<sup>167</sup>

Modernity is also related to social stratification, for to be a modern Egyptian meant participation in the activities of modernity: education, constitutional politics, appreciation of archaeology and modern culture – all of them dominated by the intellectual elite. At the heart of the modern culture of this elite were the movements and genres of the modern arts. Gershoni and Jankowski express the interplay of modernity, nationalism and art best: Egyptian nationalist intellectuals of the 1920s assumed a correlation between the realization of Egyptian authenticity and the attainment of “modernity.” Only the return of Egypt to her genuine national identity and consciousness

<sup>166</sup> This debate can be seen in the work of such writers as Marsot, who admires Muhammad Ali as the father of modern Egypt, and scholars like Khaled Fahmy who prefer to see the *wali* as an Ottoman first and only an accidental liberator of Egypt. Toledano takes a middle course here, stating that whether or not Ali was the founder of modern Egypt, he certainly “laid down the infrastructure” for what was to become the modern nation-state. See: Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>167</sup> Some scholars, such as Kenneth Cuno, contend that the development of private property in Egypt was not a wholly new phenomenon but rather that property laws simply codified people's long-standing relationship with the land. Kenneth M. Cuno, "The Origins of Private Ownership of Land in Egypt: A Reappraisal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 3 (1980): 246.

would create the conditions required for the development of a progressive, dynamic nation-state marching inexorably into the modern age.<sup>168</sup>

Egyptian authenticity and modernity can be further understood as part of a cultural and political ideological system that sets the “modern” in opposition to a newly invented understanding of tradition and antiquity. As Smith points out, “Essentially, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are cultural constructs like ‘nation-formation’ itself.”<sup>169</sup> In fact, Anderson proclaims that, without an understanding of antiquity (be that antiquity “Western” or “Oriental”), there would be no concept of modernity.<sup>170</sup> It was impossible to ignore Egypt’s connections to antiquity. Pharaonic and Greek ruins dominated the cityscapes in the country’s two most important metropolises, Alexandria and Cairo, and littered the shores of the Nile. It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that Egyptian intellectuals began to think of these ruins as an integral part of Egyptian identity, as became true in the writing of such intellectuals as Haykal and in the artwork of Mukhtar.

### 2.3 Modern Art

Entire theses can be written with the goal of defining “art” as a concept. For the purposes of this thesis, a simple definition is required, for which I turn to Pierre Bourdieu, whose theory will be discussed shortly. He writes: “The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art.” Thus, something becomes art when it is presented and understood as such, i.e. when it has symbolic value beyond its existence as a mere object.

<sup>168</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 130.

<sup>169</sup> Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 153 - 54.

<sup>170</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 5.

Along those same lines, an artist is a person who produces works of art – no more and no less.<sup>171</sup> But what are “modern” arts and artists?

Modern art is a term used to designate works created during the period from end of the nineteenth century to the 1970s.<sup>172</sup> Under this temporal definition, all art created during that time can be considered modern. But there is more to the meaning. Modern art carries with it an ideological impact, a rejection of convention and celebration of imagination. It has been called “the tradition of the new” and relates to ideas of artistic freedom.<sup>173</sup> In this way, modern art indicates not only a specific timeline but also unconventionally, experimentation and the rejection of the establishment.

The idea that art could be modern was originated by a group of rebellious painters in nineteenth-century Paris. The city’s artists had been stewing for at least a century (or, if a longer timeline is to be believed, since the sixteenth century), increasingly enraged by the sterility and formality of art institutions and schools in what was known as the “salon system.”<sup>174</sup> Salons were galleries where an anointed few were allowed to display their art, depending upon the whims of those in the establishment. The first modern artists mounted shows across the city, which rejected the strictures they encountered in the salons, and their rebellion evolved until, in 1863, artists, including Edouard Manet, showed works at the artist-run *Salon des Refusés*.<sup>175</sup> Controversy ensued; Manet’s painting *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* “created a major scandal,” and from then on critics and artists considered “modern” art to be something diametrically different from previous

<sup>171</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 35, 76.

<sup>172</sup> Peter Childs states that modern art existed only from 1890 to 1930. Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 18.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>175</sup> H. Harvard Arnason, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1968), 13.

genres.<sup>176</sup> Modern art, its proponents said, was concerned not with pedagogy but with the expression of emotions.<sup>177</sup>

This conception of modern art is thus linked to the social, economic and political context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. The appearance of modern art in Egypt yielded, at first, a rather different interpretation of what it meant to be a modern artist from that which developed in France.

### 2.3.1 Egyptian Modern Art

The first Egyptian art school was established in 1908, and according to Abu Ghazi the very first student to come through the doors was seventeen-year-old Mahmud Mukhtar.<sup>178</sup> In fact, Mukhtar has been heralded (and considered himself) the first Egyptian artist since the time of the Pharaohs.<sup>179</sup> Mukhtar and his colleagues, including Mahmud Said and Muhammad Nagy, were the pioneers of Egypt's first generation of modern artists. According to Karnouk, "The modern era in Egypt begins at the point when Egyptian artists adhered to international art," which occurred for these artists at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>180</sup> But the international aspect of their work was not its most important feature. Egyptian modernists in art were primarily concerned with

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>177</sup> Bourdieu quotes Zola to illustrate this point: "Leave to the philosopher the right to give us lessons, leave to the painter the right to give us emotions." Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 136.

<sup>178</sup> Author interview, Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, The Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, Egypt, 8 February, 2009.

<sup>179</sup> Mukhtar's biographer, Badr el-Diin Abu Ghazi, is fond of saying that Mukhtar was the first Egyptian artist since the time of the Pharaohs. See *Abu Ghazi, El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 14. This overlooks such art forms as *Aruset el-Mulid*, which flourished in Egypt since the Fatimid dynasty in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and points to the commonly held demarcation between "art" and "crafts." *Aruset el-Mulid* are carefully decorated statuettes used to celebrate the birth of the prophet Muhammad and which are used in popular, annual celebrations. Because they are neither displayed in museums nor sold in galleries, *Aruset el-Mulid* are crafts in this context and cannot be lumped in with "high" art. Abd el-Ghani el-Sabui el-Shal, *Aruset el-Mulid* (Cairo: The High Council of Culture, 2003).

<sup>180</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910 - 2003*, 1.

translating Egyptian imagery and concepts into the “language” of modern art and, as a result, created a genre of modern art all their own, herein called Neo-Pharaonicism.<sup>181</sup>

The Neo-Pharaonicist movement began in the late nineteenth century but did not reach maturity until the 1920s, whereupon artists like Mukhtar took up the cause and gave visual expression to nationalist theory. By that time, Pharaonicism had become “the heart and soul of Egyptian territorial nationalism.”<sup>182</sup> The form taken by Neo-Pharaonicist works paid homage to the work of the ancient Egyptian sculptors and painters who created tombs and monuments such as those uncovered in Luxor. Pharaonicism can therefore be considered indicative of the “mood of the age,” propelled as much by ideology as by current events, such as Howard Carter’s discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922, the same year that Egypt was granted nominal independence.

Egyptian nationalists’ concern with creating a means for nationalist expression that would support and benefit their cause led to movements supporting the Egyptianization of literature, music and visual art disseminated through the nationalist press.<sup>183</sup> In literature, this led to a profusion of nationalist poetry, which helped promote nationalist causes.<sup>184</sup> In fact, poetry “was considered [by the occupiers and pro-British administration] to be more dangerous than journalism as a stirrer of public opinion” and

<sup>181</sup> In her encyclopedic look at Egypt’s modern arts, Karnouk divides artistic movements by generation – members of the “first generation,” like those artists examined in this thesis, were “most strongly characterized” by Neo-Pharaonicism, and it was not until the “second generation” of artists (who came into their own during the decade between 1935 – 1945, after Mukhtar’s death) that genres like Surrealism challenged Neo-Pharaonicism’s hegemony over Egypt’s modern arts. ———, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 30.

<sup>182</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 164.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>184</sup> Mounah Khouri examines the works of such poets as al-Barudi, whose work “showed that poetry, in proportion to its vigor and excellence, could affect the sensibility of the community by stimulating its religious and national consciousness.” Khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt (1882 - 1922)*, 35.

poets were jailed for their seditious stanzas.<sup>185</sup> Not all art was created to serve political purposes. For this reason, Egyptian modern art, for this thesis, refers to the works of art created during the first decades of the twentieth century. Neo-Pharaonicist art, on the other hand, refers to artworks that celebrate and perpetuate symbols of Egyptian identity. The content of that art is not purely imitative; Pharaonic symbols were used to produce meanings, and that alluded to the modern context, such as the Pharaonic symbols of power that Mukhtar carved into the base of his Cairo statue of Sa'd Zaghlul. Nationalist art, as we shall see, combined these modern and Neo-Pharaonicist ideas to serve a political purpose.

## 2.4 Sociology of the Arts

Because the production of art is often perceived as a personal process, its meaning can defy categorization. This is the hypothesis of aesthetic theory. Following Kant, aesthetics is a philosophy that looks at beauty and beautiful objects, such as works of art, without concern for their source, content or context.<sup>186</sup> Each work of art is analyzed as a matchless articulation of the artist's inner world.<sup>187</sup> The limitations of this theory in social science come from the fact that no individual exists completely outside of society. Therefore works of art cannot be fully understood without attention to the social, political, economic and cultural contexts in which they were created. The sociology of the arts analyzes art with attention to those aspects.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 97, 114.

<sup>186</sup> Michael and Cheryl Hardy Genfell, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 37 - 39.

<sup>187</sup> Zolberg, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*, 6.



#### 2.4.1 Bourdieu and the Sociology of Art

Pierre Bourdieu established himself among the pioneers of the field of sociology of the arts with books like *Distinction* and *The Rules of Art* in which he considers themes such as the development of culture, taste, and the relationship between socio-political forces and the arts.<sup>188</sup> His basic contentions are that a work of art reflects more than the creative process and prowess of an individual artist, and that the viewer is involved in more than the mere act of looking at art. A work of art must be thought of in a larger context. For that reason, the study of any given work of art and of the art field in general must examine direct producers (the artists themselves), meaning and value producers (such as critics and curators), and the social conditions relating both to the work's creation and to its reception. Following Bourdieu, this thesis will examine both the direct producer (Mukhtar) and the meaning-producers (intellectuals and critics like Lutfi al-Sayyid and Haykal and nationalists like Sa'd Zaghlul) whose products and work supported the artist and promoted his art.

Bourdieu understands art production as a social process. This perspective is highly applicable to study of Mukhtar, for his monumental sculptures required the contribution of energy, money, and ideas from myriad individuals, such as journalists, government officials and private donors, not to mention the laborers who helped Mukhtar with the actual construction of the monuments. Bourdieu's suggestion that those interested in the arts examine not only the artist but also the "people who conceive the idea of the work. . . people who execute it. . . people who provide the necessary equipment and material" and the audience is crucial to full understanding of the meaning

<sup>188</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. And Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.

of such sculptures as *Nahdat Misr*.<sup>189</sup> The attention to the audience brings up another central theme of Bourdieu's work: the impact of class and conditioning on appreciation and understanding of art. Bourdieu contends that taste is a learned facet of an individual's disposition processes – in other words, it is structured by economic and social forces.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, taste is perpetuated by society as a means for division between classes.<sup>191</sup> Bourdieu calls this division “distinction,” for judgments about the division between “high” and “low” culture, “high” and “low” art are tools with which those with specific cultural capital distinguish themselves from the others.<sup>192</sup> He writes: “Art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.”<sup>193</sup> The art field does not exactly reproduce the class divisions of greater society, however. While class is largely determined by access to material wealth, cultural capital has more to do with recognition than it does wealth.<sup>194</sup>

In Bourdieu's estimation, the art field is organized by two hierarchical forces, one of which is embedded in the other. The primary force is the opposition between “pure” and mass production. Pure production designates works created for their own merit – art for art's sake – and mass-produced works are those intended to turn a profit among the majority of people.<sup>195</sup> Pure production itself is further divided by the opposition between the avant-garde and the “consecrated” avant-garde, or between subsequent generations of

<sup>189</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 34 - 35.

<sup>190</sup> ———, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 101.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> The interplay of education with the accumulation of both financial and cultural capital can confuse this point. Although the rich are often also the determiners of taste in a stratified society, such tropes as the starving artist belie the centrality of economic capital as a goal in the art field.

<sup>195</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 121.

producers.<sup>196</sup> Every new event and contribution alters the artistic field anew.<sup>197</sup> This means that the art world changes with each new work of art and must be understood as something in constant flux. In this way, the art field follows a “cycle of innovation” in which new ideas and producers gradually replace the old, but this system does not lead to profound changes unless accompanied by modifications external to the art field, e.g. a revolution of the social structure.<sup>198</sup>

An important societal change with impact on the art field is a rise in the share of the population with the means and desire to pursue education. This very revolution (along, of course, with a political one) occurred in Egypt during the period under study.<sup>199</sup> The improved economic conditions the country enjoyed under Muhammad Ali and again under British imperial control, paired with greater access to modern education, allowed for a sizeable potential audience for the arts and, eventually, led more people to become producers of art and artistic meaning.<sup>200</sup> Thanks to this increased audience, certain artistic creations were able to gain more notoriety and to enjoy greater impact. The fact that there were more people producing and consuming art did not mean, however, that they all *understood* the works on display in the Bourdieusian sense. To completely “understand” a work of art, the audience must both master the specific vocabulary with which the work was created, and keep in mind the social circumstances

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>197</sup> Bourdieu defines a field as “a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. . . This field is neither a vague social background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artists and writers . . . It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital . . .” ———, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 33, 162, 63 - 64.

<sup>198</sup> David Gartman, "Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application and Critique," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 2 (2002): 260.

<sup>199</sup> Toledano, "Social and Economic Change in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'," 278.

<sup>200</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Bourdieu discusses this kind of social transformation in *The Field of Cultural Production*, 54 – 55.

– such as the class system and educational methods – through which this work came into being and came to be displayed.<sup>201</sup> Bourdieu states: “Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the ‘mood of the age’ produces a derealization of works” and therefore hinders the viewer’s ability to fully understand any work of art.<sup>202</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Limitations of Bourdieu’s Theories in the Context of Egypt

Bourdieu’s theories are based upon his knowledge of French artists and writers, a knowledge that does not translate completely into the Egyptian context. Nineteenth-century French artists rejected the established art field and elitist class structure in their country and strove to create works of art that had no lessons.<sup>203</sup> Their denunciation of the *Académie* led to the creation of such symbolic figures as the struggling artist whose legitimacy as a creative producer was based upon the fact that the mass audience neither understood nor appreciated him.<sup>204</sup> This denunciation of institutions did not occur during the modern era in Egypt, however, and for this reason many of the tenets of modern art did not appeal to Egyptian artists like Mukhtar (although some artists did work in genres popular in Europe, such as surrealism<sup>205</sup>). That is why, when Mukhtar studied in Paris, he happily entered the *Académie* and expressed disdain for most of the more avant-garde modern artists and genres of his time.<sup>206</sup>

Bourdieu himself cautions that the sociology of the arts approach should not be taken so far that each artist’s work is charged with wholly representing his or her social milieu. Such is the problem of overly ambitious scholars like Negash, who declares that

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>203</sup> ———, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 136.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>205</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 32.

<sup>206</sup> “*Fi Baris*,” The Mahmud Mukhtar Museum, <http://www.mmukhtarmuseum.gov.eg/paris.html>.

“artists embody and reflect the ideologies they inherit from their societies.”<sup>207</sup> To this, Bourdieu would respond: “To make the artist the unconscious spokesperson of a social group to which the work of art reveals what it unknowingly thinks or feels is to condemn oneself to assertions which would not be out of place in the wildest metaphysics” and piles unnecessary responsibilities upon the back of the unfortunate artist.<sup>208</sup> Following this prudent warning, Mukhtar’s work should not be given too much prophetic power because, in addition to the fascinating social and political interactions that contributed to the creation of sculptures like *Nahdat Misr*, the majority of his pieces represent the vision and imagination of an aggressively individualistic and opinionated creative artist.<sup>209</sup> Arguments have been made against the sociology of the arts, which contend that the method devalues the artist’s contributions because of its concentration on the social aspects of the art field.<sup>210</sup> This is a valid argument; it is easy to lose sight of the individual contributions of the creative artist when assessing the field as a whole. This thesis will temper the strict sociology of the arts approach with some analysis of aesthetics in Chapter Five when the specific features of several of Mukhtar’s works are discussed.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored three interconnected discourses: nationalism, modernity, and the development of art, under the contention that all three are essential to understanding the work of Mahmud Mukhtar and the era in which he lived. Mukhtar’s work displays themes related to all three discourses. In *Nahdat Misr*, for instance,

<sup>207</sup> Girma Negash, "Art Invoked: A Mode of Understanding and Shaping the Political," *International Political Science Review* 25, no. 2 (2004): 186.

<sup>208</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 56.

<sup>209</sup> According to his biographer, Mukhtar was a virulent enemy of any who stood in the way of his creativity, even government officials. Thus the synchrony of the message in works like *Nahdat Misr* with policy was not typical of all Mukhtar’s creations. Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*. 18

<sup>210</sup> See Nick Zangwill, “Against Sociology of Art,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Sage Publications, 2002.

Mukhtar demonstrates his knowledge of the development of art in his use of modern line and technique, but also pays homage to early Egyptian art through his reinterpretation of the sphinx. The depiction of the woman who accompanies the sphinx can be read as a visual representation of nationalist thought popular during that time. Through an analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art, it has been shown that artworks should not be examined alone and that the socio-political and cultural contexts are key to comprehension. This is certainly true of Mukhtar's work.

### 3. THE MOOD OF THE AGE – LIFE AND TIMES OF MAHMUD MUKHTAR

Bourdieu's sociology of art, as summarized in the previous chapter, is predicated upon the idea that a creative work is incomprehensible without knowledge of the social, political and economic context in which that work was created. Bourdieu calls for attention to the "mood of the age" to address those factors.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, before I can embark upon an interpretation of Mukhtar's sculptures, I must first explore the mood of Egypt during Mukhtar's lifetime. This chapter interweaves a thematic approach to Egypt's history with the biography of Mahmud Mukhtar in pursuit of an understanding of the sculptor's life and the era in which he lived.<sup>212</sup>

The historical background herein begins with the first colonial incursion onto Egyptian soil, that of Napoleon's army in 1798. It was then, at the start of the long nineteenth century, that distinct changes began to occur in Egypt's social, political and economic patterns.<sup>213</sup> New forms of socio-political relationships altered the economic circumstances and cultural processes of Egypt in both local and international contexts. The importance of this era is underscored by the intellectual discourse of the time. Writer Qasim Amin, for instance, characterized the end of the nineteenth century as "the most important stage of [Egypt's] history."<sup>214</sup> Less than twenty years later, participants in the

<sup>211</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 32.

<sup>212</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, the biographical details of Mukhtar's life are dominated by his biographer, Bedr el-Diin Abu Ghazi. All of the works on Mukhtar that have been published in the years following Abu Ghazi's first publication have been based, often to a large extent, of that author's narration of events. This is problematic for Abu Ghazi has his own biases which are evident in his writing. However, a comprehensive restructuring of Mukhtar's legend is not within the scope of this thesis. I will instead endeavor to offer the story of Mukhtar's life in a different light than has been done before by interweaving it with an exploration of the socio-political and cultural events of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

<sup>213</sup> Beinín states that eighteenth century Egypt did not present any radical breaks from the previous century. Those changes came with the nineteenth century. Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 11.

<sup>214</sup> Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, 69.

1919 Revolution believed that demonstrations would bring drastic changes to all aspects of their society.<sup>215</sup>

This chapter opens with an overview of the most important events both to Egypt at large and to Mukhtar's life, and then moves on to look at the transformations that took place in Egypt's social stratification during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discussion of social stratification contains within it a consideration for the role of women and the family in nationalist discourse because this issue was debated by the elite and it impacted their understanding of their nation. I situate Mukhtar in the social strata of his time as a member of the new *effendiya* group before moving on to an examination of imperialism and resistance in the 'Urabi revolt of 1882. Mukhtar grew up in the period of resistance bookended by the 'Urabi revolt and the 1919 Revolution, and so I explore his youth and education up to his entrance into the School of Fine Arts in 1908. Mukhtar studied European methods and artistic conventions, but as he matured he paid increasing attention to Pharaonic art. Therefore I examine the development of Egyptology and of the public sphere, as both were established in the late nineteenth century. Mukhtar traveled to Paris in 1911, but he remained connected to the events at home. The 1919 Revolution, in particular, influenced Mukhtar's work and career. It is explored here with reference to the travails that Mukhtar and his nationalist supporters faced in erecting the monument *Nahdat Misr* to commemorate the revolution. The chapter closes with an inquiry into Mukhtar's mission to elevate the Egyptian art field, a mission that he pursued with dogged determination until his death in 1934. This mission connects Mukhtar to the economic, socio-cultural and political environments of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt as a force for change. By probing the mood of the age through the life of Mahmud

<sup>215</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 82.



Mukhtar, this chapter demonstrates the way in which the visual arts were an integral part of Egypt's modernizing and nationalist projects.

### 3.1 Egypt in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries – An Overview

By necessity, this section covers much of the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth century only superficially. I concentrate on key trends and incidents that are related to an understanding of the environment in which Mukhtar worked and from which he drew his inspiration, rather than including every feature of this eventful period.

Mukhtar's life story frames my narrative of the early twentieth century, for the major events of his life will be presented with reference to his country's milestones. Thus, the impact of the selected events can be felt in their influence upon the sculptor and through their contribution to new traditions in the social, political and cultural fields.

The invention of tradition, typical of many countries during the long nineteenth century, is described by Hobsbawm as a result of dramatic alterations to society.<sup>216</sup> Such alterations can be events, like the entrance of an occupying power, or they can take the form of an ongoing process, like industrialization. The effect of both changes in Egypt was the same: The modernizing elite came to view "old" traditions as out of date and felt duty-bound to replace them with new, "modern" traditions. Much of the reform was perpetuated by state institutions, such as schools and museums, including the School of Fine Arts, the Egyptian Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. For this reason, the modernity of these traditions cannot be understood without consideration for the state's involvement. This state and the people who ran it changed rapidly during the nineteenth century as Egypt went from an Ottoman province to an English colony, and continued to

<sup>216</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric and Terence Ranger Hobsbawm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3 – 4.

change in the twentieth century through increased popular involvement and, finally, revolution.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had ruled Egypt for almost three hundred years. That rule did not go unchallenged, however, particularly by local factions of Mamluk administrators who represented a more tangible authority in Egypt than the distant Ottoman sultan.<sup>217</sup> These two forms of authority were eclipsed in 1798 when Napoleon led a French battalion into Egypt and achieved a shaky hold on the region. Napoleon brought scientists, artists and historians with him to Cairo and inaugurated an unprecedented project, which researched and recorded Egyptian life and history, eventually producing a series of books called *Description de l'Égypte*.<sup>218</sup> Napoleon was ousted from Egypt by an Ottoman-British effort in 1801, and within a few years a new and equally ambitious sovereign took over the country: Muhammad Ali Pasha.<sup>219</sup>

Muhammad Ali ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848. During that time, he consolidated control of the government into his own and his family's hands, created monopolies and began setting up a modern army. In this way, the Pasha shattered the old ruling order and spearheaded a reform process whose undertakings included the definition of modernity in Egypt. Central to Muhammad Ali's conception of modernity were his modern army and the development of industry, both of which relied upon European technology. To serve the army, the Pasha placed a gunpowder factory in Cairo in 1815, updated the ports in

<sup>217</sup> William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Third ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), 64.

<sup>218</sup> Paula Sanders, *Creating Medieval Cairo: Empire, Religion, and Architectural Preservation in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>219</sup> Muhammad Ali's title was Pasha; he will be called here in either by his name or his title, "the Pasha."

Bulaq and Alexandria and built factories to produce everything from soap to fezzes.<sup>220</sup>

The Pasha also initiated educational reforms, again to support his modern army. This period has been called an era of “transformation and Arabization” because of the volume of texts translated for Egyptian use, and because an unforeseen consequence of the educational reforms was the appearance of a new, educated generation of Egyptians who would eventually demand independence.<sup>221</sup> Art, under the Pasha dynasty, was an official endeavor: The public spaces of the city were dominated by bronze statues made for the members of Muhammad Ali’s family by European artists, and the Pasha commissioned several European portrait painters to capture his likeness.<sup>222</sup> By the turn of the century, these public statues would become an expression of the Ali dynasty’s rejection of Ottoman sovereignty and a manifestation of their European-oriented modernity.<sup>223</sup>

Although Muhammad Ali’s reforms created jobs and allowed for a growing number of people to receive education, they were not universally positive. He initiated the conscription of peasants, and his state’s “massive intrusions” into its citizens’ lives caused damage that reverberated through generations.<sup>224</sup> Ali took advantage of his large army and attempted to expand his holdings into an empire of his own. In the process, he threatened Ottoman rule in Syria and traveled into the Sudan, along with other territories in what we now call the Middle East. Many see these military actions as part of a

<sup>220</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 40.

<sup>221</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 23.

<sup>222</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 22. See also Klaus Kreiser, “Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt,” *Muqarnas* 14 (1997). And Gaston Wiet, *Mohammed Ali Et Les Beaux-Arts* (Cairo: Dar al Maaref, 1949).

<sup>223</sup> Kreiser, “Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt,” 107.

<sup>224</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 26.

nationalist attempt to liberate Egypt.<sup>225</sup> As Fahmy points out, however, Muhammad Ali's military campaigns do not represent an inclusive plan for Egypt because each are "dictated by unique historical causes."<sup>226</sup> Fahmy insists upon Ali's "Ottoman character" and argues that the Pasha could not even begin to imagine the world without the Ottoman Empire – Fahmy takes this to indicate that Ali's ultimate loyalty was to his sultan, not to the Egyptian people.<sup>227</sup> Either way, the Pasha became too much of a threat for the Ottoman Empire to handle on its own and it had to rely on a coalition with European forces to curtail Egyptian expansion. Still, Muhammad Ali's family remained in nominal control of Egypt until 1952, and many of the Pasha's modernization projects resumed under the rule of his successors.<sup>228</sup> This was particularly true when Muhammad Ali's grandson, Isma'il (r. 1863 – 79), took power. Isma'il set his sights on transforming Egypt into a modern and Western country, famously pronouncing: "My country is no longer in Africa, it is now in Europe."<sup>229</sup>

It was during Isma'il's reign that the Egyptian intelligentsia began to debate the meaning and definition of their nation, although the coming decades did not bring consensus.<sup>230</sup> This debate took place as part of the expanding public discourse supported by the popular press, which emerged in Egypt during the nineteenth century. Isma'il also contributed to the altered public space in Egypt through his ambitious modernization (and, arguably, Westernization) projects, including the opening of the Suez Canal. To

<sup>225</sup> Cleveland claims that "Muhammad Ali's political objective was to secure independence from the Ottoman Empire," an assertion that Fahmy would vehemently deride. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 66.

<sup>226</sup> Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*, 40.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 72 – 73.

<sup>228</sup> Sanders, *Creating Medieval Cairo: Empire, Religion, and Architectural Preservation in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 7.

<sup>229</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 95.

<sup>230</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 132.

fund these projects, he borrowed from the European powers. When the bottom fell out of the Egyptian economy, Isma'il's administration descended rapidly into debt.<sup>231</sup> The European powers, particularly France and Great Britain, reacted by setting up the Public Debt Commission to supervise repayment of their loans, and Isma'il established exorbitant taxes to pay the commission.<sup>232</sup> The vise grip of European economic control soon extended into the political arena when, in 1882, British men took over much of the administration of the Egyptian state in response to the eruption of discontent among Egyptian army officers known as the 'Urabi revolt.<sup>233</sup> From 1882, then, Egypt was under British control, although the relationship was not defined until 1914.<sup>234</sup> From 1883 on, Egypt was under the power of a succession of British administrators, starting with Evelyn Baring, who later received the title Lord Cromer (r. 1883 – 1907). The incursion of foreign power onto Egyptian soil was the impetus for the nationalist movements that would shape the country in the coming century.

A generation of men was born during the last decade of the nineteenth century who would react to these political and economic changes in ways that altered the cultural landscape of their country. Most of these men were born in villages but later moved to Cairo to join the flourishing intellectual and artistic fields there. In 1888, writer Mohamed Hussein Haykal and painter Muhammad Nagy entered the world. Then, writer

<sup>231</sup> The Egyptian economy was based, to a large extent, upon the cotton market. During the American Civil War, from 1861 – 65, Egypt became Britain's primary source of cotton and the economy expanded rapidly. When the Civil War ended, cotton prices plunged and the Egyptian state was plagued with economic crises. Bein, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 52.

<sup>232</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 99.

<sup>233</sup> Cleveland reports that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, "hundreds of British officials, army officers, engineers, and teachers – many unqualified by either training or experience – dominated all areas of important decision making within Egypt." This produced deserved bitterness among the educated Egyptian elite who were denied any influence in their own country. Ibid., 105.

<sup>234</sup> British control of Egypt during the era before World War I has been called a "veiled protectorate" because of its vague boundaries. Ibid., 104.

and educational reformer Taha Hussein and writer ‘Abbas Mahmud al-’Aqqād were both born in 1889. In the following year, the journalist-critic Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Qadr al-Mazini was born, and then Mukhtar and his fellow artist Yusef Kamil were born in 1891. The year 1892 saw the births of musician Said Darwish and artist Muhammad Hassan, followed a year later by painter Rageb ‘Ayyad.<sup>235</sup> Painter Mahmud Said was born in 1897. The significance of Mukhtar’s birth, therefore, relates to the vibrant generation of Egyptian intellectuals and artists into which he was born.

Coinciding with (and often in reaction to) the long years of British political and economic dominance, the Egyptian press flourished. The intelligentsia expressed their diverse opinions of the foreign regime, setting off a long discussion as to whether British influence was positive or negative. The stakes were raised in 1906 by the events known as the “Dinshaway incident.” British officers stationed near the village of Dinshaway unintentionally injured a local woman while shooting at pigeons, whereupon peasants assaulted and wounded the soldiers, one of whom died. Although that death has since been attributed to sunstroke, a military tribunal (which included Egyptian administrators) rapidly convicted thirty two peasants of premeditated murder and sentenced four to death by hanging. The response by Egyptian nationalist journalists and litterateurs was immense; the incident and its peasant protagonists were soon mythologized through poetry and novels.<sup>236</sup> By 1907, elite leaders put their anti-imperialist ideas into action by forming nationalist parties, and throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, Egyptian political life was rent by the rivalries between groups who represented opposing

<sup>235</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 69. See also: Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 9.

<sup>236</sup> *The Virgin of Dinshaway*, written by Mahmud Tahrir Haqqi in 1906, recounts the story of an innocent and pious peasant woman embroiled in rural strife related to the incident. It was a best seller, and one work among many dealing with the incident. Beinun, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 75 - 76.

ideas of nationalism and of the Egyptian nation.<sup>237</sup> The debates raged up to the onset of World War I, and it was that international event which finally inspired a more unified spirit of revolution in the majority of Egyptian people.

Mukhtar was still quite young when the Dinshaway incident sparked national attention, but he must certainly have been aware of it: The young boy left his home village in 1902 to follow his mother to Cairo, and there he attended a local school before entering the School of Fine Arts in 1908.<sup>238</sup> His education was both artistic and political. According to Sharouny, both Mukhtar and his work were connected to resistance movements during his student years. Crowds raised Mukhtar's small statues of nationalist leaders Mustafa Kamil and Muhammad Farid as part of their protests against British occupation, and in 1910, Mukhtar himself joined in an independence protest where it was alleged that he "pushed the British chief of the Cairo police off his horse onto the ground."<sup>239</sup> Mukhtar was arrested and spent 15 days in jail.<sup>240</sup> One year later, the young artist left to continue his education in Paris, while the resentments in Egypt continued to simmer.

In 1914, the British made their control of Egypt official by announcing that the country was its protectorate.<sup>241</sup> One result of this declaration was that the British felt no qualms when they funded and supplied their war effort in the Middle East by requisitioning people, supplies and funds from Egypt.<sup>242</sup> By the end of the war, Egypt was suffering from near famine and widespread unrest. Furthermore, the demise of the

<sup>237</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 109.

<sup>238</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 10. Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 16.

<sup>239</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 11.

<sup>240</sup> <http://www.mmukhtarmuseum.gov.eg/art.html>

<sup>241</sup> "Egypt a British Protectorate," *The American Journal of International Law* 9, no. 1 (1915).

<sup>242</sup> Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt - Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 262.

Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I left the Islamic world without its familiar center and consigned Egypt to its fate as a British colony.<sup>243</sup> When the British denied territorial nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul's request to appear at the 1919 peace conference to argue for Egyptian independence, protestors took to the streets in Cairo and popular action spread into the countryside. Shock waves reached the shores of Europe, where Mukhtar and his fellow expatriate artists came out in support of the revolution. Mukhtar, in fact, was so affected by the 1919 uprising that it inspired him to design his most famous sculpture, *Nahdat Misr*.

This three-year revolution and the ensuing deliberations between British and European leaders so destabilized British rule that in 1922 they declared Egypt an independent state. For this reason, Goldberg credits the 1919 Revolution with the creation of the modern state in Egypt,<sup>244</sup> while, for Tignor, the revolution marks the "emergence of Egypt's most important political party" (the Wafd, whose members led the revolution) and stands out as the decisive act that prevented Egypt from becoming completely subsumed into the British Empire.<sup>245</sup> Independence was more symbolic than sincere, however, for Great Britain retained control over the Sudan, the Suez Canal Company, the rights and privileges of foreign residents, the modes of external defense and Egypt's foreign affairs.<sup>246</sup> Such a haphazard transference of rights and power caused some nationalists to disparage their so-called independence as "little more than colonialism under a new name," but even the suggestion of independence was enough to whet

<sup>243</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 209.

<sup>244</sup> Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt - Egypt 1919," 261.

<sup>245</sup> Tignor, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: New Directions in the Egyptian Economy," 41.

<sup>246</sup> Robert Vitalis, *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.



Egyptian appetites for further rejection of foreign domination.<sup>247</sup> Growing rejection of foreign power found strength in the rhetoric of economic or business nationalism, whose emblem was Bank Misr, and was also expressed in nationalist artistic movements, particularly Neo-Pharaonicism, which reached its height at the end of the 1920s with the public installation of *Nahdat Misr*.<sup>248</sup> Thus, during the first decades of the twentieth century, Egypt's political, social and cultural life was impacted by foreign rule, local nationalisms and the ambitious projects of visionaries like Mahmud Mukhtar.

### 3.1.1 Social Stratification and Social Mobility

Any study of modern Egypt, and of Mukhtar, would be incomplete without attention to social stratification. Social stratification is not the same thing as a class system in the Western model. As Beinín points out, the notion that populations can be divided into social classes is tied to discourses of European history.<sup>249</sup> The translation of these notions into the Egyptian context becomes, therefore, a thorny problem, which will be avoided herein by the use of names for the various groups of people under study. The majority of Egypt's population during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consisted of peasants and workers, the rural and urban poor. Although there was some crossover between these two groups of people through urbanization and the introduction of industry, they were separate entities, and were also quite separate from the country's wealthier groups.

The groups of people who controlled Egypt's dominant symbolic and economic capital during the period under study were far from unified. Instead, this minority of the population formed assorted, and often competing, status groups. These groups were

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*, 295.

<sup>249</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 4.

arranged hierarchically by their relationship to power, wealth and cultural capital.<sup>250</sup> The picture is complicated by the presence in Egypt of two groups of foreign rulers: Ottoman overlords and European colonialists. This extensive foreign presence produced what Cole calls a “dual elite” in which the people he terms Ottoman-Egyptian notables were opposed to European merchants and administrators.<sup>251</sup> Those Ottoman-Egyptians can be further divided into those who supported Egypt’s integration into European systems and those who resisted that integration.<sup>252</sup>

The Ottoman forces were fully entrenched in Egypt by the nineteenth century, but whether they were integrated into the larger population is unclear. While some scholars maintain that the Ottoman administrators of Turco-Circassian descent had effectively blended with wealthy Egyptian families by the nineteenth century, Egyptian notables themselves may not have thought the same.<sup>253</sup> In fact, many members of Egypt’s wealthier group saw themselves as a “middle class.”<sup>254</sup> They reserved upper class status for members of the royal family.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, members of these wealthy (but not royal) Egyptian families often identified themselves as *fallahin* (peasants), which emphasized their connection to the land, often the source of their wealth, and also differentiated Egyptian groups from those with Turco-Circassian roots.<sup>256</sup> It is this sort of self-identification that is important to this thesis, for the themes of nationalism, modernity and the development of art are as much about human conceptions and sense of self as

<sup>250</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 8.

<sup>251</sup> Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, 23.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 31 - 32.

<sup>253</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 19. See also: Juan Ricardo Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 4 (1981): 388.

<sup>254</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 288.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 212.

they are about historical fact. Therefore, people of Turco-Circassian descent who promoted Egyptian nationalist thought will be considered members of Egyptian groups, of whom the most important in this thesis are the intelligentsia and the *effendiya*.

The *effendiya* were a new group in the nineteenth century, but neither their ranks nor their membership remained static. Throughout the nineteenth century, the social status of the *effendiya* began to rise, based upon their modern education and its related cultural capital.<sup>257</sup> These men were distinguished from the general population by their “possession of scientific knowledge derived from a Western educational experience.”<sup>258</sup> As writers and translators, these men were responsible for the movement of Western ideas into the Egyptian context, such as ideals of national self-determination. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the concept the *effendiya* was tantamount to the concept of modernity.<sup>259</sup>

According to Ryzova, *effendi* is “a cultural term . . . related to social mobility.”<sup>260</sup> For this reason, the understanding and membership of the *effendiya* class changed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The term was used originally in the nineteenth century to indicate the group of Western-educated bureaucrats working within the growing state system, but with the revolutionary events of the twentieth century, the *effendiya* became the “nation’s liberators” and therefore gained not only social but also

<sup>257</sup> Muhammad Ali inaugurated modern, government schools in Egypt and his institutionalization of education was expanded by his grandson, Khedive Isma’il. In 1872, Isma’il created the Dar al-‘Ulum, an educational institution which presented a “modern” curriculum that was understood as a direct threat to the previous center of learning in Egypt, al-Azhar, and its “traditional” or religious-based teaching. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 10.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>259</sup> Lucie Ryzova, “Egyptianizing Modernity through The “New Effendiya”: Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy,” in *Re-Envisioning Egypt: 1919 - 1952*, ed. Amy J. Johnson Arthur Goldschmidt, Barak A. Salmoni (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 140.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 125.

symbolic capital among Egypt's elite.<sup>261</sup> The *effendiya* of the 1920s felt that it was their job to consolidate a new image of Egypt and disseminate this to the masses.<sup>262</sup> Because of their exploits both in parliament and in the press, the *effendiya* were the "state-makers" of the 1920s.<sup>263</sup>

Mukhtar was a quintessential member of the *effendiya*, which group also comprised his friends and supporters. He was born in the village of Tanbara to the village 'umda, but the artist's childhood was marred by strife between his mother, a second wife to Mukhtar's father, and the man's other, older wife and children.<sup>264</sup> The abuse got so great that Mukhtar's mother was eventually compelled to flee her husband's house, bringing her five-year-old son to live in his grandmother's home in the village of Nisha. Mukhtar had no more contact with his father and, in fact, the artist never even used his father's family name, going instead by "Mukhtar," which means, literally "chosen one."<sup>265</sup> Thus, although Mukhtar's father was relatively wealthy and respected in his village, the artist, like many educated Egyptians, prided himself in his background as "the simple, anonymous son of a peasant from the valleys of the earth."<sup>266</sup> Mukhtar received a traditional education in the village, but upon moving to Cairo he benefited from the most modern of educations his country had to offer: a schooling in fine arts. This cemented his *effendiya* status, which was further augmented by his foray abroad and his mastery of the French language.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. See also Whidden, "The Generation of 1919," 21.

<sup>262</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 80.

<sup>263</sup> Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through The "New Effendiya": Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," 131.

<sup>264</sup> The *umda* is the mayor or leader of a village. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 10. See also Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 33.

<sup>265</sup> "Mukhtar" can also signify a village official. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 33.

<sup>266</sup> Abu Ghazi, *Mukhtar: Hayātuhi Wa Fannuhu*, 33.

By the 1930s, the *effendiya* had lost their glamour and the term came to be associated with poorer urban men, but for the period under study in this thesis, the *effendiya* were a powerful and political intellectual elite.<sup>267</sup> These men represented the “new” Egyptian, and through their intellectual and political efforts they brought about a “new” language (the standardized Arabic of the press), new cultural systems of expression and, most importantly, a new state. This state had to deal with the pressing problems of poverty and disorganization thanks, to a great extent, to its mounting population.

### 3.1.2 Population Growth and Marginal Populations

The population of Egypt grew significantly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1800, Egypt’s population stood at around 4.5 million people. By 1900, this number was up to 10 million.<sup>268</sup> Thanks to a growth rate of 1.4 percent during the early twentieth century, Egypt’s population reached 19 million in 1947.<sup>269</sup> This expansion had its greatest impact on the urban and rural poor. As Cole points out, “Demographic enlargement has a disproportionate impact on marginal populations,” and the share of the population that can be considered marginal in Egypt increased eleven times as a symptom the doubling of Egypt’s population during the nineteenth century.<sup>270</sup> So, although Beinín sees “no evidence of a decline in status of peasants” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this changed in the nineteenth century.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through The "New Effendiya": Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," 125.

<sup>268</sup> Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, 57 and Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," 389.

<sup>269</sup> Beinín, "Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923 - 1952," 313.

<sup>270</sup> Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, 57.

<sup>271</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 25.

The relationship between the peasants and the ruling elite during the nineteenth century was uncomfortable, to say the least. Under Muhammad Ali, peasants became an important and, to a certain degree, renewable source of labor for the administration, and rural people often fled or even hurt themselves to avoid military conscription and *corvée* labor.<sup>272</sup> Later, when Egypt declared bankruptcy in 1876, the Ottoman-Egyptian administration turned to the peasants for capital by overtaxing them and even physically abusing them to extract funds.<sup>273</sup> As a result of this pressure, rural strikes were common in Egypt during the nineteenth century.<sup>274</sup> When the country began to industrialize, the employees of Egypt's new industries periodically participated in strikes, but it was the 1899 strike of (mainly Greek) cigarette rollers that launched striking as a "permanent feature of industrial life in Egypt" and also indicated the potential consequences of political actions by the poorer members of society.<sup>275</sup>

At the turn of the century, worker activism was often considered (by the ruling elite) to be either an aberration or a faulty European import.<sup>276</sup> Lockman shows that the intelligentsia and politicians of this time did not even have a conception of workers as a social group. But by the 1910s, the significance of rural and urban agitation on the part of the poor was impossible for the elite to ignore and, after the first decade of the twentieth century, Egyptians across the social spectrum understood the workers to constitute a

<sup>272</sup> *Corvée* labor was a system under which peasants were forced to "pay" taxes by laboring year-round. This means that, during the farming off-seasons, peasants were compelled to work as indentured servants of the state, often performing hard labor like digging canals. Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, 65, 68.

<sup>273</sup> Peasants who did not comply with the ruling elite or did not provide as much capital as the elite desired were often whipped. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, 86 - 87.

<sup>274</sup> Fred H. Lawson, "Rural Revolt and Provincial Society in Egypt, 1820 - 1824," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2 (1981): 131.

<sup>275</sup> Lockman, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," 448.

<sup>276</sup> ———, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899 - 1914," 171.

specific, and important, group.<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, nationalists began to cultivate the workers as a weapon against foreign occupation.<sup>278</sup> From then on, worker strikes were supported by the nationalist press and nationalists even sponsored fundraising drives to support the workers.<sup>279</sup> Many workers, in turn, lent their support for the nationalist cause wholeheartedly. Mukhtar represented one such rally on the base of his Alexandria monument to Sa'd Zaghlul, thus codifying the nationalist (and pro-Wafd) meaning of the protest for posterity.<sup>280</sup> The singular symbiosis between intellectuals and workers was a facet of the colonial experience in which both groups saw the European colonists as an adversary. The commonly held enmity of the British caused the labor struggles to become nationalist and, by 1911, thousands of both workers and peasants participated in nationalist projects, although their reasons for doing so were not necessarily in line with those of their wealthier compatriots.<sup>281</sup>

### 3.1.3 Lifestyles of the Rich and Nationalist

Industrialists, developers, rulers and visionaries transformed Cairo during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the previous century, people of all status sets lived in the same neighborhoods and shared in popular entertainment and religious festivals such as the *mulid* and saints' days.<sup>282</sup> After the turn of the century, however, the new neighborhoods were tacked onto Cairo's outer limits and those who could afford the move began to live in suburbs. While Mukhtar and his mother lived in Islamic Cairo,

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.: 158.

<sup>278</sup> ———, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," 449. See also Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 84.

<sup>279</sup> Lockman, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," 451.

<sup>280</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "Lohat Hetāf El-Gamāhir," (Alexandria: 1930 - 33).

<sup>281</sup> Lockman, "The Social Roots of Nationalism: Workers and the National Movement in Egypt, 1908 - 19," 454.

<sup>282</sup> The *mulid* is the celebration of the prophet's birth. Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 121.

wealthier families had taken up residence in areas like Ma'adi and Heliopolis. These people were increasingly entertained by such “high” arts as opera, while poorer groups congregated in low-end cinemas. In the same way, the elite were increasingly distinguished from what they would consider their social inferiors by wealth, mannerisms, kinship and education.<sup>283</sup> By the 1920s, many members of the wealthy and *effendiya* groups “wore their Westernized culture and values like a badge of identity.”<sup>284</sup> Imported goods were status symbols and often replaced local goods, as was the case with imported French perfume.<sup>285</sup> Access to imported education had a similar effect. The *effendiya* benefitted from modern education either in state-run or Western schools; the poor often received only *kuttab* education or none at all.<sup>286</sup>

Many members of the wealthier groups were adamant about their distinction from workers and peasants. Among these men, Lutfi al-Sayyid and Haykal (privately) expressed what was, at best, apathy and, at worst, revulsion for the poor, although they “saw popular emotionalism as easily exploitable for political purposes,” so long as the proper group – the intellectual elite – remained in charge of any reforms.<sup>287</sup> This attitude certainly signals a considerable, and conscious, gap between the lower and upper strata of society. The *effendiya* extended their state-building project to include the debate over the status of women, known as the “woman question.”

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 6, 45.

<sup>284</sup> Cole, “Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt,” 398.

<sup>285</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 163 – 64.

<sup>286</sup> The *kuttab* is the village school where children are instructed by a local shaykh and often memorize sections from the Qur'an.

<sup>287</sup> Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 19.



#### 3.1.4 The “Woman Question”

Egyptian nationalists of the early twentieth century based much of their campaign for independence upon the idea that the country was a family that they alone could properly cultivate. Pollard contends that the oft-raised “woman question” was, in fact, a facet of a broader independence and reform movement.<sup>288</sup> She points out that politicians’ conflation of “charity and domesticity with politics was an Egyptian response to the politics of the British protectorate,” for British administrators made it clear that they doubted Egyptians’ ability to govern themselves, based in part upon Egyptians’ supposed mistreatment of women.<sup>289</sup> Those same administrators defended their own domination of the country with reference to the woman question. As Abu-Lughod points out, historically the discourse of women’s liberation has been used to justify colonial rule, and British leaders like Lord Cromer capitalized on the discourse of liberation even as they suppressed women’s movements in the home country.<sup>290</sup> In this way, the discourse of women’s liberation had a broader connotation for both parties: When nationalists and colonialists discussed women and the family, they were really talking about the nation and debating who should control it.

The correlation between women or the family and the nation in nationalist discourse is demonstrated by *The Liberation of Women*, written by Qasim Amin in 1899.<sup>291</sup> Amin argues that the poor treatment of women he sees in Egypt is not based upon Islam and, furthermore, that this treatment holds the Egyptian state back from

<sup>288</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 13.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>290</sup> Lord Cromer claimed that part of his mission in Egypt was to ease the suffering of Egyptian women. At the same time, he was against women’s suffrage in England. Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 784.

<sup>291</sup> Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000).

achieving modernity and independence (both of which are based, in his argument, upon the European model). According to Pollard, Amin's book "had much less to do with liberating women than it did with exposing the home and its domestic relations as a means of illustrating that Egypt was 'modern' and could therefore run itself," an idea supported by such journals as *al-Sufur*, (The Unveiling) whose editor stated: "Women are not the only ones in Egypt to be in hijab."<sup>292</sup> Thus the "woman question" was in fact a *national* question related to colonial processes. The family, in this context, stood in for the nation and was something that must be monitored and controlled by powerful men.

Women were not the only group with whose status nationalists and colonialists were concerned. The paternalistic view of the nation as family extended also to the elite's control over the peasantry. The intelligentsia saw peasants as a group that needed to be taught the proper course and their proper place. The perception of peasants was not entirely negative, however. Those same elite leaders also celebrated the peasants as holdouts of the purely Egyptian way of life, uncorrupted by the ways of the West.<sup>293</sup> The value placed upon *fallah* status connects to the processes of nationalism, for much nationalist rhetoric was based upon and inspired by the essential "Egyptian-ness" of the *fallahin*. This appreciation of the peasantry carried over into cultural products: The first novels written by modernist Egyptians recounted and celebrated stories of peasants, and visual artists made regular use of peasants in their imagery. Haykal's novel, *Zaynab*, is

<sup>292</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 154, 64.

<sup>293</sup> This ahistorical representation of peasants is troublesome. For one thing, it plays into Orientalist depictions of Easterners as unchanged. Further, it ignores the fact that economic, political and social events by necessity affect all people in a society – peasants had not been living in a bubble. In fact, as was discussed above, rural Egyptians were particularly impacted by modernization starting with the incursions of Muhammad Ali's administration into their lives and livelihoods. The nationalist representation of the unchanging peasant is persistent, however, and has even made its way into scholarship about the country. For example, see Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922 - 1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

centered around the lives of peasants (see section 4.3.4).<sup>294</sup> In the visual arts, Mukhtar dedicated the majority of his work to a depiction of Egyptian peasant women whose purity and beauty can be understood as symbolic of the Egyptian nation (see section 4.2.2). Both men were inspired by nationalism which situated itself in opposition to foreign power, and their artistic works were part of a larger project of resistance.

### 3.2 Nationalist Ideology in Practice – Contesting Imperialism

Although British imperialism in Egypt took on a more obvious, and inescapable, form after 1882, the foreign presence in Egypt was long-standing. As Ahmed indicates, the consolidation of British control after the occupation “did not bring about any fundamental change in the economic direction in which Egypt was already embarked,” which was that of raw material production for foreign industry.<sup>295</sup> Still, when the dependency relationship forged between Britain and Egypt was made official by occupation, Egyptian business leaders and bureaucrats had “no hope whatsoever of diversifying its economy and industrializing” and, at the same time, gained an obvious foe in the British occupiers.<sup>296</sup>

There were 6,000 European and American nationals living in Cairo in 1840, but by 1870 this number reached 68,000.<sup>297</sup> In 1881, the foreign population was an estimated 90,000 to 100,000 people.<sup>298</sup> European presence was felt in schools, trade and even in the

<sup>294</sup> This novel was written in 1910 – 11 but was published in 1914. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 48.

<sup>295</sup> Ahmed, "The Discourse of the Veil," 145.

<sup>296</sup> Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," 390.

<sup>297</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 77.

<sup>298</sup> Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, 44.

government.<sup>299</sup> Foreigners were given privileges known as capitulations, which made it much easier for them to run businesses and to eliminate the local competition. Still, throughout their imperial tenure in Egypt, most British colonial leaders felt theirs was a benevolent administration; they felt that it was their empire's duty to shepherd Egypt into the modern era by demonstrating the ways of proper rule. This sense of duty was based upon the belief that Egyptians were unqualified to control the country, as evidenced by the country's descent into debt.<sup>300</sup>

There were other less (theoretically) altruistic reasons behind British imperialist interest in Egypt. The country represented a crucial geographic link between Europe and India and also had considerable resources of value to the British, cotton in particular. Furthermore, once the British became involved in Egyptian finance and production, their ties to the land became more entrenched. For example, while in control of Egypt, Lord Cromer directed the reassignment of thousands of acres of land into the possession of his brother's business partner, whereupon this land and other holdings became British property that had to be protected by the foreign administration.<sup>301</sup>

The intrusion of foreign control over any country will be met with dissension. The case in Egypt was further complicated by the fact that, until 1914, there were two colonial powers with their hands in Egyptian politics and economics. As Lord Cromer explained the situation regarding power, "One alien race, the English, have had to control and guide a second alien race, the Turks, by whom they are disliked, in the government

<sup>299</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 78.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>301</sup> Vitalis, *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt*, 22.

of a third race, the Egyptians.”<sup>302</sup> This hierarchy of power, combined with the difficult financial situation in Egypt and throughout the world during the last decades of the nineteenth century, were contributing factors to nationalist movements, to revolution and, even earlier, to the 1882 revolt in the army led by Ahmed ‘Urabi.

### 3.2.1 The ‘Urabi Revolt

After years of reduced and withheld wages and caps on promotions, Colonel Ahmed ‘Urabi led a group of his fellow Egyptian army officers on a revolt against foreign control of the Egyptian military and administration. He represented his movement as an expression of the “patriotism of the Egyptian people,”<sup>303</sup> claiming that his goal was to “secure Egypt for the Egyptians.”<sup>304</sup> The events of 1882 easily enter into a standard nationalist narrative and, with the assistance of hindsight, his revolt has been subsumed into histories of Egyptian nationalism as an early example of nationalist action, or even a foiled revolution.<sup>305</sup> Conversely, Owen argues that ‘Urabi cannot rightly be seen as a nationalist leader.<sup>306</sup> Rather, he was the head of an economically inclined movement. This is why he did not reject all colonial authority (‘Urabi proclaimed his allegiance to

<sup>302</sup> The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1908), 5.

<sup>303</sup> Ahmed Urabi, “Arabi’s Appeal to Gladstone,” in Mia Carter and Barbara Harlow, eds. *Archives of Empire, volume I, From the East India Company to the Suez Canal*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, 708.

<sup>304</sup> As reported by E. M. Forster, “The Bombardment of Alexandria,” in Mia Carter and Barbara Harlow, eds. *Archives of Empire, volume I, From the East India Company to the Suez Canal*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, 711.

<sup>305</sup> Writers like Wendell are unduly generous in calling ‘Urabi the “first leader of Egyptian nationalism” and crediting him the “desire for radical social change” that later characterized Egyptian intellectuals of the twentieth century. Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image from Its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid*, 24, 2. See also Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*. And Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image from Its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid*.

<sup>306</sup> Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, 123.

the Ottoman powers, who can be also considered foreign) but only that authority that threatened his and his cohorts' livelihood.<sup>307</sup>

Although 'Urabi was not a revolutionary, the expressed ideology of his movement and the attention that it garnered in the press impacted the mounting nationalism in the minds of much of Egypt's intelligentsia. This much was obvious to Lord Cromer. He points out that two groups supported 'Urabi's rebellion: the army and a party "who had some vague national aspirations."<sup>308</sup> Within a few decades, those vague aspirations would become a force of change in Egypt, thanks to the maturation of a new generation of Egyptians, including Mahmud Mukhtar.

### 3.2.2 Mukhtar's Early Life

Mukhtar was born less than a decade after the 'Urabi revolt, and much of the ideological leanings of his forbearers trickled into his youthful consciousness.<sup>309</sup> As a child, however, Mukhtar's troubles and triumphs were familial and local, not yet national. As has already been mentioned, Mukhtar was forced to leave his place of birth, and his father, because of inter-familial strife. In his maternal village of Nisha, the young boy's creative energies were first honed. He was greatly inspired, from a young age, by the great store of imagery and legends of the local culture. These stories came from the village ceremonies in which he participated as well as from the tunes of *shu'arā' el-*

<sup>307</sup> The Ottoman reaction to the revolt confirms this: to the Ottoman powers, 'Urabi was "seen as a rebel," rather than an anti-colonial revolutionary, who therefore received neither Ottoman sympathy nor support. Selim Deringil, "The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis of 1881 - 82," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 1 (1988): 19.

<sup>308</sup> Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 188.

<sup>309</sup> Most of the biographical information herein is taken from Abu Ghazi's two biographies of Mukhtar, which poses a problem because Mukhtar's biographer was not a neutral observer of the sculptor's life; rather was a staunch supporter of all things nationalist and of Mukhtar (see section 1.3). However, Abu Ghazi's work remains the chief resource for this and all other writings on Mukhtar. I have tried to strike a balance, therefore, between the facts and the myths to produce what I think is an accurate portrait of a complicated man.

*rebāba*, or traveling poet-troubadours. The boy memorized the names and escapades of the great men enumerated within the singers' tunes.<sup>310</sup> These stories were made all the more personal to Mukhtar when they were augmented with tales told to him by his family about his maternal grandfather. Mukhtar's grandfather had been an agitator for farmers' rights who was exiled to the Sudan because of his protests against Khedive Isma'il's exploitative tax policies. Mukhtar would soon give form to these stories through his first sculptural creations: small, clay figures shaped on the banks of the Nile.<sup>311</sup>

Mukhtar joined the local *kuttab*, or village religious school, at age eight. He did not like the school, however, and routinely fled to visit his favorite spot – the banks of the Nile canals. In this way, Mukhtar's childhood in the village was, by turns, cruel and idyllic. His early days were marked by moments of serenity and creativity by the waterside or alone at home, but also by his fear of such authority figures as the *kuttab*'s shaykh and presumably of his former step-siblings and step-mother as well. While lingering along the edges of the canals, the young artist observed the village women going about their daily activities, such as laundering clothing and drawing water, activities that Mukhtar later immortalized in a series of sculptures featuring peasant women.<sup>312</sup> In 1902, Mukhtar was ripped from his second home and relocated to Cairo, where he became a member of a growing population of urban-dwellers.<sup>313</sup>

<sup>310</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 17.

<sup>311</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 16.

<sup>312</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 18.

<sup>313</sup> The reason for Mukhtar's move is contested. The more sympathetic version, following Abu Ghazi, holds that Mukhtar's mother's health became so bad that she was forced to go to Cairo for treatment. Mukhtar stole away from his relatives, who did not want him to travel to the capital, and joined his mother there. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 10. Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 16. In a less sympathetic light, 'Abdul 'Azziz offers a different narration of the move. She claims that the boy left his village after a violent altercation with his uncle in which the older man beat Mukhtar until he

Once in Cairo, the boy set about sketching minarets, which startled him with their beauty, and captured his new environs on paper.<sup>314</sup> Young Mukhtar also made drawings of nationalist leaders, such as Mustafa Kamel and Muhammad Farid.<sup>315</sup> His love for drawing and sculpting was not enough for the young boy to announce plans to become an artist. It wasn't until, in 1908, Prince Yusuf Kamel opened the School of Fine Art in Cairo's Darb el-Gemāmīz neighborhood that Mukhtar knew his path.<sup>316</sup>

### 3.2.3 The School of Fine Arts

The proposal for establishment of a School of Fine Arts was met with dissenting voices among some of Cairo's intellectuals and religious scholars, and this debate speaks for young Mukhtar's original hesitance to dedicate his life to the arts, as well as the broader sentiments about art in Egypt during the early twentieth century. Figurative arts were not always welcome in all sectors of Egyptian society.<sup>317</sup> During the 'Urabi revolt in

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was bloody. Mukhtar vowed to never return to the village after that fight. 'Abdul 'Azziz bases her narration, in part, on interviews with the artist's sister and nephew, but such an event is not mentioned in any other biography of the sculptor. 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," 7 - 8, 1. Either way, by the early twentieth century, Mukhtar's development was impacted by his new life in Egypt's biggest city.

<sup>314</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 16. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 10.

<sup>315</sup> 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," 8.

<sup>316</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 16.

<sup>317</sup> To this day, writers struggle to come to terms with the commonly held belief that Islam forbids figurative art. Karnouk, for instance, mentions this prohibition without interrogating its validity. Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 4. The esteemed historian of Islamic art, Oleg Grabar, grapples with the historical repercussions of the supposed rejection of figurative art imposed by the Qur'an. He reports that the Qur'an contains no explicit opposition to representational art, but at the same time there is no explicit call for the creation of figurative works. From this he concludes that the original doctrine falls under the rubric of "aniconism" because it expresses no opinion on icons whatsoever. Grabar offers three arguments that can be made in this debate. First, Qur'anic passages that call idols "abominations of Satan's handiwork" can be interpreted as "expressing an objection to images" in general, although they are more accurately against idolatry specifically. The second argument points out that God is the only creator and therefore any human artistic representation would be reproachable hubris. The third idea extrapolates from the Qur'an's aversion to luxury to call art one of the extravagances to be avoided. Grabar finds none of these arguments completely convincing, but maintains that "the arts were not a significant concern of the revelation, nor did they play a large role in the modes of life prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula during the first decades of the first/seventh century." Regardless, the *idea* that figurative arts were taboo in Islam remained potent up to the modern era, and briefly challenged Egypt's nascent



1882, mobs had attacked the Muhammad Ali statue in Alexandria and removed the lions from Qasr al-Nil Bridge in Cairo and the statue of Ibrahim Pasha from Ezbekeyya.<sup>318</sup> Those actions were done in obedience to the edicts of a strict shaykh who spoke against all figural art.<sup>319</sup> The protestors did not destroy the statues, however, and when the tides of public opinion and elite authority turned, the monuments were restored to their previous positions.

The controversy over the establishment of an art school and the purposes of art more generally were quelled by the words of the mufti of Egypt, Muhammad ‘Abduh. ‘Abduh wrote in favor of the arts, explaining that, “If you knew why Arabs preserve poetry, you would understand why Europeans treasure arts,” and justifying drawing as “silent poetry,” which shows emotion more clearly than literature.<sup>320</sup> Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal echoed a similar sentiment in the early twentieth century, which indicates the growing international consensus on the importance of arts to nationalism and to modernity. Said Kemal: “A nation that ignores painting, a nation that ignores statues, and a nation that does not know the laws of positive science does not deserve to take its place on the road to progress.”<sup>321</sup>

‘Abduh concluded that Islam and Muslims had reached such a state of maturity that there was no more risk that figurative expression would descend into idolatry. He confirmed that art was one of the finest methods for acquiring and communicating

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modern arts in the twentieth century. Oleg Grabar, *Early Islamic Art, 650 - 1100: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 92, 95.

<sup>318</sup> Ibrahim was Muhammad Ali’s son, who briefly led the country during his father’s illness in 1848.

<sup>319</sup> This little-known leader was Shaykh ‘Ullaish. Although he drew some attention during the ‘Urabi revolt, by the early twentieth century his influence had waned. Kreiser, “Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt,” 108.

<sup>320</sup> As quoted in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 4.

<sup>321</sup> Kreiser, “Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt,” 114.

knowledge. With this spirit in mind, the School of Fine Arts opened its doors to new students. According to Abu Ghazi, the teenaged Mukhtar was the first aspiring student to go through those doors. He approached the first man he saw with a request for enrollment.<sup>322</sup> That man was the school's director, French sculptor Guillaume Lapagne.<sup>323</sup> Needless to say, Mukhtar was accepted into the school – he was one of thirteen students.

While the immediate product of the 'Urabi revolt was an increase in British interference in the Egyptian state, this did not mean that French influence was obliterated during the early twentieth century. Great Britain had asked the French for help in dislodging the 'Urabi threat, but France was unable to join the pursuit, and for this reason it lost any remaining power it may have had in Egypt, except for activities relating to Egyptology and the arts.<sup>324</sup> Art education at that time followed the European model. Students produced copies of Greco-Roman works and studied the conventions of European art-making. At the same time, students were exposed to the products of Egyptology and the growing public sphere. Mukhtar was influenced by these two currents, even after his 1911 departure for France.

### 3.3 Who Owns Antiquities? Egyptology and Nationalism

Egypt has long been known internationally for the presence of monumental antiquities within its borders.<sup>325</sup> The pyramids and sphinx were magnets for tourism and

<sup>322</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 10 – 11.

<sup>323</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 11.

<sup>324</sup> James F. Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919 - 1941* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 69. The severance of French ties to Egypt was made official in 1904, which France agreed to leave Egypt to Britain in exchange for free reign in Morocco. "Egypt a British Protectorate," 203. 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," 6.

<sup>325</sup> James F. Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919 - 1941* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 67.

European scholarly attention as early as the seventeenth century.<sup>326</sup> With the emergence of Egyptology as a distinct discipline within archaeology, Europeans began to lay claim to Egyptian monuments and antiquities. It was up to nationalists and the intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to begin Egypt's reclamation of its historic sites.

Egyptology came of age as a discipline during the nineteenth century. Its popularity was related to the growing importance of museums in European culture – the backbone of many European national museum collections was the collection of antiquities from Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Egyptology is thus closely related to European economic and cultural impositions on the Middle East, to such a degree that archaeology walked “hand in hand” with imperialism into Egypt.<sup>327</sup> The Egyptian Museum is typical of this relationship: Although it is in Cairo, from its establishment in 1863 until Egypt's 1952 revolution, it was a French-run institution in which Egyptians were only peripheral participants.<sup>328</sup> As Reid points out, the very names “Egyptology” and “Egyptian Museum” were foreign to Egypt and the international status of Egyptology has, to a certain extent, obliterated other eras of Egypt's history from the international record.<sup>329</sup>

The European disregard for Arab and Islamic periods was not rejected by all of Egypt's intellectual elite. Instead, territorial nationalist leaders focused upon their

<sup>326</sup> Reid cites a British book on the pyramids from 1646. Donald Reid, *Whose Pharaohs: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>327</sup> Mario Liverani, “Imperialism,” in *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 223; Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 2.

<sup>328</sup> Auguste Mariette became the first head of the Antiquities Service in 1858 and Étienne Drioton's stewardship ended in 1952. Ibid., 105, 305.

<sup>329</sup> Reid also mentions that the French, not the Egyptians, are credited with being the “mother of Egyptology.” Ibid., 196, 7.

nation's Pharaonic heritage as part of their rejection of imperialisms, both British and Ottoman. The celebration of Pharaonic roots played a part in the construction of an Egyptian nation during the nineteenth century.<sup>330</sup> By emphasizing the existence of a "distinct national entity" through years of imperial domination, nationalist writers attempted to legitimize the transformation of their nation (or *ethnie*) into a nation-state.<sup>331</sup>

After the turn of the twentieth century, Egypt's intellectual elite and *effendiya* increasingly made it their task not only to inform the general public about their country's Pharaonic heritage but also to bring the interpretation of that history into Egyptian hands. This two-fold task began in the time of Muhammad Ali. In 1835, the Pasha endeavoured to set up the country's first national museum and antiquities service in order to move archaeological processes under Egyptian aegis.<sup>332</sup> He was not successful. In 1858, Frenchman Auguste Mariette established the Egyptian Antiquities Service and Egyptian Museum;<sup>333</sup> Khedive Isma'il inaugurated that museum in 1863.<sup>334</sup> Finally, in 1883, a new law assigned the antiquities service to the Ministry of Public Works, but it was not until the 1920s that Egyptian authorities were able to assert more control over the country's antiquities, much to the chagrin of European archaeologists and financiers.<sup>335</sup> This new power over antiquities coincided with the 1919 Revolution and was led by the revolution's spokesman, Sa'd Zaghlul.

<sup>330</sup> Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*, 17.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>332</sup> Christel Braae, "The Early Museums and the Formation of Their Publics," in *Middle Eastern Cities, 1900 - 1950: Public Spaces and Public Spheres in Transformation*, ed. Hans Chr. Korsholm Nielsen and Jakob Skovgaard-Peterson (Damascus: Danish Institute in Damascus, 2001), 54, 56.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>334</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 105.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 175.

During his brief tenure as Prime Minister, Sa'd Zaghlul was finally able to exert Egyptian control over antiquities. In 1922, during the heady days during which Egypt was granted nominal independence from Britain, English archaeologist Howard Carter uncovered the tomb of Tutankhamen in Luxor. The discovery elicited international attention and, within Egypt, was celebrated as further evidence for the country's uniqueness and rich history, advancing Egyptianist sentiments.<sup>336</sup> With the help of its French representative, the new Egyptian government laid claim to the treasure trove, initiating two years of negotiations with Carter and his financial backers.<sup>337</sup> In 1924, the Egyptian government took over the tomb and Carter was sent packing.<sup>338</sup> From then on, the tomb was considered a "national shrine" to which political leaders and supporters made pilgrimages, both to celebrate their country's shared heritage and to highlight the visitors' own modernity.<sup>339</sup> In 1926, Mukhtar crafted a sculpture, "Laqia fi Wadi el-Mulūk" (Find in the Valley of the Kings), which was inspired by the discovery of the tomb. He displayed this in a Paris salon and was awarded a medal for it by the French government.<sup>340</sup>

The conflicts over control of Egyptian antiquities are vital to comprehension of Egyptian nationalism during this period.<sup>341</sup> Put simply, both nationalists and Europeans equated jurisdiction over the country's ancient heritage with control of the modern state. By the end of the nineteenth century many Egyptian thinkers (such as Ali Mubarak and Rifā' Rāfi el-Tahtawi) considered pride in Egypt's archaeological past to be an "essential

<sup>336</sup> Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919 - 1941*, 82.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 77 – 78.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>339</sup> Reid, "Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past: Egypt 1922 - 1952," 134.

<sup>340</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 70.

<sup>341</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 18.

ingredient of their modern national identity.”<sup>342</sup> Through their adoption of European-invented tradition and use of archaeology to impose validity, Egyptians were on their way to expressing themselves as an independent, modern nation.

Display was a vital aspect both of twentieth-century nationalism and of the modernizing process. Museums and related cultural institutions like the antiquities service worked within the growing public sphere to promote and perpetuate nationalist narratives of history and understandings of the nation by mounting discussions in the public sphere.

### 3.3.1 The Development of the Public Sphere

The public sphere was first defined by Habermas to mean that “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.”<sup>343</sup> Habermas holds that the initial appearance of a public sphere occurred in Europe in the eighteenth century.<sup>344</sup> Although individuals must have understood there to be a difference between their home lives, for instance, and their public practices, the formation of a communal conception both of space and of thought or opinion required the same imaginative processes that produced the concept of the nation.<sup>345</sup> For that reason, the public sphere is intimately related to the processes of modernity.<sup>346</sup> Since it is imagined, the wall dividing the public and private spheres of any given society is permeable, and it is also a contested

<sup>342</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 181.

<sup>343</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 49.

<sup>344</sup> Arnaud Sales, "The Private, the Public and Civil Society: Social Realms and Power Structures," *International Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1991): 300.

<sup>345</sup> Suad Joseph, "The Public/Private: The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community: The Lebanese Case," *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 73.

<sup>346</sup> Anderson argues that the idea of a nation was produced through people's shared reading of newspapers. The same processes contributed to the creation of the public sphere. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 24 – 25.

site.<sup>347</sup> Still, there are some relative constants in the understanding of the public sphere. It can be seen to contain both the physical spaces shared by citizens, such as parks and cultural institutions, and the more theoretical arenas in which people “confer in an unrestricted fashion,” such as public debate or the news media.<sup>348</sup> Because the opinions and actions produced within the public sphere can impact state actions, Habermas concludes that the public sphere “mediates between society and state,” but is separate from both.<sup>349</sup> Such was the case in nineteenth-century Cairo, where the reconfiguration of the city and its citizens produced spaces through which administrators and non-government thinkers could relate and debate, but which were neither purely the realm of state nor of society.

A rapid renovation of Cairo’s public space began at the end of the nineteenth century through the efforts of the Ministry of Public Works under Khedive Isma’il.<sup>350</sup> Isma’il was motivated by what he saw at the Paris Universal Exposition to reconstruct his capital with new, public and educational institutions like libraries, museums, schools and even a zoo, in addition to widened streets and a refurbished downtown.<sup>351</sup> Beyond providing amusements for the denizens of Cairo, the Egyptian state sought to impose “an intellectual orderliness, a social tidiness, [and] a physical cleanliness” on its capital.<sup>352</sup> In

<sup>347</sup> Joseph, "The Public/Private: The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community: The Lebanese Case," 73, 75.

<sup>348</sup> Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," 49.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.: 50.

<sup>350</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 63. Fahmy would object with the use of this date, for he asserts that “Egypt’s rulers have always been concerned about the streets of Cairo, its buildings, and even its appearance.” Fahmy’s arguments are strong, but for the purposes of this thesis the more simplified picture which concentrates on the nineteenth century growth in concern over the reorganization of Cairo is sufficient. Khaled Fahmy, "Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Narrative," in *Making Cairo Medieval*, ed. Irene A. Bierman Nezar AlSayyad, Nasser Rabbat (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 180.

<sup>351</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 42 – 43.

<sup>352</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 63.

this way, modernity was conflated with order, and the organization of urban space was politicized as administrators strove to produce a new, modern state.<sup>353</sup>

In addition to the urban renewal and restructuring, the proliferation of print media allowed for the growth of a local, Arabic press through which public discourse flourished.<sup>354</sup> Although Isma'il's successor, the more European-friendly Khedive Tawfiq (r. 1879 – 92), restricted public expression, his son 'Abbas Himli II (r. 1892 – 1914), proved far more sympathetic both to the nationalist cause and to freedom of expression in general.<sup>355</sup> With 'Abbas's encouragement, press censorship was lifted and by the beginning of World War I there were some 144 journals in production in Egypt.<sup>356</sup> This journalistic explosion was accompanied by a literary renaissance.<sup>357</sup> Poetry thrived during this time and was often published in newspapers. Leaders like poet-statesman Mahmud Sami al-Barudi “showed that poetry, in proportion to its vigor and excellence, could affect the sensibility of the community by stimulating its religious and national consciousness” and, in this way, impact public discourse.<sup>358</sup> The literary boom was supported by a rise in literacy, and new literary genres such as the novel were introduced.<sup>359</sup> The visual arts were also affected by the development of Egypt's public sphere. Newspapers increasingly included political cartoons in which Egypt was represented visually.<sup>360</sup> Although the early drawings of Egypt varied widely, by the 1920s the most established symbols for the nation were the Pharaonic figure, the peasant

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>355</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923*, 132.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>357</sup> Khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt (1882 - 1922)*, 9, 11.

<sup>358</sup> Al-Barudi was one of the leaders of the 'Urabi revolt in addition to being a prolific poet. Ibid., 35.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>360</sup> Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, 58.



woman and the liberated, “new” woman.<sup>361</sup> Two of these three visual symbols were prominent in Mukhtar’s work from his student days in France.

Mukhtar’s trip to France was sponsored by Prince Yusuf Kamel, the founder of the School of Fine Arts. It was the young man’s first time traveling outside of Egypt. Once in Paris, Mukhtar entered the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris; he was the first Arabic speaker to gain admission to that institution.<sup>362</sup> His entrance into Parisian student life was not so easy, however. During an evening of revelry, Mukhtar’s new colleagues ordered him to undress, whereupon they tied him to a chair and adorned his head with paper made to look like a Pharaonic crown that bore the title “Ramses II.” Then the students lifted Mukhtar onto their shoulders and paraded him, still nude, to the Bonaparte Café. His fellow artists placed Mukhtar (and chair) on a table and tossed leftovers onto him in a “parody of making offerings and showing adulation” to their Egyptian king. Sharouny quotes Mukhtar: “This atmosphere instantly marked liberation from curbs of conservatism, love for freedom and a break from shackles of formalities. It was one of the U-turns I experienced and has made a lasting impact on my life.”<sup>363</sup> This event impressed upon Mukhtar the liberty of French society, and the mores of his native country suffered in comparison. Mukhtar said later that his life in Paris was marked by “a sense of absolute freedom. It left a particularly deep imprint on me, more than anything

<sup>361</sup> Baron points out that the “depiction of political abstractions in female forms goes back to antiquity” but practice is neither universal nor consistent. The process of depiction was certainly not consistent in Egypt. The author traces various symbols of Egypt through the cartoons and poetry of the popular presses: Egypt was represented through imagery of the Nile, was depicted as a cow, a donkey, a male peasant or a Pharaonic queen. Later, Egypt was symbolized by an image of the “new woman,” who wore western clothing and participated in modern activities such as driving a car. This overview of images of Egypt indicates that the nationalist representation of the country was flexible and that artists altered it to fit many purposes. Ibid., 7, 46, 59, 70.

<sup>362</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 34. Abu Ghazi, *Mukhtar: Hayātuhi Wa Fannuhu*, 35.

<sup>363</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 18. The same anecdote is also quoted in Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 13 and Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 34 – 35.

else had before. I came away asking myself why everyone doesn't behave this way?"<sup>364</sup>

The artist's previous belief system was thus shattered. The culture shock Mukhtar experienced opened him up to a greater appreciation of "modernity" in line with the territorial nationalists of his day, but he did not abandon his connections to his home. In 1913, Mukhtar's sculpture *Aida* was included in the Salon de Paris.<sup>365</sup> It was the first work by an Egyptian artist to be exhibited abroad, but only the first of many for Mukhtar.<sup>366</sup> The artist's educational path was shaken by the outbreak of World War I, however, and Mukhtar, like many of his fellow Egyptians, suffered from economic privations.

When war broke out, the funds that Mukhtar had been receiving from Prince Yusuf Kamel dried up and he was forced to find work. At first, he labored in a munitions factory while maintaining his artistic pursuits in his spare time. Finally, at the urging of his old mentor Laplagne, Mukhtar took over as the art director of Musée Grévin, Paris's wax museum.<sup>367</sup> This position allowed him to pursue artistic endeavors both professionally and in his leisure time, and it also gave him some prominence in the city's art field.<sup>368</sup> At the same time, Abu Ghazi reports that Mukhtar was "burning with revolutionary thoughts" and cast these thoughts into statues.<sup>369</sup> The most famous of those statues, *Nahdat Misr*, was directly inspired by the 1919 Revolution.

<sup>364</sup>As quoted in Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 36.

<sup>365</sup> Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," 186 and Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 12.

<sup>366</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 17, 69.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 17. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 12..

<sup>368</sup> Mukhtar eventually parlayed his work at the museum into sculptures with Egyptian themes, such as his wax statue of Egyptian singer Um Kultum.

<sup>369</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 72.

### 3.4 Mukhtar and the 1919 Revolution – The Fight for Nahdat Misr

The conclusion of World War I cemented the centrality of the nation-state in international political theory. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson outlined his Fourteen Points, calling for the autonomy of each and every nation-state. Wilson's words were widely celebrated in Egypt. In 1918, rising Egyptian-opposition leader Sa'd Zaghlul sent Wilson a letter lauding the his ideas.<sup>370</sup> The following year, Zaghlul and some of his colleagues in the Wafd party requested that the British allow them to attend the Versailles peace conference.<sup>371</sup> The British administrators refused and, as punishment, exiled the upstarts to Malta. In response to the expulsion of Zaghlul from Egypt, students organized petitions in Cairo and workers, lawyers and other urbanites mounted protests. This movement grew as it fed on the grievances that Egyptian people of all social groups had against their British overlords. As the fighting expanded, peasants began to attack the railway system, which they associated with British rule.<sup>372</sup> In this way, the 1919 Revolution marked a unique time of unprecedented unity across Egyptian society, both rural and urban.<sup>373</sup> The overall message of the movement was unified: We want an end to colonialism.

<sup>370</sup> Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919 - 1941*, 75.

<sup>371</sup> The name of Zaghlul's political party, the Wafd, literally means "delegation" and indicates its roots as a lobby group.

<sup>372</sup> Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 86. The reasoning behind peasant violence was not purely ideological. As Goldberg points out, rural, poor Egyptians were the hardest hit by inflation and food shortages: one Alexandria hospital reported a seven-fold rise in patients suffering from starvation from 1913 to 1917 and an eighteen-fold increase in typhus patients (Goldberg relates the rise in diseases like typhus and influenza to the general malnutrition: healthy bodies are better able to fight off these diseases). Because the problems of food shortage and conscription into the British army affected rural poor disproportionately, Goldberg asserts that the "agrarian grievances rapidly assumed the character of class grievances and the tensions ignited by the war appeared as class tensions." Urban lower classes were also impacted but to a lesser degree. Upper classes were more able to purchase the goods they needed to survive and were less vulnerable to forcible enlistment. Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt - Egypt 1919," 271.

<sup>373</sup> Baraka, *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919 - 1952*, 10.

Gershoni and Jankowski hold that the 1919 Revolution had an “exclusively territorial nationalist orientation” because of the prominence of the leading group’s ideology in the outcome and interpretation of the events.<sup>374</sup> The nationalist orientation of the revolution is impossible to ignore, based as it was on the expression of Egypt’s “single and unique race,” an *ethnie*, which included Egyptians of all religious denominations and social groups.<sup>375</sup> Additionally, the success of the revolution “served as a tremendous reinforcement for the exclusively Egyptian-centered territorial nationalist orientation” and led to the dominance of Egyptianism among the rival nationalisms of the 1920s.<sup>376</sup> However, the intellectuals behind the revolution did not achieve unity either in terms of how Egypt’s government should be run or, on a more basic ideological level, what exactly Egypt’s national identity should be.<sup>377</sup> Because the leaders of the revolution could not realize consensus, the next few decades of Egypt’s political history (the so-called “liberal age”) were times of strife and political infighting between pro-palace and opposition groups.<sup>378</sup> Mukhtar would end up one of the casualties of these groups’ political battles.

<sup>374</sup> President Wilson called for a new world order in which all nations would govern themselves. Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 41.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>377</sup> Whidden, "The Generation of 1919," 21, 42.

<sup>378</sup> Take, for example, this brief chronology: Sa’d Zaghlul returned from exile 1923 and his Wafd party won 90 percent of the parliament in the following year, promptly appointing Zaghlul as the new prime minister. British pressure forced this administration out after only nine months in office because of the assassination of a British nobleman, and the next prime minister was far more amenable to British commands. In 1925, the Wafd won 54 percent of the parliamentary vote, but the king dismissed this chamber. Such “anti-democratic and obtrusive behavior” continued through 1926 and, in 1927, Zaghlul passed away. In 1929, the Wafd once again managed to win 90 percent of parliamentary seats, but they were unable to wrangle a treaty out of the British or even to reestablish the constitution (canceled by prime minister Muhammad Mahmoud the previous year) before Wafdist Mustafa al-Nahas was ousted on trumped up charges of corruption. The parliament was dissolved in 1930 by pro-palace prime minister Isma’il Sidqi, who then rewrote the constitution to grant the king more power. From then on, opposition parties were “irrevocably estranged from the monarchy” and the ideals which inspired so many Egyptians of all groups to join the revolution began to fade into the background. Selma Botman, "The Liberal Age,



Figure 2: The model of *Nahdat Misr*, 1920. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

In 1919, however, Mukhtar was hopeful for his country's (and his career's) future. He wanted to create for Egypt a monument that would demonstrate its rebirth and its shining future. His first design for *Nahdat Misr* was a woman, sword in hand, who boldly confronted an unseen enemy. Mukhtar's French instructors loved the statue, but when the sculptor grasped the resemblance between the figure of his creation and that of the French symbol Jeanne d'Arc, he smashed the model and returned to the drawing board.<sup>379</sup> The next design he crafted featured a pair of figures: a rising sphinx and a

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1923 - 1952," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume 2, Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 291 – 94.

<sup>379</sup> The fact that Mukhtar's first model for *Nahdat Misr* was reminiscent of popular representations of Jeanne d'Arc indicates the sculptor's participation in an international trend: "The cult of Jeanne." Booth explains that feminists and nationalists in Egypt (and the world over) took up the story of France's patron saint during the 1920s. In Cairo's liberal and anti-imperialist popular press, writers produced biographies and representations of Jeanne d'Arc in which the peasant-martyr's story was adapted to the writers' political purposes. It is not clear how much of Jeanne d'Arc remained in Mukhtar's final design, but the sculptor took a page from the books extolling the saint when he adapted the image of a rising peasant woman to serve his specific ideological message. Marilyn Booth, "The Egyptian Lives of Jeanne D'arc," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

standing peasant woman.<sup>380</sup> This was the model he would present to the world, and for which he became best known (Figure 2).

In 1920, Mukhtar entered this second incarnation of *Nahdat Misr* in an exhibit at Paris's Grand Palais.<sup>381</sup> It won the gold medal, drew adoring "crowds of Egyptian students," and garnered international acclaim.<sup>382</sup> The award of such a prestigious prize upon an Egyptian was presented as an "Egyptian triumph" in the country's nationalist press.<sup>383</sup> In this way, the sculpture Mukhtar created was read from its first appearance as the artist's willful contribution to Egypt's fight for autonomy.<sup>384</sup>

The nationalist press's attention to Mukhtar highlighted the sculptor's entrance into the art field as a central component of the nationalist cause and called upon Egypt to recognize the true value of the arts.<sup>385</sup> Writer Magd el-Diin Hifni Nasif instructed his fellow Egyptians to recognize the significance of the fine arts to their national development and modern resurgence by endeavoring to acquire the work.<sup>386</sup> His was followed by similar calls for public support in the newspaper *al-Akhbar* by writers like 'Afifi, Rafi'i and Wisa Wasif. Rafi'i raised the installation of *Nahdat Misr* to a "national task," which would help the country "restore her ancient glory."<sup>387</sup> The newspaper *al-Ahram* reiterated the call for funds, and donations began to pour in, including a sizeable

<sup>380</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 14.

<sup>381</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 38.

<sup>382</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 14 See also Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 69.

<sup>383</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 38.

<sup>384</sup> This is the conclusion of Ibid., 48.

<sup>385</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 72. See also Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 59.

<sup>386</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 59.

<sup>387</sup> As quoted in Ibid.

amount given by Bank Misr.<sup>388</sup> Writer Wasif Butrus Ghali summed up the arguments in *al-Akhbar*:

The nobility of any people is measured by its share in the development of humanity. A people doesn't deserve any thanks and isn't respected and loved by other peoples except through the learning of its scientists and the progress of its artists. . . That makes me call on all Egyptians to perform this work [the erection of *Nahdat Misr*] in a way that suits Egypt, for this work is considered a symbol of our national rising and our new life.<sup>389</sup>

The poor also contributed to the best of their ability, often deeming their doing so the equivalent to participation in a national cause or fulfillment of national duty.<sup>390</sup> The sculpture itself was not as easy to raise as was public support, and the travails that beset the erection of *Nahdat Misr* are parallel to the difficulties and struggles of the artist himself in the socio-political context of early twentieth-century Egypt.

Mukhtar returned to Cairo in 1920 as a bonafide artist and was greeted like a hero.<sup>391</sup> The press campaign promoting the erection of *Nahdat Misr* continued, and the

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 60. Bank Misr is another site of nationalist reaction to British imperialism. Although there were rumblings of discontent with Egypt's economic structure during the nineteenth century (Tignor points out that the first talk of a national bank came with the 'Urabi revolt Tignor, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: New Directions in the Egyptian Economy," 55.), the effects of World War I highlighted the fatal flaws in Egypt's economy, particularly its reliance upon foreign capital and its lack of diversity. Egypt's economic dependency on Europe was seen by many merchants and members of the intelligentsia as evidence of the government's failings. From this dissatisfaction, business nationalism was born. Tignor, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: New Directions in the Egyptian Economy," 55. In 1920, Egyptian financier Tal'at Harb founded Egypt's first national bank, the aptly-titled Bank Misr. The bank was promoted by the motto "an Egyptian bank for Egyptians only" and its stated objective was the elimination of foreign capitalist control over the country. Although the bank was not "nearly as nationalist as Harb's proclamations," it represented the expansion of nationalisms into realms other than politics. The idea of business nationalism is linked to the cultural elements of the nationalist project through monetary contributions such as that given to the campaign for the erection of *Nahdat Misr*. Toledano, "Social and Economic Change in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'," 276. Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, 102.

<sup>389</sup> Wasif Butrus Ghali, "Wagebna nahu Mukhtar," *al-Akhbar*, May 20, 1920, as republished in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 98.

<sup>390</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski cite peasant and worker donations such as those by a railway worker who raised money with his relatives after heeding the newspapers' call for donations and a woman who was published in *al-Akhbar* as saying that donating was a requirement of Egyptian men and women, "fulfilling their [national] duty and in their appreciation of its importance." Another group of lower class donors wrote to the paper asking the wealthy to contribute "so that we can be equal to other countries in the world." Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 60 - 61.

<sup>391</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 31.

editors of *al-Akhbar* displayed the model of *Nahdat Misr* in their office.<sup>392</sup> In July of that year, Prime Minister Hussein Rushdi formed the “Committee for the Erection of the Sculpture *Nahdat Misr*,” and the committee proposed that the sculpture be installed in front of Cairo’s main railway station. The committee also increased the size of the monument, and Mukhtar lobbied successfully for the use of Aswan granite, as a tribute to his Pharaonic predecessors.<sup>393</sup>



Figure 3: Mukhtar and laborers at work on *Nahdat Misr*. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

<sup>392</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 61.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 61 – 62. See also Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 15.



The Egyptian government green-lighted the project in 1921.<sup>394</sup> Despite this, *Nahdat Misr* was not unveiled until seven years later. This delay was largely due to “political infighting” between the Wafd party (who fully supported the sculpture) and palace-friendly governments (who fully opposed everything the Wafd supported).<sup>395</sup> Central to Mukhtar’s problem with securing ongoing governmental support for his work was the fact that his sculpture expressed only one of the multiple nationalisms of his time. Islamic nationalists criticized the “purportedly colonialist character of Mukhtar’s sculpture” and were especially put off by its “pagan elements.”<sup>396</sup> It took political consensus to dominate cultural criticisms, and for this Mukhtar had to wait until the Wafd regained control. The expense of the project was also a hindrance – transporting granite from Aswan was more expensive than the committee had anticipated, and work halted for over a year until the Wafd once again took office in 1924 and Wasif, now a member of parliament, argued for an increased arts budget. This Wafd government was soon driven from office by the British, and their pro-palace successors once again hindered Mukhtar’s progress and limited his creative independence. When the artist took a trip to France in 1926, the Ministry of Public Works used Mukhtar’s absence as an excuse to shut down work on *Nahdat Misr* completely.

Mukhtar did not take the obstacles to his work lying down. He initiated a “personal campaign” to place pressure on the Egyptian government, calling upon Haykal and the writer’s newspaper *al-Siyasa al-Ushbu’iyya* for help in his mission.<sup>397</sup> His efforts

<sup>394</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra’d Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo’asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm ‘Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 32 – 33.

<sup>395</sup> The following description of events is adapted from Gershoni and Jankowski, who in turn base their argument on the facts laid out in Abu Ghazi’s work. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 62 – 68.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

were to no avail until the Wafd at last shared the majority in parliament with the Liberal Constitutionalists in the following year. Mukhtar demanded artistic integrity and independence from this new parliament, and his wishes were granted. Sa'd Zaghlul visited the building site to offer his support, as did two successive Prime Ministers, and Mukhtar was given thirteen months to finish his work. He finished in six.<sup>398</sup> Thus in 1928, the sculpture was finally ready to meet the public,<sup>399</sup> but Mukhtar's attention had turned to a higher mission. In that same year, he had founded Jama'at el-Khayāl, or the Imagination Society (this group was also known as "La Chimere"). He did so as part of his plan to promote art and artists by every means possible. Mukhtar founded studios across from the Egyptian museum in which he and his colleagues could congregate and work.<sup>400</sup> By establishing his society, Mukhtar hoped to recreate the feeling of camaraderie he experienced among artists and intellectuals in Paris through parties and shows. The mission of the Imagination Society was the support of the revival in Egyptian art, and the spread of that revival internationally through "education, providing information through the media, and arranging exhibitions in Egypt and abroad."<sup>401</sup> That task united artists, writers, critics and intellectuals (see section 4.3), but one of the strongest proponents of the Imagination Society's aims was, of course, Mahmud Mukhtar.

<sup>398</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 33.

<sup>399</sup> The unveiling of *Nahdat Misr* was discussed in the introduction.

<sup>400</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 13.

<sup>401</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski quote from Abu Ghazi's account. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 54.

### 3.4.1 Mukhtar's Mission

Mukhtar set his mind to injecting into Egyptian culture the high regard for the arts, which he considered their due. In an interview he gave to the newspaper *al-Balagh* during the final stages of production of *Nahdat Misr*, Mukhtar proclaimed:

It is time now for the government to pay attention to art and regain its place among the other nations in this field. We are delighted to see the indications of the artistic rising [of Egypt] side by side with the national rising. The government encourages all types of art, and the nation itself shows its pleasure to the artists. Egyptian art had been dead for two thousand years, but now it is going to rise from the dead for we have the necessary means and enough preparation to breathe life into it.<sup>402</sup>

Mukhtar would accept no challenge to this mission but chipped away at it as doggedly as he did the stone of his sculptures. This determination caused Mukhtar to make enemies among powerful men who disagreed with his ideas, including, as we saw in the introduction, King Fu'ad himself. Along the way, Mukhtar transformed Egypt's art field. His success was due partially to the support of his nationalist clique, but also was due to the artist's formidable personality.

The last years of Mukhtar's life were marred by illness, but he was unwavering in his convictions and continued working when he was physically able. The artist's suffering began in 1931, when he was only 40. Authors attribute the illness to Mukhtar's grueling schedule and his passionate labors while creating sculptures, but no one offers a concrete diagnosis.<sup>403</sup> Whatever the cause of his illness, Mukhtar's health deteriorated and he was increasingly unable to use one of his arms. He continued his labors on two

<sup>402</sup> "Hadith ma' Mukhtar," *el-Balagh*, January 18, 1927, as reprinted in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 101 – 04.

<sup>403</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 41. 'Abdul 'Aziz attributes the artist's suffering to an abscess on his shoulder which eventually developed into a "malignant tumor and would not heal." 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," 14.

monuments to Sa'd Zaghlul, for which he had been commissioned in 1927.<sup>404</sup> One of these sculptures was destined for a public square in Alexandria; the other came to rest in Cairo. Once again, his progress was impeded by political power struggles.

In 1931, a pro-Palace administration hindered Mukhtar's work on the Zaghlul monuments to such an extent that the artist was driven to sue his government over breach of contract.<sup>405</sup> The arguments made on Mukhtar's behalf during the trial by lawyer 'Adb al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, painted the government's actions as an affront to the arts in general, represented by "the first artist that modern Egypt has produced."<sup>406</sup> The trial did not succeed in removing the roadblocks the government had placed before Mukhtar, and the monuments were not unveiled until 1938, four years after Mukhtar passed away, but the rhetoric of the trial indicates the comingling of arts and politics among nationalists of the early twentieth century.<sup>407</sup> In 1933, Mukhtar underwent surgery on his arm but the result was only increased pain. He traveled to Paris to visit doctors there, but they offered no solution. The sculptor returned to his native country and, in 1934, he passed away at the age of 43.<sup>408</sup> His sculptures retained their symbolic weight after Mukhtar's untimely demise, and they still stand as visual representations of the mood of his age.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored nineteenth- and twentieth-century events, trends and developments that had bearing upon both the creation and the reception of Mukhtar's work, with reference to the life of the artist himself. As has been shown, the period was a

<sup>404</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 90.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>406</sup> As quoted in Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>408</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 41. See also Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 70.

time of population growth during which the intelligentsia and *effendiya* extended their control of cultural capital. Fine art is one of the most exclusive elements of cultural capital, and during the period under study the growth of an educated group of Egyptians meant that the audience for the arts dramatically expanded, as did the pool of potential producers. Thanks to innovations in education, such as the foundation of the School of Fine Art, artists like Mukhtar were able to respond to their new audience and to its concerns.

The occupation was primary among the concerns of not only educated Egyptians but also of the workers and peasants. The grievances of people from all social strata were increasingly focused on a single enemy in the first decades of the twentieth century: British colonialism. Thus of the various nationalist movements that were present during the early twentieth century, Egyptianism became the most prominent and, for a brief time, the most powerful. Mukhtar represented the goals of this movement in *Nahdat Misr*. The leaders of this movement strove to prove that theirs was a unique and historic nation and that this nation had a right to self-determination. To support that argument, nationalists undertook the definition of their nation. The arts became part and parcel of their projects. To Egyptian territorial nationalists and artists of the early twentieth century, the prevailing visual representations of the nation were the Pharaonic monument and the Egyptian peasant. These symbols served the purpose of uniting the diverse sectors of Egyptian society (people of every faith, rich and poor, could feel a connection to their country's antiquities) and also presented a recognizable and distinct image of the nation abroad.

Mukhtar's sculptures served to underscore the emblematic power of this symbolic system by combining ancient and modern imagery and styles into a cogent, and unified, form. Taking their cue from the meaning system present in Mukhtar's pioneering works, a new generation of Egyptian artists began to emerge during the early twentieth century. A regeneration took place in the Egyptian arts, encouraged by the establishment of arts institutions like schools and museums. According to Azar, the new approach to Egyptian art that these artists pursued was influenced by styles and sets of imagery as varied as Pharaonic tradition, Coptic art, Mamluk imagery and Orientalist imagery, which caused it to become a "hydra, a monster," and in this way unique (much like the nation).<sup>409</sup> The next chapter analyzes the development of Egyptian modern art through the work both of Mukhtar and of some of his fellow artists.

<sup>409</sup> Aimé Azar, *La Peinture Moderne En Egypt* (Cairo: Les Editions Nouvelles, 1961), 9.

#### 4. MUKHTAR'S GENIUS – NATIONALIST ART IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Egypt's elite transformed their country from one that lacked even the most basic curriculum in the arts to one that could boast of a successful art school, a thriving artistic community, and a museum of modern art.<sup>410</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar was at the center of that transformation. The nationalist press held up Mukhtar's monuments as enduring symbols of the new Egypt and galleries at home and abroad exhibited the sculptor's smaller works. In this way, Mukhtar's artistic success came to be seen as evidence of the Egyptian nation's potency and distinctiveness. At the same time, his works were deeply personal and introspective. This chapter seeks to reconcile the public and the private worlds of Egypt's national sculptor through an analysis of some of Mukhtar's works. The purpose of this exercise is to expose the importance of the arts to Egyptian nationalism in the early twentieth century and vice versa.

In the following sections, I examine Mukhtar's work chronologically. I begin with two sculptures from his tenure at the School of Fine Arts, before moving on to look at his most famous sculpture, *Nahdat Misr* (1920 – 1928). I then analyze select works, which the artist created during the late 1920s. These deal primarily with peasant women and are lesser in fame and scale than Mukhtar's monuments, although certainly not lacking in ambition. Finally, I examine the two monumental portraits Mukhtar created of Sa'd Zaghlul, which were not erected until after Mukhtar's death. In order to broaden the inquiry into the Egyptian art field of the period, I move on to a review of Mukhtar's

<sup>410</sup> As already mentioned, the School of Fine Arts opened in 1908. The Museum of Modern Art was established in 1927, in the same year that the king founded a Fine Arts Committee. Mukhtar founded the Imagination Society in 1928, and the group soon became one of many such artist collectives who contributed to the thriving art field in Egypt. Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 13, 70.

contemporaries: first, his fellow artists in the Imagination Society, Mahmud Said and Muhammad Nagy; then critic and meaning-producer Mohamed Hussein Haykal, who led the group Friends of the Imagination Society.

#### 4.1 Mukhtar's Artistic Style – The Student Becomes the Master

According to Mukhtar's biographer, "art [in Egypt] was dead" until Napoleon paraded into the land with his army and his collection of artists.<sup>411</sup> Although Abu Ghazi's scholarship is colored by his own nationalism and his obvious love for Mukhtar (see section 1.3), this hyperbolic declaration reflects the way in which Mukhtar's contemporaries saw him: the sculptor's appearance was transformative to his generation because of what they considered the lack of artistic product preceding him.<sup>412</sup> Mukhtar himself was therefore taken by his friends and contemporaries as a "symbol of Egypt's glory," as influential as Muhammad 'Abduh and Sa'd Zaghlul.<sup>413</sup> At the same time, the sculptor's mature style was conservative by international standards. He did not play with abstraction like the more avant-garde artists of his time, nor did he introduce any of the experimental and rebellious artistic genres of European art to Egypt.<sup>414</sup> For the most part, Mukhtar remained loyal to the conventional techniques he learned in Cairo and Paris: His

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>413</sup> This is the perspective of his biographer. Ibid., 15. 16. Other writers shared a great respect for the sculptor, most notably writer Taha Hussein (see chapter 5).

<sup>414</sup> Although Mukhtar was the contemporary of Paris Surrealists, which movement began around 1919 with calls for revision of the standard "definition of reality" through techniques like automatic writing and dream interpretation, the sculptor passed away before Surrealism became a substantial movement in Egypt. It was not until 1939, five years after Mukhtar's passing, that the Egyptian artist and writer George Heinin (1914 – 1973) founded the Society of Art and Freedom; the society's first group show took place the following year. Surrealism in Egypt flourished in the 1940s and 1950s. The movement was led by Heinin and by artist Ramses Younan (1921 – 1966), both of whom were members of what Karnouk has called Egypt's "second generation" of artists – those who came after, and were influenced by, Mukhtar's generation. Therefore the Surrealist movement in Egypt had little bearing on Mukhtar's work and is outside of the scope of this thesis. See: Samir Ghareib, *Surrealism in Egypt and Plastic Arts*, First English ed., Prism Art Series (Giza: Prism Publication Offices, 1986), 1, 3 - 4, 11.; Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910 - 2003*, 34.; C.W.E. Bigsby, *Dada & Surrealism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972), 39 - 41.



work was studiously figurative. In the context of modern Egypt, however, there was no artist more influential at breaking down barriers and rejuvenating Egyptian art than Mahmud Mukhtar. Abu Ghazi's assignment of the status of a miracle worker on Mukhtar is a stretch, but the artist's work was nonetheless groundbreaking.

Mukhtar achieved international fame for his artistry in *Nahdat Misr* (see section 3.4), but that success did not chain him to a particular technique or style. Instead, the sculptor matched his method to his message and harmonized his line with his materials. His style did not sprout overnight but matured with the man. Mukhtar's creative output began when he was still a child, when he molded mud into small statues for which the only critic, and the only audience, was the boy himself. While he was a teen, Mukhtar's style was dominated by the lessons given by the European instructors at the School of Fine Arts; still, as will be demonstrated below, the young artist managed to invest some of his personality into his schoolwork. After his move to France, Mukhtar came into what his biographer calls a more "cosmopolitan style."<sup>415</sup> He reacted to the modern artworks that surrounded him in Paris to develop his own hybrid style. This style, which matured during the 1920s, was driven by Mukhtar's academic instruction and by his emotional connection to his home country, its symbolic systems and its struggle for independence.

In the late 1920s (the artist's most productive period), Mukhtar's work became more introspective, but his hand never strayed far from the concerns of a new Egyptian nation.<sup>416</sup> Thus Mukhtar's mature style, like the artist himself, was a study in contradictions. His imagery and technique nod to both modern and ancient styles, such as his combination of smooth planes in drapery (a "modern" motif) with Pharaonic figures

<sup>415</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 26 - 27.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 26 – 27.

in works like *Fallahatun Tarfa 'u el-Ma'*.<sup>417</sup> This synthesis is the essence of Mukhtar's genius: His works are at once Egyptianist and international, simultaneously individual and universal, occasionally challenging and always beautiful.

#### 4.1.1 Mukhtar's Early Works

In his final year of study at the School of Fine Arts, Mukhtar created a small bronze statue called *Ibn al-Balad* (Son of the Village).<sup>418</sup> The style of the work is quite different from that of the Greco-Roman sculptures, which student artists copied as part of their education, and it introduces Mukhtar's early interest in representing his countrymates rather than in producing more generalized figures.



Figure 4: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Ibn al-Balad*, 1910. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

<sup>417</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 20.

<sup>418</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "Ibn Al-Balad," (Cairo: 1910).

Mukhtar's portrayal of a young villager so pleased his fellow Egyptians that during, and after its display in the School of Fine Arts' first exhibition in 1911, eight people bought gypsum copies of the original bronze statue.<sup>419</sup>

*Ibn al-Balad* (Figure 4) is a playful and diminutive statue, standing only 59 centimeters high, of which height a good third consists of a roughly hewn base.<sup>420</sup> The individual depicted in the sculpture is a young boy dressed in a *galibeya*, the traditional dress of the Egyptians (and of the Arabs). His shoes curl upward, as if pointing to his rotund belly. His peaked hat tilts over his face so that its angle mirrors the curl of his shoes and draws attention to the boy's cherubic features. This is a face whose rounded cheeks and prominent lips accentuate its tiny nose and eyes, and yet the irregularity of the features (some aspects are oversized and others undersized) creates an appealing balance thanks to the boy's wide smile. The clothing he wears is well-kept and his posture is erect. Although his face is youthful, the boy's neck is creased with muscle, which bears witness to the peasant's hidden strength. According to Sharouny, the boy's pose "belittles all hardships and makes a mockery of everyone, including himself. This is typical of the sharp-witted locals, whose sense of humor is unmistakable."<sup>421</sup> The comical tone with which Mukhtar composed this small sculpture must have been a conscious choice – as is shown in the following example, the artist was capable of capturing the suffering of his subject. Here, rather than exposing the struggles of the peasantry, Mukhtar represented the lighter side of rural life.

The work's light tone belies what may be its deeper purpose – by representing a peasant, Mukhtar involved his work in an ongoing debate among members of the

<sup>419</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 58.

<sup>420</sup> The measurements and dates in this section are taken from Sharouny. Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 58.

*effendiya* and the elite about the proper place of the peasantry (see section 3.1.4). Cairo's elite saw the country's peasants both as relics of "pure" Egyptian-ness, and also as a group in need of guidance and control. The Egyptian-ness of the statue is evident in the boy's traditional clothing. Although he is well-dressed and pleasant looking, the boy displays none of the outward signs of modernity, such as Westernized dress or military uniform, either of which might have indicated his involvement in modern processes of education and government. Furthermore, the boy is depicted standing still, doing nothing, with his hands hidden behind his back. Were he pushing a plow, for instance, this representation might then be linked to the economic position of the peasantry, which might in turn remind the viewer that the Egyptian economy rode on the backs of its peasant farmers, highlighting the potential power of this growing group. Instead, the boy is immobile and unthreatening. His expression, however, is pleasant and appealing and his posture is welcoming. This statue does not mock its subject. Because of his oversized ears and slightly off-kilter posture, this boy's portrait could easily have descended into a simple caricature at the hand of a less compassionate artist, but Mukhtar was a member of a generation who came from, and venerated, the village and its denizens.<sup>422</sup> For this reason, the sculpture transcends caricature and becomes a fitting manifestation of the *effendiya*'s complex attitude toward the peasantry.

Another sculpture that he crafted in the same year demonstrates the young man's representational ability. Mukhtar completed *Ra's Zingiyah* (Head of a Black Woman, Figure 5) for a class in portrait sculpture.<sup>423</sup> The bust is bronze and stands 44 centimeters high. Mukhtar spared no detail of the woman's mournful features; her forehead and

<sup>422</sup> This veneration of and even nostalgia for the countryside is also evident in the work of Mukhtar's contemporary, Haykal. (See section 4.3.4).

<sup>423</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "Ra's Zingiyah," (Cairo: 1910).

cheeks are creased with pain. Her lips are slightly parted, as if she were drawing a breath. The woman's gaze is directed downward and, although Mukhtar has not included her entire shoulder, the positioning of the woman's collarbones and neck indicate that her posture is hunched forward. There is great sorrow evident in the woman's face, sorrow that Mukhtar has recreated sympathetically and faithfully. Thus, even before he left for Paris, the young artist possessed nearly the full sculptor's palate: He was able to recreate realistic physical features and to imbue them with genuine emotion, and he was also capable of reducing that realism to serve an expressive purpose. What the young artist lacked was a distinctive style of his own.



Figure 5: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Ra's Zingiyah*, 1910. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

#### 4.1.2 An Egyptian Artist in Paris

Mukhtar flourished in Paris, gaining friends and fans among his fellow students (see section 3.3.1). He did not take up every aspect of creative life in his new home, however. While much of French modernist painting was seen as a rejection of the salon

system and conventional art – Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* so offended the emperor that he pronounced the work “an offense to good morals”<sup>424</sup> – Mukhtar established himself within the salon system by entering the École des Beaux-Arts and displaying his work in Paris’s Grand Palais (for an explanation of the salon system, see section 2.3). For this reason, his work, although thoroughly modern, does not really adhere to any of the outré modernist movements in vogue in Europe at the time, such as Dadaism and Cubism, which rejected the very artistic tenets that Mukhtar embraced. The reason for this is simple. The majority of modern art genres left him cold because of what he considered their superficiality. He concluded that the most fanciful movements, in particular, amounted to nothing more than a lot of pomp meant to conceal lack of talent.<sup>425</sup> Mukhtar observed modernist groups with disdain, stating: “Fantasy often seeks to cover up lack of skill and inefficiency under an attractive name.”<sup>426</sup>



Figure 6: Mukhtar in his Paris studio. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

<sup>424</sup> There is evidence that the leaders of France’s impressionist movement cultivated their confrontational stance as a reaction to the strictures of their art field, and of political life in their country at large. Philip Nord, *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 19, 20.

<sup>425</sup> “*Fi Baris*.” <http://www.mmukhtarmuseum.gov.eg/paris.html>

<sup>426</sup> As quoted in Sharouny. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 18.

That is not to say that Mukhtar rejected all modern artists. He was impressed by the works of Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brancusi.<sup>427</sup> Rodin's work in particular exerted great influence on the fledgling sculptor, to such an extent that Mukhtar lumped the Frenchman together with Michelangelo (and himself) in a group, which he referred to as geniuses.<sup>428</sup> From Brancusi's work, Mukhtar realized the impact that smooth lines and surfaces can have on a sculpture, while Rodin's work schooled the young artist in the emotional possibilities of sculptural line and figural contortion.

Despite his dismissal of many modernist movements, the young artist was deeply influenced by the atmosphere of Paris during the 1920s, and was particularly impressed with the freedoms of French society (see section 3.3.1). It is also likely that Mukhtar absorbed some of his appreciation for Egyptology from France's embrace of the discipline (see section 3.3).<sup>429</sup> Furthermore, Mukhtar's use of a woman to represent his country may also have inspired by his tenure in Paris, although this kind of symbolism was not new to the modern era. French artists, writers and politicians had long used representations of Jeanne d'Arc to symbolize their nation, and in the 1920s the saint's popularity soared (see section 3.4). Jeanne d'Arc was not the only woman whose body represented the French nation in Paris's public monuments; Mukhtar was greatly

<sup>427</sup> Rodin (1840 – 1917) was a French sculptor. He is widely considered the founder of modern sculpture and is best known for his figural works, including "The Thinker." Jean-François Chabrun Robert Descharnes, *Auguste Rodin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 7. Brancusi (1876 – 1957) was a Romanian-born sculptor who was active in Paris from 1903 on. He worked briefly under Rodin before branching out to develop his own style. Sanda Miller, *Constantin Brancusi, a Survey of His Work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 5, 49.

<sup>428</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 39. In a telling coincidence, Rodin has been called the first European sculptor since the Renaissance, just as Mukhtar was dubbed the first Egyptian sculptor since the Pharaohs. Bernard Champigneulle, *Rodin* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 67.

<sup>429</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski report that the squares and museums of nineteenth century Paris displayed a great many Egyptian (or Egyptian-inspired) monuments, including several sphinxes. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 43 - 44.

influenced by the façades of the Arc de Triomphe wherein women and men were joined in representations of France's glory (Figure 7).

Gershoni relates that “Mukhtar was particularly fascinated by François Rude’s monumental masterpiece on the façade of the Arc de Triomphe facing the Champs Élysées, entitled ‘Le Départ des Volontaires de 1792.’”<sup>430</sup> This façade has two levels: a winged woman rises above a plane of writhing male soldiers as she points a sword before her to drive unseen masses into battle. Mukhtar was impressed by Rude’s ability to balance the masculine and feminine, and must have noticed this façade’s blend of the historic and the modern. The sculptor endeavored to create for Egypt a national monument and symbol to rival those he saw in France. That monument was *Nahdat Misr*, and its appearance represents Mukhtar’s complex relationship with the nationalist politicians of his country.



Figure 7 François Rude, *Le Départ des Volontaires de 1792*, Arc d'Triomphe, Paris. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/Marseillaise/hymne.asp>

<sup>430</sup>This façade is known popularly as “La Marseillaise.” Ibid., 45.



#### 4.2 The Symbolism of Nahdat Misr

Abu Ghazi calls *Nahdat Misr* “the greatest and most honest symbol of its time,”<sup>431</sup> and Gershoni and Jankowski declare that it enjoys a “longstanding canonical status as the central symbol of Egyptian modernism.”<sup>432</sup> Where does that symbolism come from, however, and why has it retained its potency?



Figure 8: *Nahdat Misr* as it stands today, Giza. Photo, Author's own.

On the surface, the symbolism of *Nahdat Misr* is explicit. Mukhtar has joined two established emblems of Egyptian identity into a single monument. In this way, the project and the story of its course from model to monument distills the social, political and economic context in which Mukhtar was working into a single sculpture. As was shown in the previous chapter, the 1919 Revolution carried with it the idea that the country could be reborn (see section 3.4). In that context, antiquities like the sphinx were taken by

<sup>431</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 8.

<sup>432</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 30.

artists and ideologues as symbols of an eternal Egypt that could rise up and demand a new life for the people. For this reason, Mukhtar's sphinx is physically, and metaphorically, rising. Through its explicit imagery, the sculpture represents an intersection of the discourses surrounding nationalism, modernity and the development of art.

Some viewers of the monument took the woman's removal of her veil as a reference to the "woman question" (see section 3.1.4).<sup>433</sup> Women's leaders of the time, like the publishers of the women's magazine *Majallat al-Nahda*, read the figure's gesture as a representation and legitimation of their struggle for women's liberation.<sup>434</sup> That magazine displayed the monument as their magazine's logo.<sup>435</sup> The sculpture is not a feminist work, however, and the use of a woman here indicates little about the artist's actual thoughts on gender relations. Pollard's perspective on the deeper meaning of feminist discourse in the modern era, introduced in the previous chapter, can bring new light to understanding of Mukhtar's work and to interpretation of *Nahdat Misr* in particular. If the process of unveiling is meant to reveal the true potency and modernity of the Egyptian nation, then Mukhtar's portrayal of a woman lifting a veil from her face in *Nahdat Misr* is not only (and perhaps not at all) a feminist symbol, but rather is an expression of the overarching nationalist and modernist discourse that characterized the age.

<sup>433</sup> There is also some debate surrounding the appearance of the peasant herself – some critics believe that she looks more French than Egyptian, an allegation which 'Abdul 'Aziz attributes to the fact that Mukhtar's loyal and ever-present model was a Frenchwoman. The figure's appearance is generalized enough, however, that she could be French, Egyptian or really a member of any Mediterranean group. 'Abdul-'Aziz, "Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile," 20.

<sup>434</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 79, 65.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 79.

The peasant woman's motion indicates the country's liberation from colonial oppression, both Ottoman and British. As Baron explains, the "face veil remained one of the last vestiges and main markers of the old Ottoman elite" and can thus be read as a sign of the traditional order against which modernists such as Mukhtar and his nationalist friends struggled.<sup>436</sup> This woman removes her traditional clothing and looks forward, her eyes raised, which can be read as an embrace of modernity and as a celebration of the demise of both the colonizers and strictures of tradition, which had held Egypt down for so long.

The connection between the woman and the sphinx is established by a single point of contact – the woman rests her right hand on the sphinx's crown. She does so with her fingers outstretched and her hand relaxed, while her left hand is clasped in a fist as she grips the fabric of her veil. The dual positioning of her hands signifies the woman's comfort with the symbol of the ancient past and, at the same time, her commitment to moving forward. The sphinx's limbs, on the other hand, are completely symmetrical – he has already achieved aesthetic perfection and now rises to impart this legacy upon the Egypt of the future. Rather than lying on his forelegs, as is the common, traditional representation of the sphinx, Mukhtar created a dynamic creature that is pushing itself up from the ground.<sup>437</sup> So, although the figures that Mukhtar grouped in *Nahdat Misr* were not, in and of themselves, radical breaks from previous representations of women or of the sphinx, their relationship and stances demonstrate Mukhtar's original message. Taken together, the figures represent the territorial nationalist ideology which celebrated the

<sup>436</sup> At that time, the veil was a marker of aristocracy – peasant women, especially those laboring in the fields, may not have veiled. Therefore the fact that the peasant woman wears a veil moves her farther away from realism and into the symbolic realm. Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, 35.

<sup>437</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 38.

continuity of Egyptian culture from the Pharaonic to the contemporary age. The combination of artistic styles in Mukhtar's work also serves as a reference to the development of art. This development can be read in an evolutionary manner, wherein the Pharaonic style of the sphinx is contrasted to the modern style with which Mukhtar crafted the peasant woman. While the sphinx is in the process of rising, the woman is already erect, and her head towers above that of the sphinx. Taken together, these two figures represent the entirety of Egypt's artistic past (conveniently skipping over the Islamic and Ottoman periods) as they move together into the future.

The sculpture's meaning would not have retained such potency were it not for the enthusiastic accounts given of the sculpture and its unveiling in the nationalist press. Because of the widespread consensus concerning the symbolism of the monument, that meaning was codified. Even the criticisms of the work contributed to its ongoing implication, for criticism allowed the sculptor to defend himself and his meaning as part of a public debate. In this way, the sculpture can be seen as an integral piece of the early twentieth-century territorial nationalist project – the artistic work impacted nationalist discourse and aided in its dissemination. People had to read a newspaper to know what its editors and writers thought, but anyone passing through Cairo's main train station would be privy to Mukhtar's vision of the Egyptian nation. *Nahdat Misr* is both a product *and* a tool of Egyptian territorial nationalism in the early twentieth century.

Few of Mukhtar's other sculptures were as controversial as *Nahdat Misr* because most were not as public as this monument.<sup>438</sup> In fact, the bulk of his work was not so explicitly nationalist but rather allows a closer look of the artist's occasionally personal

<sup>438</sup> The Sa'd Zaghlul monuments are Mukhtar's other public works and they too were divisive, but the controversy surrounding their creation and installation had more to do with political infighting than it did with debates over nationalism and representation.

narrative. Central to that narrative were the hours the artist spent as a young boy, watching the activities of village women by the banks of Nile (see section 3.2.2).

#### 4.2.1 Experiments in Portraiture

During the period of his greatest artistic productivity, the sculptor's attention was drawn as much by his series of sculptures of peasant women as it was by his more public projects. From 1927 until 1929, during which time *Nahdat Misr* was finally unveiled, Mukhtar worked diligently and generated some 40 smaller sculptures.<sup>439</sup> During that time, Mukhtar molded the visages of his friends and those who inspired him. In portrait busts he created bronze sculptures of unnamed people like *Shaykh el-Bashariin* (Chief of the Basharians), of his friends such as Hoda Shawari and of famous Egyptians such as Sa'd Zaghlul (Figure 9).<sup>440</sup>



Figure 9: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Ra's Sa'd Zaghlul*, 1930; *Shaykh el-Basharin*, 1927. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

<sup>439</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 103.

<sup>440</sup> The Basharians are a nomadic tribe in the region of Aswan, near the location from which Mukhtar quarried granite for *Nahdat Misr*. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 66. Mahmud Mukhtar, "Shaykh El-Basharin," (Cairo: 1927). Mahmud Mukhtar, "Ra's Sa'd Zaghlul " (Cairo: 1930).

Although these portrait busts demonstrate Mukhtar's skill both in recreating people's physical features and also in delving into the more mysterious depths of personality, the portraits are not, as a group, particularly distinctive – they could have been completed by any sculptor with appropriate skill, training and access to the individuals depicted. Mukhtar's real genius is revealed in his series of sculptures of Egyptian peasant women. These sculptures could not have been created by any other man, for they reveal Mukhtar's early attention to the appearances and activities of peasant women (whom he had watched so avidly as a child while crouched by the Nile canals), his classical training and his exposure to European modern art. Mukhtar's sculptures of peasant women are the expression of a fully mature artist who is completely comfortable both with his technique and with his subject.

#### 4.2.2 Mukhtar's Peasant Women

Mukhtar's sculptures of peasant women might be interpreted as emblems of his motherland.<sup>441</sup> This perspective is understandable since the peasant woman he included in *Nahdat Misr* was an explicit symbol of "mother Egypt."<sup>442</sup> The pedagogical function of Mukhtar's monumental sculptures is different than the purpose of his series of peasant women, however. For one thing, the sculptor designed *Nahdat Misr* and his two statues of Sa'd Zaghlul with a specific context in mind: that of public display on a monumental scale. In order to reach and teach the maximum audience, Mukhtar simplified those sculptures and made their symbolism plain for all to see. They are, therefore, monuments meant to be viewed by crowds; they are meant to be seen from streets in one glance and

<sup>441</sup> This is Sharouny's interpretation of smaller statues like *el-Fallaha*, which he declares "is not a mere peasant, but a symbol of a grand and proud Egypt." Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 86.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 54

understood just as quickly. Mukhtar created his smaller works for more private and personal contexts – these sculptures were intended for private collections or else for display in galleries, and are now collected in a museum.<sup>443</sup> Museums and galleries are public but they require people to go out of their way to see the works and even force visitors to pay for the privilege. The museum or gallery audience, by virtue of visiting that institution, has already signified knowledge of the art field. As Bourdieu points out, to understand a work of art on sight the audience must already be privy to the language of visual representation – by visiting museums or galleries people both demonstrate their knowledge of this language and continually expand their comprehension.<sup>444</sup> In Egypt during the 1920s, only a select few were conversant with the language of modern art.<sup>445</sup> Mukhtar created his peasant series for them and for the international audience.

Mukhtar's series of sculptures of peasant women, therefore, displays far more depth in both his expression and in his technique than do his monumental works. Taken together, the sculptures are more a manifestation of the artist's thoughts and beliefs than they are representations of specific women at specific times. These are not portraits of particular women but are physical representations of Mukhtar's nostalgia for the unadulterated beauty of the peasants he observed as a boy, for the joy he took from participating in their daily routines. Mukhtar brings the peasant women into a world

<sup>443</sup> Works of art in private collections are unavailable to the general public because they are involved in exclusive relationships with their owners, unless those owners lend their property to museums or galleries for public display. Therefore the discussion here will focus on museums and galleries.

<sup>444</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 215.

<sup>445</sup> Those familiar with modern art – and with art history in general – were concentrated among the wealthy and *effendiya*. The appreciation of modern art was a status symbol, much like the previously-mentioned use of French perfume. Take, for instance, the collection of Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil. Khalil was one of Egypt's wealthiest men during the early twentieth century, and he was also an avid art lover. He expressed that love by joining Prince Yusuf Kamel in the creation of a the group Society of Appreciation for the Fine Arts in 1924 and by amassing a distinguished collection of (primarily French) modern art. That collection is now displayed in Khalil's Nile-side palace under the title Mr. and Mrs. Mahmoud Khalil Museum. "Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Salon," ed. Central Administration of Museums and Exhibits (Ministry of Culture, Sector of Figurative Art, 2008).

which they would never otherwise enter (the art field) by representing the women as he does, by capturing their daily lives in reproducible and recognizable forms. Although peasants were generally excluded from the art field in early twentieth century Egypt both because of their lack of education and because of their physical distance from the arenas of “high” culture, these women enter the arts as the product of a man’s imagination, and as a commodity available for purchase.

Why did the artist spend so much time depicting women? It’s true that Mukhtar sculpted men as well – in fact, his museum holds several small representations of male peasants going about their daily lives – but the majority of his attention during his years of greatest productivity was spent on the peasant woman series, and it is therefore to this series that I have given the most attention. The imposition of meaning upon the representation of a woman’s body was not unique to Mukhtar. There is nothing more immediate or intimate to the human viewer than the body, and sculptors in particular have focused on the human form since antiquity.<sup>446</sup> As Babcock points out, bodies “are always, everywhere, intimately involved with the reproduction of culture and the politics of representation.”<sup>447</sup> The culture that is being reproduced by these bodies is that of early twentieth century Egypt, wherein women and peasants were to be celebrated and protected by men, socially, politically and economically.

The economic role of these women is central to full understanding of the works under consideration. The women are often depicted at work. They draw water or go to market and thus embody what many would consider traditional women’s work. Just as these women do not don Western clothing, they are also not seen reading, for instance, or

<sup>446</sup> L. R. Rogers, *Sculpture*, vol. 2, *The Appreciation of the Arts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 93.

<sup>447</sup> Barbara A. Babcock, “Pueblo Cultural Bodies,” *Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 423 (1994): 40.



taking part in urban (and thus “modern”) activities. This omission is not an insidious imposition of the artist’s opinion upon his subject – in truth, many of Egypt’s peasant women probably never ventured outside of their village or outside of the conventional gender roles assigned to them by society. Some did, however. Mukhtar’s own mother not only moved villages but also came to Cairo with her young son (see section 3.2.1). Why, then, did Mukhtar choose to depict only specific aspects of women’s lives?

For one thing, Mukhtar’s physical and temporal distance from the moments and people he is portraying gives the sculptures an idyllic quality; their appearance is tinged by nostalgic recollection of peasants’ lives with which “modern” activities or appearances would be incompatible.<sup>448</sup> This, in turn, serves an ideological purpose. By representing peasant women divorced from “modern” or urban life, Mukhtar freezes these moments, and these women, in time. As Owens points out, representations of peasants or native groups often mirror the need felt by those in power to “fix the Other in a stable and stabilizing identity.”<sup>449</sup> This stability lends the representations (and the people themselves) an air of constancy which is non-threatening and thus comforting to those in power. Perceived stability also locks the peasants in a “traditional” category which makes them vessels for reform and control by the more “modern” members of society. In the Egyptian context, the statues thus reflect the ongoing elite debate regarding the place and purpose of the peasantry in society (see section 3.1.4), and reproduce the power relations of Egypt’s colonial and post-colonial state. In this

<sup>448</sup> Mukhtar did not work on these sculptures in the fields, as it were, but in his studios in both Cairo and Paris.

<sup>449</sup> Babcock quotes Craig Owens in her article in reference to the representation of American Indian women in American popular culture and scholarship, but the treatment of American Indians has many telling similarities with the representation of peasants internationally, seen here in Egyptian artworks like those created by Mukhtar. Babcock, “Pueblo Cultural Bodies,” 47.

nationalist discourse, women and the family represent the nation which must be guided, and interpreted, by men like Mahmud Mukhtar

These sculptures also embody the artist's challenge both to his fellow Egyptians and to the international art world: Do not underestimate Egyptian modern art! In this way, Mukhtar's peasant woman sculptures are an elegant tool of his mission to elevate Egyptian art – they demonstrate to an educated audience that it is possible to “grow” great art on Egyptian soil without blind imitation of European trends and, for that feat, they demanded and received admiration. The most evocative sculpture of Mukhtar's series of peasant women is *Riyāh al-Khamāsin* (The Khamsin Winds, Figure 10).<sup>450</sup> This piece, according to Abu Ghazi, raises Mukhtar's art “from local into international” status.<sup>451</sup> Sharouny indicates that the sculpture initiated Mukhtar's “turn to abstract aesthetics,” which reveals that the artist had turned away from explicit, nationalist imagery and was approaching his smaller works as more personal and interior expressions.<sup>452</sup>

This limestone statue stands 56 centimeters high and represents a woman who is walking, with difficulty, in a great gust of wind.<sup>453</sup> Her clothing and veil billow because of the gale's force, extending behind as if they were sails and her body a ship's mast. Although most of the woman's body and face are obscured by her garments, her besieged limbs are evident within the folds of her clothes – her arms are folded at her chest, pinning her veil in place; her left leg extends in front her body, knee bent, while her right

<sup>450</sup> The *Khamsin* Winds are the colloquial name for a series of dust and sand storms that strike Cairo each March and which are purported to last for fifty (*khamsin*) days. Mahmud Mukhtar, “*Riyāh Al-Khamāsin*” (Cairo: 1929).

<sup>451</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 25.

<sup>452</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 20.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

leg pushes against the ground far behind her body's center. It would be impossible to maintain this posture in normal conditions, but this woman is buoyed by the very wind against which she exerts her strength. Thus, the great irony that this sculpture symbolizes is revealed: Those very obstacles that impede our progress can also sustain us. In other words, people would not be strong if they never had to struggle.

The expressive force of *Riyāh al-Khamāsin* is emphasized by the fact that the sculpture looks completely different when viewed from various angles. While from the front of the piece the face makes it obvious that this is a sculpture of a woman, the swells and bulges of cloth overtake the side view so that, from that perspective, the primary impression given by the sculpture is of three waves that fold into each other, rather than a figural form. From behind, the representational nature of this sculpture is completely obscured.

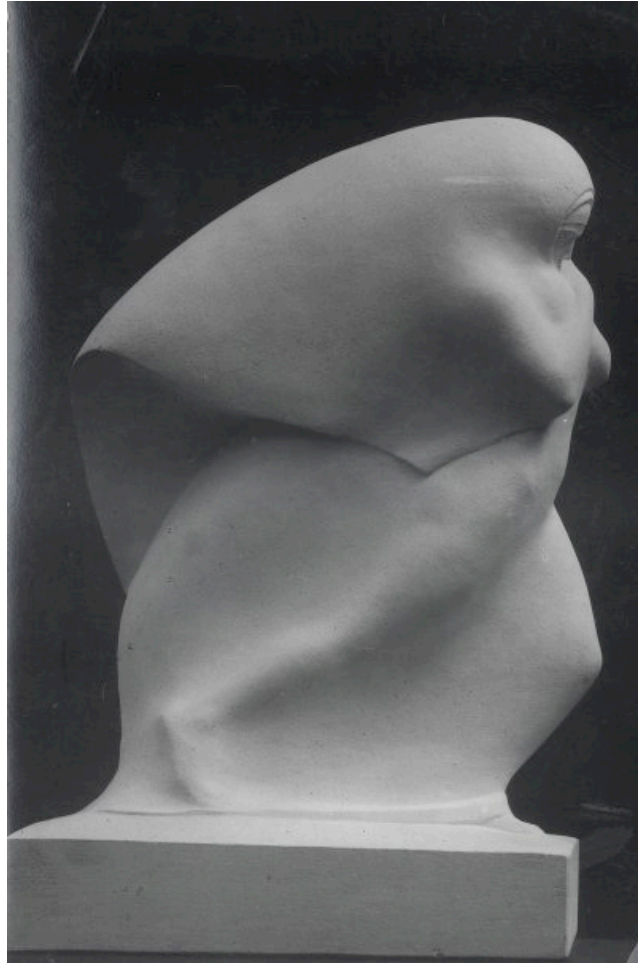


Figure 10: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Riyāh al-Khamāsin*, 1929. Photo from the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

In this way, the sculpture offers a telling representation of the diverse perceptions available to any who witness, attempt or experience resistance.

Sharouny interprets this sculpture as an evocation of Mukhtar's own struggle to get his monumental sculptures made, and to raise the status of art in Egypt.<sup>454</sup> The fact that the woman's face is obscured, however, coupled with the abstracted nature of the sculpture when seen from most angles, lends the work more universality than allowed by Sharouny's interpretation. The planes created by the woman's garment are uncreased and thus unspecific, just as the woman's body itself is indicated by notions of limbs but not by the limbs themselves. Mukhtar's feat in this sculpture's design is in the careful

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 64.

balance of essentialization and personalism: He has essentialized the lines and planes so that they are unrecognizable out of context and has given no specificity to the face or figure, and yet he hints at personality through the woman's gesture.



Figure 11: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Fallahatun Tarfa'u el-Ma'*, 1927 - 29. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

This meticulous equilibrium between essentialization and individuality can be seen in all of Mukhtar's peasant women, although no other sculpture carries as much metaphorical impact as *Riyāh el-Khamāsiin*. His limestone sculpture, *Fallahatun Tarfa'u el-Ma'* (Female Peasant Raises Water, Figure 11) comes close. It is only 45 centimeters tall, counting the substantial base.<sup>455</sup> The woman depicted crouches at a sloping cliff and lowers a jar below her feet to retrieve water – in this way, it is clear that the base is meant to represent the bank of the Nile.<sup>456</sup> The majority of the sculpture is taken up by the plane created by the gently sloping curve of the woman's back and the elegant extension of her arms in front of her. The specifics of her body are lost in her garments, but her gesture is clear. The woman's rear extends beyond the end of the base, but she is counterbalanced by the weight of the sculpture's front. Thus, the physical reality of the sculpture is itself a

<sup>455</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "Fallahatun Tarfa'u El-Ma'," (Cairo: 1927 - 29).

<sup>456</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 64.

metaphor: Just as raising water from a crouched position calls for the use of careful balance, so does the sculpture itself require a balancing act so that the rounded body does not cause the squared-off base to topple over. The woman remains upright only by achieving and maintaining balance with her burden.

The postures of the three women depicted in *el-'Awda min el-Nahr* (The Return from the River, Figure 12) also emphasize poise and stability – rendered in limestone, the women carry jars of water on their heads, but their bodies and countenances do not betray any difficulty raised by this task.<sup>457</sup> Similarly, the woman who is featured in *el-'Awda min el-Suq* (The Return from the Market) holds a full basket of purchases on her head, and yet moves calmly forward.<sup>458</sup> Her right leg is extended slightly in front of her body and her right arm is bent at the elbow as if she were waving. By stretching one limb away from the body, Mukhtar is able to explore the many folds and creases created by the fabric of her clothing. Mukhtar's use of the woman's clothing here has deeper meaning than the practical use; extensive use of drapery signals his knowledge of Greco-Roman sculptural techniques. Ancient Greek artists in particular used drapery to “emphasize and clarify the solid shapes of the body” and this technique increased their expressive ability by introducing line into the solid masses of sculpture.<sup>459</sup> Mukhtar's utilization of drapery thus serves as a figurative link between his work and the masterpieces of classical, Western sculpture, while the solidity of his works echoes Pharaonic works.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 69. Mahmud Mukhtar, "El-'Awda Min El-Nahr " (Cairo: 1928).

<sup>458</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "El-'Awda Min El-Suq," (Cairo: 1928).

<sup>459</sup> Rogers, *Sculpture*, 118.



Figure 12: Mahmud Mukhtar, *el-'Awda min el-Nahr*, 1928. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

Pharaonic sculptures are characterized by their stately solidity. Figures in ancient Egyptian sculptures are denser and more compact than is physically possible for a human being.<sup>460</sup> The result is that these figures retain an imposing and unyielding appearance throughout the ages. This solidity was part of their appeal to early twentieth-century Egyptianists: The nation should be built upon a foundation as hearty and robust as great blocks of granite and limestone. Mukhtar adapted the solidity of ancient Egyptian works into some of his own sculptures, such as *el-Huzn* (Sadness).<sup>461</sup> This basalt sculpture depicts a seated woman whose folded arms rest on her bent knees.<sup>462</sup> This sculpture is an overt reference to Pharaonic works. Mukhtar's distinctive combination of modern Greco-Roman and Pharaonic style is also evident in *'Inda Liqā' el-Ragul* (When Meeting the Man, Figure 13).<sup>463</sup>

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>461</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "El-Huzn," (Cairo: 1927).

<sup>462</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 76.

<sup>463</sup> Mahmud Mukhtar, "'Inda Liqā' El-Ragul " (Cairo: 1929).



Figure 13: Mahmud Mukhtar, '*Inda Liqā' el-Ragul*', 1929. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

The piece is bronze and 43 centimeters tall.<sup>464</sup> Here Mukhtar portrays a standing woman who covers the majority of her face and body with a long drapery. Of her face, only her eyes are visible. The posture of her upper body is defensive, but her left foot extends forward as if she is approaching someone. The woman's raised arms cause her clothing to cascade in front of her body, and Mukhtar has not hollowed out the space behind these draperies, to the effect that the body is invested with a solidity reminiscent of Pharaonic works. At the same time, the motion of the clothing's lines suggests Greco-Roman sculpture and emphasizes the erect posture of this woman. In these sculptures of peasant women, therefore, Mukhtar's unique voice has reached full force.

#### 4.3 Mukhtar's Mission –The Zaghlul Monuments and the Imagination Society

Mukhtar's interest in the arts was not merely personal; he was very aware of his social and political surroundings and strove to elevate Egyptian art to its deserved level. This goal led him to become involved in all aspects of the art field. He worked to establish art museums, pushed for art education in schools, endeavored to inspire an

<sup>464</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 87.



appreciation of art in the general population and urged the government and private donors to support and fund artists. Had he not passed away at a young age, Mukhtar would probably have continued his works both in the privacy of his studio and in the public sphere.

His two sculptures of Sa'd Zaghlul, then, represent the artist's swan song and his final message about the uses and importance of the arts in the political life of his country. The impact of Sa'd Zaghlul on the politics and culture of Egypt was colossal, and his monuments are just as large. The ceremonial attending Zaghlul's passing in 1927, therefore, fit into the Egyptianist narrative of the revolution and rebirth of his nation. Zaghlul's tomb was built in imposing Neo-Pharaonic style as if the nationalist were himself a modern Pharaoh. Mukhtar contributed to the ongoing commemoration of the politician by accepting a commission for two monumental statues of Zaghlul to be displayed in Cairo and Alexandria. Just as Mukhtar's sculpture *Nahdat Misr* represented the 1919 Revolution by combining modern and Pharaonic imagery in such a way that a woman represented modern Egypt, so did the sculptor's two monuments to Zaghlul combine modern and Neo-Pharaonic styles so that Zaghlul too can be read as a symbol of the modern state.

The two statues are similar but not identical. Like *Nahdat Misr*, both sculptures were "revolutionary" not only because they depict a revolutionary leader, but because of their deviation from the norm for monuments to leaders in Egypt – until this time, the public spaces of the city had been dominated by bronze statues made of and for the members of Muhammad Ali's family by European artists.<sup>465</sup> Those statues had been an

<sup>465</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 22. See also Kreiser, "Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt."

expression of the Ali dynasty's rejection of Ottoman sovereignty and a manifestation of their European-oriented modernity (Figure 14).<sup>466</sup>



Figure 14 Statue of Ibrahim Pasha, Opera Square, Cairo. Photo by Bob Landry, LIFE Magazine, 1942.

The Zaghlul monuments, on the other hand, were the first of their kind: portrait monuments of an Egyptian leader created by an Egyptian artist. They were visual representations of the territorial nationalist cause and worked in service of the preservation of a specific version of national memory.<sup>467</sup> This memory is multi-layered, much like the two sculptures. In both, the bronze figure of Zaghlul stands atop a tall base so that the leader is surveying the area, far above the heads of any viewer. At the bottom of the base, eye-level with the viewer, Mukhtar included extensive decorations in both free-standing sculpture and in high relief. These decorations are Neo-Pharaonic in style

<sup>466</sup> Kreiser, "Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt," 107.

<sup>467</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 22.

and content. Thus, taken as a whole, the two monuments represent the wide span of Egypt's history, from the time of the Pharaohs to the modern age, now united in the person of Sa'd Zaghlul.

Sa'd Zaghlul, as Mukhtar represented him in his Alexandria statue, is a majestic leader. He is dressed in modern, Westernized clothing but his posture is that adopted by Pharaonic-era sculptors to represent their royalty: His hands are clenched and his left foot extends in front of his right.<sup>468</sup> The twin centerpieces of the Alexandria monument are two bronze statues of seated women, one representing Lower Egypt and the other Upper Egypt. Mukhtar pairs these two symbols to demonstrate the unification of the Nile Valley (and thus of all Egyptians) achieved by Zaghlul. There are also high reliefs affixed to the base of this statue, which illustrate heroic moments in the leader's life. In one, a pulsating group of men holds Zaghlul aloft on their shoulders while others raise their hands, and their voices, in celebration of their hero (Figure 15). The crowd swells around their leader and their raised arms are reminiscent of a wave atop whose swell rides Zaghlul. These men are all dressed in Western-looking suits and fezzes, rather than in traditional costumes like those found on Mukhtar's peasant sculptures.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 49.



Figure 15: Mahmud Mukhtar, *Lohat Hatāf El-Gamāhir*, 1930 - 33. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sector of Fine Arts, 2003. CD-Rom.

The scenes at the base of the Cairo monument to Sa'd Zaghlul are more Pharaonic in content than those of the Alexandria work, and the depiction of the leader is more static.<sup>469</sup> Zaghlul stands with his feet together, his right arm raised as if he were gesturing to a crowd. Once again, his dress is Westernized and his posture dignified. At the bottom of the long base (which is in the shape of a papyrus plant) are four bronze low reliefs, which explore scenes from Egypt's countryside, once again situating the leader in the context of his country's ancient heritage and geography. Although these scenes are not explicitly Pharaonicist – the figures depicted within them could be contemporary peasants – the technique with which Mukhtar has presented them serves as a reference to Pharaonic art. In this way, the Cairo statue of Zaghlul combines elements of the many symbols of the nation utilized by leading nationalists of the time: The laboring peasants, Pharaonic monuments, and modern and educated man form a unified whole.

The fact that Mukhtar included extensive and complicated decoration in what might have been a simple sculptural monument to a deceased leader demonstrates the sculptor's perspective on the value and significance of the arts to the political life of his

<sup>469</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 93.

country: The arts are as essential a means by which nations can achieve modernity as are political movements. These monuments were based on Egypt's ancient pedigree, represented by the low reliefs, and its current potency, seen in the person of the nation's great leader. Such a complexity of expression and mood was also achieved by two of Mukhtar's finest colleagues: painters Mahmud Said and Muhammad Nagy and the writer Mohamed Hussein Haykal.<sup>470</sup>

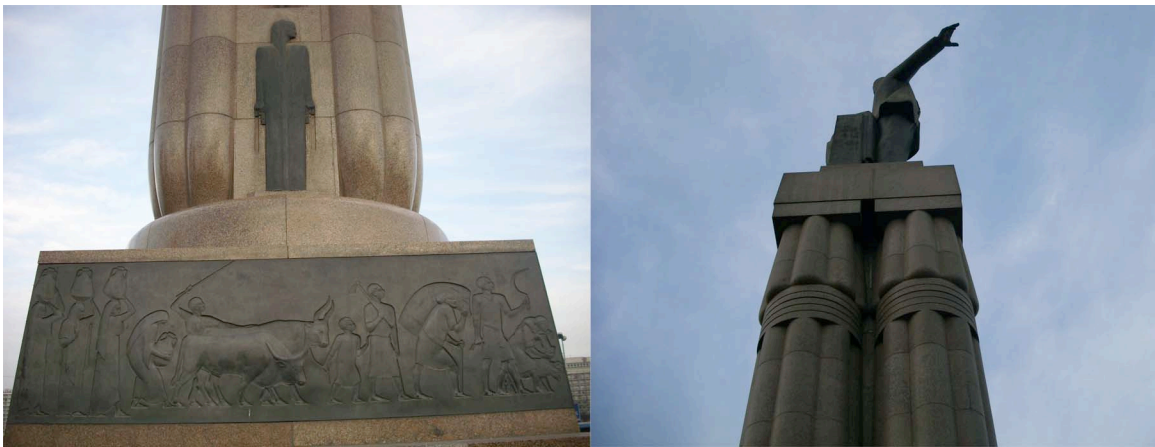


Figure 16: Views of the modern and Neo-Pharaonic aspects of the monument to Zaghlul, Cairo. Photos, author's own.

#### 4.3.1 Painters of The Imagination Society

Mukhtar founded the Imagination Society in 1928, during his peak period of productivity (see sections 3.4 and 3.4.1).<sup>471</sup> The significance of the group, for the purposes of this thesis, lies in its access to aspects of the art field beyond the mere production of images and objects. According to Bourdieu, the art field consists not only of direct producers or artists but also of meaning-producers like critics and curators.<sup>472</sup> By organizing and leading an artist society, which then spawned an associated society of critics, Mukhtar managed the rare feat of bridging two aspects of the art world – pure production and meaning production. His movement was thus institutionalized and its

<sup>470</sup> Reid, "Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past: Egypt 1922 - 1952," 138.

<sup>471</sup> Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 16.

<sup>472</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 34 - 35.

meaning system crossed artistic genres. Mukhtar was aided in his quest to advance and institutionalize art by his fellow artists in the Imagination society, foremost among whom were Said and Nagy.

#### 4.3.2 Mahmud Said – The Painter’s Painter

Mahmud Said was born in 1897 in Alexandria to a family with Turco-Circassian roots.<sup>473</sup> Unlike Mukhtar, he was not able to devote his life to art and, in fact, never studied at an art school.<sup>474</sup> Instead, Said graduated from law school in Cairo and took a post at the Court of Appeals, which he held until his retirement from the law in 1947, although he took an extended trip to Europe in the 1920s.<sup>475</sup> In this way, the painter’s life was split between his commitment to his legal career and his dedication to art. While working as a magistrate, Said was involved in Egypt’s art field as a member of the Consultative Commission on Fine Arts in 1924, and in 1950 was named vice president of the High Consultative Council on Fine Arts.<sup>476</sup>

Said’s paintings feature women of all classes engaged in leisure activities such as chatting together or dancing before musicians. In *The White Cat* (1937, Figure 17) veiled women chat in an exterior space while a white cat, whose features eerily resemble those of a woman, stares intently through the painting’s fourth wall. In *Dancer with Takht* (1949), a woman dances with her hand raised above her head. Her eyes are downcast, as are those of the male musicians in the background, so that every individual is ensconced in an interior world without concern for each other’s actions. According to Karnouk, in

<sup>473</sup> Azar, *La Peinture Moderne En Egypt*, 388.

<sup>474</sup> Mahmoud Alnabawi Alshal, *Mahmoud Said*, trans. Dr. Ahmad Kamal, Prism Art Series (Cairo: Ministry of Culture Egypt, 1982), 1.

<sup>475</sup> Azar, *La Peinture Moderne En Egypt*, 388.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

Said's paintings the world is organized "as a stage, every figure as a performer."<sup>477</sup>

Because of the interiority of Said's work, Karnouk posits that he is "a painter's painter" whose expression is scarcely separate from analysis.<sup>478</sup> There is scarcely a trace of Neo-Pharaonicism in Said's work, although Karnouk insists that his women are of the "Anknotonian physical type."<sup>479</sup> The imposing, almost sculptural quality of Said's figures is due to the artist's use of thick brush strokes and generous curves.<sup>480</sup>



Figure 17 Mahmud Said, *The White Cat*, 1937. Photo from Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*.

Unlike Said, Muhammad Nagy made explicit use of Neo-Pharaonicist imagery in his paintings. His works were also much more monumental. He has been called "the founding father and perhaps the greatest pioneer of modern Egyptian painting." His

<sup>477</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 21.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>480</sup> Alshal, *Mahmoud Said*, 11.

public works are as blatantly nationalist as any of Mukhtar's monuments, but they express a slightly different conception of the nation.<sup>481</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Muhammad Nagy –Muralist of the Nation

Like Said, Nagy was also born in Alexandria, in 1888. He attended the University of Lyon, from which he graduated in 1910 with a degree in law, but he pursued a career as an artist and spent four years studying at the School of Fine Arts in Florence.<sup>482</sup> Nagy traveled frequently throughout his professional life as an attaché with Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also traveled around Egypt, working in studios in the cities of Luxor, Alexandria and Memphis. According to Azar, Nagy's creative life was torn by the tragedy of irreconcilable obligations – the impulse to seek out new styles and the desire to preserve ties with modern, European styles.<sup>483</sup> The painter achieved balance by going on a series of trips through which his eyes were opened to the imagery and color schemes of communities other than Egypt and European capitals. After a diplomatic post in Brazil, Nagy retired from his diplomatic career and journeyed to Ethiopia to search for artistic inspiration.<sup>484</sup> The colors of Ethiopian painting, as well as those found in Coptic works, contributed to his maturing palate, as did his study of Pharaonic tomb painting. The burgeoning art field in Latin America, where muralists like Diego Rivera contributed both to politics and culture with their images of workers and farmers, had enduring influence on the painter.<sup>485</sup> Nagy himself began to work on murals, the most famous of

<sup>481</sup> Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," 186 – 87.

<sup>482</sup> Azar, *La Peinture Moderne En Egypt*, 383.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>484</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 26.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 27.



which shares the title with Mukhtar's masterpiece, *Nahdat Misr* (Figure 18). Created in 1923, the mural adorns a wall in Cairo's parliament building.<sup>486</sup>

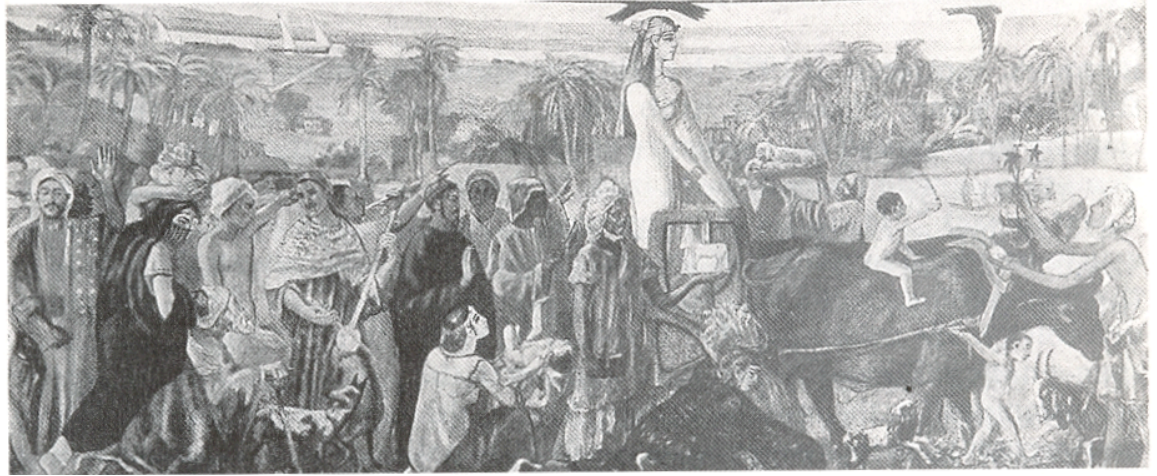


Figure 18 Muhammad Nagy, *The Revival Of Egypt*, 1923. Photo from Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*.

The painting is wide and crowded. In it, Nagy has amalgamated figures from all aspects of Egyptian history and life before a background of lush palm trees and a distant river. Most of these figures share a similar height, thus creating a near-solid mass across the foreground. Here are peasant men in traditional dress displayed with the tools of a peasant's trade, including a muscular water buffalo. The women in the painting work as emblems of Egypt's varied heritage: On the far left, a veiled woman dances to the music created by the nearby musician playing a *rebab* (Figure 19).<sup>487</sup> Another woman, in Greco-Roman dress, offers a naked infant up as if requesting a blessing from the centerpiece of the painting, a Pharaonic goddess. This woman stands out from the motley crew surrounding her because she is the only figure whose body reaches above the line of heads – she is standing on a cart, which is drawn by the water buffalo. In addition, she is dressed in flowing, elegant robes and is adorned with jewels. In this way, the goddess

<sup>486</sup> Azar, *La Peinture Moderne En Egypt*, 383.

<sup>487</sup> The *rebab* is an Arab stringed instrument which dates to the eighth century. Mark Slobin, "Musics of West Asia-North Africa," *Music Educators Journal* 59, no. 2 (1972): 45.

represents the glory of Egypt's ancient past, while the peasants stand for the situation of modern peasants.



Figure 19 Details of *The Revival Of Egypt*, 1923. Photo from Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*.

Nagy was certainly aware of Mukhtar's sculpture, *Nahdat Misr*, with which his mural shared a title. The shared name indicates the two artists' membership in a generation of nationalists and intellectuals who believed that their time was one of Egypt's cultural renaissance. Both works celebrate, encourage and commemorate the perceived revival in Egypt's arts. Nagy's portrayal of Egypt takes into account the same nationalist symbolic system with which Mukhtar worked. The peasants toil alongside an image of Egypt's Pharaonic greatness, and in the background the imagery brings to mind the Egyptian landscapes. The artists' visions are not identical, however. Ostle points out the Alexandrian flavor of Nagy's style – his work is peppered not only by Pharaonic but

also by Greco-Roman symbolism which is quite different from Mukhtar's mature style.<sup>488</sup> Although the message of Egypt's revival in this painting, as in Mukhtar's *Nahdat Misr*, is one of regeneration of ancient, Pharaonic glory and the enduring strength of the Egyptian people, the picture of Egypt that emerges from the two works is different. Mukhtar's work was Egypt-centric while Nagy looked to the country's European influences for inspiration. Thus, even within the Imagination Society, there was no consensus as to what and who exactly the Egyptian nation really was.

This debate was continued most famously by Mukhtar's friend and colleague, Haykal. The writer founded another group, the Friends of the Imagination Society, in support of Mukhtar's collective.<sup>489</sup> The artists and intellectuals of these two groups attempted to encourage works of art that could compete with European works by using a "modern" artistic language, and yet express the distinctiveness of the Egyptian spirit and culture.<sup>490</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Mohamed Hussein Haykal – Elite Focus, National Reach

Mohamed Hussein Haykal and Mahmud Mukhtar were members of the same generation of artists and nationalists. Their upbringings were similar, as was the influence of Western education on their rise into the upper echelons of the *effendiya* group. Both men were sons of a village *umda* and traveled to Cairo at a young age to study there.<sup>491</sup>

<sup>488</sup> See especially his "School of Alexandria" (*Madrasat al-Iskandariyya*), inspired by Rafael's "School of Athens." In this painting, famous Egyptian men, including Mukhtar, flank Archimedes and Ibn Rushd. Ostle, "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," 187. One interpretation could be that Nagy was representing Egypt's ties to its fellow Mediterranean nations rather than paying homage to the country's Arab and African neighbors. This line of thought was made famous by Taha Hussein, who famously (and controversially) argued that Egypt had more in common with southern Europe than with the "East" (see section 5).

<sup>489</sup> Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 13.

<sup>490</sup> Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style*, 11.

<sup>491</sup> Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 33, 35.

Although their politics may not have always run along parallel paths, both men believed above all in the importance and power of the arts for the promotion of nationalist aims. Haykal has been singled out in this thesis among the group of writers working during this era because his writings expressed the same nationalist sentiment as was evident in Mukhtar's monumental works. He worked within the Neo-Pharaonicist movement by exploring modernized Pharaonic symbols in his prose, charging these emblems with nationalist significance. Haykal had a distinct, ideological goal which led him to celebrate Egypt's Pharaonic heritage: The key to Egypt's successful future, for the writer, was a rediscovery of the true essence of Egyptian nature.<sup>492</sup> By returning to this model, Egyptians would not be compelled to imitate Europe but could forge a path to modernity all their own.<sup>493</sup> Furthermore, it was to Haykal that Mukhtar turned for assistance when he faced problems erecting *Nahdat Misr*, and it was with Haykal that Mukhtar developed his mission to elevate the Egyptian arts.<sup>494</sup>

Haykal published what some consider the first Arabic-language novel, *Zaynab*. In the book, he deals with the search for love in a village setting as an allegory for the quest for freedom – the moral of the story is that, since Egypt's society remains backward and inimical to love, the only solution is to go abroad for relief.<sup>495</sup> Haykal himself went abroad for study, but he returned to impart knowledge to his fellow Egyptians. His artistic activities, and his support of other artists (like Mukhtar), sprung from his heartfelt belief in the arts, and in freedom. "Beauty, art, happiness, and love all became associated [by

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>494</sup> In a letter to Haykal, Mukhtar wrote to encourage his friend to promote art education because, in the sculptor's opinion, it is only through art that the glories of religion and history are revealed to the populace. The letter is reproduced in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 152 - 53. See also Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 65 - 66.

<sup>495</sup> Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 52.

Haykal] with freedom and were seen as part of the evolutionary process, culminating in a progressive society.”<sup>496</sup> Like Mukhtar, Haykal expressed his beliefs through both art and political action.

During the 1920s, while Mukhtar was toiling on monumental sculptures and on his smaller works, Haykal published articles in favor of teaching and exploring Egypt’s Pharaonic era because he saw it as the nation’s “spiritual heritage.” He called for revival of the “creative spirit” of the Pharaohs.<sup>497</sup> This vision of Egypt was secular; it was not until 1929 that Haykal began to alter his tune slightly and include “Islam within the scope of Egyptian history.”<sup>498</sup> To Haykal, the “spirit” was the “basis of a culture, defining its existence as a unique entity apart from whatever other cultures or influences affected Egypt.”<sup>499</sup> That spirit was present in Egyptian modern art, and Haykal still promoted his take on Neo-Pharaonicism as late as 1933.<sup>500</sup> After the mid-1930s, the national atmosphere changed and territorial nationalism was no longer the most popular meaning system from which politicians and artists drew their inspiration. Haykal and Mukhtar’s world was gone forever, and yet their legacy lives on in the creative products of the Imagination Society and the Friends of the Imagination Society.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

After Mukhtar designed *Nahdat Misr* in 1920, intellectuals publicized his work with articles and poetry heralding the sculpture and spearheaded a media campaign promoting the erection of the statue in a prominent Cairo square.<sup>501</sup> Egyptians of all

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>501</sup> al-Shal, *Mahmud Mukhtar: Ra'd Fann Al-Naht Al-Mo'asir Fī Misr Wa Taqwīm 'Amalahu Al-Faniyyah*, 31.

monetary and educational levels answered the call and donated money or offered their labor to the project's completion.<sup>502</sup> In this way, one man's design became a national project, which appealed to people across social, religious and educational lines. According to al-Shal, the project was akin to rebuilding the pyramids for the modern age.<sup>503</sup> The sculpture is thus not only a symbol of the Egyptian nation but is also an emblem of a specific time in Egypt's history.

During the early twentieth century, Egypt was reeling from its revolution and people across the social spectrum believed that real change was on the way. The Egyptian nationalists of the first three decades of the twentieth century worked to promote a concept of their nation that was forward-minded and yet based on and legitimated by its basis in Egypt's Pharaonic heritage. The promotion of modern art was essential to that project, for the discipline's association with European modernity was used as evidence of Egypt's advancement as a civilization. As this chapter has shown, Mukhtar's public monuments served the cause of territorial nationalism both aesthetically and socially. His smaller works were less political and yet were tools in his mission to elevate Egypt's art field. Mahmud Mukhtar combined modern, Pharaonic and Egyptian symbols to create a new and cohesive whole – Egyptian modern art– and he will always be remembered for his imagination and his convictions, which he carved into stone.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid. 31 - 32.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid. 32.

## 5. CONCLUSION – MUKHTAR’S LEGACY

In a tribute to Mahmud Mukhtar written soon after the sculptor’s death, writer and scholar Taha Hussein declared:

It is difficult for today’s youth to conceive of our admiration and astonishment when talk began of Mukhtar twenty-five years ago, for we converse a lot about art now; we study [art] and organize exhibitions and mount discussions . . . but twenty-five years ago the matters of art were strange to the Egyptian youth. . . Mukhtar was a matchless phenomenon and [his appearance] was a miraculous event which inspired our admiration . . . the surprise and shock that accompanied his appearance was what made us all call him ‘The Genius.’ . . . If art is now recognized and encouraged by the public authorities, we are indebted for this to Mukhtar, and no one shall ever forget this, for he always [will be] our genius.<sup>504</sup>

Hussein’s predictions have been proven correct; Mukhtar’s impact on the Egyptian art field is still felt. Much of that impact is due to the connection between Mukhtar’s work and the territorial nationalist movement.

Even though the finer details of Mukhtar’s biography are known only by a select few, Mukhtar’s broader influence has expanded over the years. The establishment and periodic restoration of a museum dedicated to the artist’s career and by means of a prize that, for decades, was given to up-and-coming artists in Mukhtar’s name have institutionalized this influence.<sup>505</sup> Thus, however true the idea is that the sculptor was Egypt’s first artist since the Pharaonic era, the fact remains that, to this day, he is

<sup>504</sup> Taha Hussein, “‘Aded Khas Tahiya li-Mukhtar,” (Special Issue in Tribute to Mukhtar), April 1934, *Un Effort*, as quoted in Abu Ghazi, *El-Mathāl Mukhtar*, 19.

<sup>505</sup> After years of struggle and aborted attempts, the Mahmud Mukhtar Museum was opened in 1962. It was the “first museum in modern Egyptian history to be established in honor of an individual artist.” Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 128, 29. See also: Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 28 - 29. And *Musée Moukhtar*, (Cairo: Société Orientale de Publicité, 1962). The prize is not currently active, but it was awarded on and off from 1935 until 1988. Sharouny, *Memory of the Nation: Masterpieces of Mahmoud Mukhtar*, 23 - 24.

understood and celebrated as a leader among the pioneers of Egyptian modern art. In 1984, the Egyptian government celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the sculptor's passing with a commemorative stamp, and two stamps have also been issued bearing an image of *Nahdat Misr*.<sup>506</sup> Even more recently, an article from the May 2008 issue of the magazine *The Heritage of Egypt* confirmed the enduring potency of the Mukhtar legend: Dr. Ezz el-Din Naguib reiterates the standard narrative of Mukhtar's life and legacy, opening his line of reasoning with the assertion that Mukhtar "was the first Egyptian sculptor" to appear after two thousand years' worth of dust had settled on Pharaonic civilization.<sup>507</sup>

### 5.1 The Art of Nationalism

Mukhtar's artistic project had echoes across Egyptian politics and scholarship. To return to Hussein, soon after Mukhtar's death, the author published a treatise entitled *The Future of Culture in Egypt*.<sup>508</sup> In it, he argues that an independent Egypt must have a strong army, economic independence, a good educational system and creative integrity.<sup>509</sup> In Hussein's opinion, Egypt's culture already had the raw material necessary for an internationally recognized and locally emancipated culture, for its strength was based upon the power of "the ancient, eternal Egypt."<sup>510</sup> Thus Egypt boasts a spirit or "soul which combines the new with the old, which steadily pushes forward and yet

<sup>506</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 136, 40.

<sup>507</sup> The sentiment is his, the metaphor is my own. Ezz el-Din Naguib, "B'ath Ruh El-Umma Bi El-Manhutāt El-Hajariya: El-Nahāt Mahmud Mukhtar Fi Mā'awīyyat El-Finun El-Jamilah Bi-Misr (Renewing the Spirit of the Nation: The Sculptures of Mahmud Mukhtar in the Century of Fine Arts in Egypt)," *Turath Misr (The Heritage of Egypt)* 1, no. 2 (2008): 9.

<sup>508</sup> This book raised controversy because its author concluded that Egyptian culture was more akin to the Mediterranean model than that of the "East," thus neglecting the Islamic aspects of his society. However, his assessment of the importance of arts fits into the argument here about the connection between art and nationalism. Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, trans. Sidney Glazer (Washington D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954).

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 15 - 16.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 2.



pauses from time to time to look backward.”<sup>511</sup> Hussein cites the flourishing in Egyptian arts as evidence of this spirit. He maintains that, although art is “personal, portraying as it does the soul and temperament of its producer,” it is also essentially national and, at the same time, universally recognizable.<sup>512</sup> In this way, Egypt’s arts are one of the finest methods through which the nation (here personified by the artist) could represent itself. It comes as little surprise, then, that Hussein and those who thought like him so celebrated Mukhtar’s contributions to Egyptian art. As this thesis has argued, in the first decades of the twentieth century, one task of Egyptian intellectual nationalists was to prove that theirs was a nation worthy of autonomy and, moreover, of acclaim. Possession of a flourishing art world was, therefore, central to nationalists’ projects in that the arts were a path to garnering the approbation of other intellectuals worldwide, and thus to (re)establishing the glory of Egypt.<sup>513</sup>

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>512</sup> “An Egyptian statue is purely national in that it embodies the Egyptian nature and taste; yet as soon as cultivated people glimpse it, they are moved by admiration” no matter what their national loyalty. Ibid., 154.

<sup>513</sup> The arts were (and are) seen as a sign of cultural fitness and as a symbol of national revival internationally. Smith explains this with particular reference to the situation in late-eighteenth century France, where a “cult of national genius” was celebrated through arts commissions and the promotion of individual artists as national representatives. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 193. In Egypt, as has been shown, the promotion of Pharaonicism in literature and the visual arts was also linked to political and national processes. See Israel Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930*, 168 - 85.



Figure 20: Mukhtar at work on Nahdat Misr. From the collection of Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, with his kind permission.

In support of the hypothesis that the processes of nationalism and of the arts were linked in early twentieth-century Egypt, this thesis began by exploring what I have called a trio of discourses: nationalism, modernity and the development of art. Each of these discourses has its own rules and frameworks, yet I demonstrated that, in the Egyptian context, they are intertwined.

Modernity and nationalism were both ideologies that supported the promotion of an Egypt-centric genre of modern art, Neo-Pharaonicism. Neo-Pharaonicism did not appear in a vacuum but was the product of Egypt's socio-political atmosphere. Therefore, I explored the socio-political, economic and cultural context in which Mukhtar lived and worked. Borrowing from Bourdieu, I called this the “mood of the age,” and I looked at it through Mukhtar's biography.

The changes that Egypt underwent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a public sphere in which the practices of Egyptology and public debates over the status of the nation and of the family were expressed visually by

Mukhtar's sculptures. The meaning of those sculptures, however, cannot be discerned through socio-political and biographical discussion alone. To continue my investigation into the symbolism of Mukhtar's works, I examined many of his works with reference to Mukhtar's developing and distinctive style. This led to consideration of Mukhtar's broader mission: Rooted in his fervent belief in the importance of the arts to civilization, Mukhtar set out to elevate Egyptian modern art to an internationally-respected field. He accomplished this goal with some of his most spectacular works, such as *Riyāh al-Khamāsin*. Artistic triumphs such as that sculpture served both Mukhtar and the nationalist leaders of his time. Thanks to Mukhtar's international renown, Egyptian nationalists could bolster their arguments in favor of their country's independence and foster national pride.<sup>514</sup> Thus was Mukhtar's relationship to nationalism symbiotic; both benefited from the other's work. Although territorial nationalism began to fade from popularity during the 1930s, the codified symbolism of the monuments *Nahdat Misr* and those depicting Sa'd Zaghlul remained vital to the story of the Egyptian nation.<sup>515</sup> As has been shown, that symbolism still resonates with scholars today.

In commemorations for the artist after his death, writers like Haykal and Hussein took the relationship between nationalism and the arts a step further to declare that *Mukhtar* and the Egyptian spirit were one and the same. Haykal fretted that the art field, having lost Mukhtar, would shrivel and that the Neo-Pharaonic school would collapse.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>514</sup> In 1930, Paris's Bernheim-Jeune Salon presented a retrospective of forty-one of Mukhtar's sculptures, one of which was then purchased by the French government, thus confirming (for many Egyptians) Mukhtar's worth on an international scale. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 103.

<sup>515</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski examined publications from after the sculptor's death and determined that, even up to the beginning of the 1950s, *Nahdat Misr* and other works by Mukhtar "continued to appear in Egyptian publications as a visual symbol." For instance, a 1936 illustration of *Nahdat Misr* in *al-Musawwar* newspaper used the monument as a "symbol of Egyptian sovereignty." In 1950, Egypt Air advertized its services using an image inspired by the monument. Ibid., 113.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 107.

Hussein asserted that, “Mukhtar expressed the soul of the Egyptian people, and the soul of the Egyptian people is epitomized in the personality of Mukhtar. . . Mukhtar was an authentic mirror of the unconfined and eternal spirit of Egypt.”<sup>517</sup> Hussein’s exaggerated tone aside, Mukhtar’s work certainly articulated the soul of 1920s Egypt. Without the socio-political context in which he was able to flourish, Mukhtar’s legend would not have loomed quite so large.<sup>518</sup>

#### 5.1.1 The Artist as Nationalist Hero

From my assessment not only of Mukhtar but also of his fellow artists and thinkers in the Imagination Society and the Friends of the Imagination Society, I conclude that the connection between nationalism and the arts in early twentieth-century Egypt was at once intimate and innate.<sup>519</sup> One cannot be fully understood without attention to the other.<sup>520</sup>

Mukhtar was and remains “our genius” because he was able to bring together ideas of nationalism, modernity and art in recognizable, respected and even reproducible forms. The peasant woman and the sphinx, central symbols of Mukhtar’s Neo-Pharaonicist works, are still understood as emblems of an Egyptian nation.<sup>521</sup> Mukhtar’s three monuments remain on display in Cairo and Alexandria and his smaller sculptures

<sup>517</sup> Quoted by Gershoni and Jankowski. Ibid., 108.

<sup>518</sup> ‘Abdul ‘Aziz comments sagely: “Had Mokhtar [sic] been born in an earlier age, he might have lived and died unknown, as did probably many ‘mokhtars’ before him.” ‘Abdul-‘Aziz, “Mahmud Mokhtar: Sculptor of the Nile,” 14.

<sup>519</sup> Winegar indicates that the connection between artists and the socio-political life of Egypt remains, for “the idea of the modern artist as translated in Egypt was one of a freethinking individual, but also a member of mainstream society – *not* an oppositional or critical malcontent. . . They have thus largely eschewed the idea that artists should adopt unorthodox lifestyles.” Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 47.

<sup>520</sup> Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi believes that Mukhtar is known among the general population only for *Nahdat Misr*. Author interview, Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi, The Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, Egypt, 8 February, 2009.

<sup>521</sup> In her study of the contemporary art field in Egypt, Winegar asserts that Neo-Pharaonicist symbolism is still popular among Egyptian artists, having experienced a revival during the 1970s and 1980s. Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*, 97.

are housed in the Mukhtar Museum, where they introduce subsequent generations of art lovers to Mukhtar's nationalist art, if not to the man himself.<sup>522</sup> In this way, Mukhtar and the era in which he worked endure in the imagination of the nation.

<sup>522</sup> *Nahdat Misr* no longer stands in front of Cairo's main train station – the monument was moved in 1955 to a square in front of Cairo University in Giza where it is now associated, by proximity to that institution, with knowledge and education. Israel Gershoni, *Commemorating the Nation*, 123.

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