

## Al-Kawākibī's Thesis and its Echoes in the Arab World Today

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*The greatest disaster is our loss of freedom . . . freedom to speak out and publish, freedom to carry out scientific research. . . .*<sup>1</sup>

On May 31 and June 1, 2002, a conference was held in the birthplace of °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1855–1902), Aleppo, Syria, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his death. The two-day conference sessions, attended by prominent Syrian and Lebanese academic figures, were dignified and solemn. The participants were profoundly conscious of the magnitude of an occasion celebrating one of the pioneers of *al-nahḍa*, the Arab “awakening” or “revival.” At the same time, they were more than a little concerned about the fate of the cumulative endeavors that successive generations of Arab intellectuals had made for the sake of the Arab revival.

In the words of Māhir al-Sharīf and Salām al-Kawākibī, a great grandson of al-Kawākibī, the organizers launched the conference to draw attention to “the magnitude of [the task of] reviving the son of *madīnat al-shuḥabā*” [a designation of Aleppo]—°Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī—and to stimulate a dialogue among a broad range of Arab thinkers “because there is a dire need for sharing these ideas with each other and for disseminating the common knowledge that contributes to enhancing the discourse on development.”<sup>2</sup> Motivated by this objective, the Syrian-born and Sorbonne-educated Palestinian historian Māhir al-Sharīf voiced his misgivings about the struggles of Arab intellectuals. The contemporary Arab world, he argued, had not made much of an advance since the age of *al-nahḍa*:

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The call [for the Arab revival by means of reform] has seemed ineffective even in the present, a century after the passing of the age of al-Imam al-Kawākibī. This is due to the fact that those intellectuals who are detached from governmental and educational institutions, as well as the media, do not have a broad social foundation supported by the citizens. Rather, their plea remains the cry of socially isolated intellectuals and sheikhs, in circumstances characterized by a lack of public and individual freedom—especially freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and freedom of research—as well as economic and social stagnation and even crisis. . .<sup>3</sup>

Al-Kawākibī's lifetime, the second half of the nineteenth century, was a period marked by continued Ottoman decline and growing European ascendancy. Much of the Ottoman empire, including its Arab provinces, was in a state of stagnation and under the rule of venal and corrupt Ottoman officials. Nevertheless, there was a general recognition of the importance of Islam as the primary bond between Arabs and Ottomans. It was a bond nourished by Sultan Abdul Hamid II's (r. 1876–1909) emphasis of the importance of his role, however questionable, as caliph and protector of Islam. Ottoman subjects in the Balkans had already discovered their distinctiveness, thanks to religious differences, but for Arab Muslims the loyalties to the *umma*, represented by the Ottoman sultanate, remained supreme.<sup>4</sup> Hence, most Arab Muslims were inclined to accept Ottoman rule as the only surviving legitimate symbol and standard-bearer of Islam. But not all of them did so.

There were a few thinkers and activists who were preoccupied with the plight of the Arab-Muslim world and found the causes of its decline and degeneration in deviations from the essence of Islam brought about by none other than autocratic and corrupt Ottoman rule. They advocated intellectual inquiry and political reform, a process that necessitated, for some, recasting—and, for others, severing—traditional allegiances to the Ottoman state. Al-Kawākibī was one of these reformers, part of that stream that Hourani has termed "Arabic thought in the liberal age."<sup>5</sup>

°Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī was born in 1855 to a prominent family in Aleppo, Syria.<sup>6</sup> Although he did not learn any European languages, he mastered, in addition to Arabic (his mother tongue), Ottoman, which allowed him to read translations of European works. In 1875, he embarked on a career in journalism, translating from Ottoman and writing for an official paper in Aleppo. Given the influence of European liberal writers,<sup>7</sup> he was naturally inclined to vent his antipathy toward Ottoman absolutism. As a result, soon after he launched his own two newspapers—*Al-shuḥabā*<sup>7</sup>

and *Al-iʿtidāl*—they were shut down on the order of the Ottoman *walī*, governor of Aleppo. In 1877, he entered the Ottoman public service in Aleppo, hoping to push for reform from inside the administration, but his career in government proved as troubled as that in journalism. His struggles against social injustice gained wide appeal among the poor, who gave him the nickname *Abū al-Duʿafāʾ*, “the father of the weak,”<sup>8</sup> but his steadfast opposition to Ottoman governors and their Arab collaborators led to charges of conspiracy and then to imprisonment and harassment, eventually forcing him to emigrate to Cairo in 1898. He thrived in the freer intellectual environment, becoming a leading figure in Cairo’s literary circles and forging close links with other reformers such as Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā. He died, of causes that remain unclear, several months after his return from a trip to the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa on behalf of the Egyptian khedive, ʿAbbas II.

Al-Kawākibī produced two major works, *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād wa-maṣāriʿ al-istiʿbād* (“The Nature of Despotism and the Harm of Enslavement”)<sup>9</sup> and *Umm al-Qurā* (“The Mother of Villages” [Mecca]).<sup>10</sup> It was in these books that al-Kawākibī elaborated his conception of the causes of Muslim decline and his remedies for reform. They were drafted while he was in Aleppo and appeared initially in Cairo under pseudonyms. Both generated a literary sensation. Like his other works, they were directed at Arab readers and at intellectuals in particular. Al-Kawākibī did not write for multiple audiences. His style was too sophisticated to be accessible to the Arab masses, few of whom were literate. Instead, he spoke primarily to the educated social stratum, a constituency of intellectuals he aimed to inspire to work toward reform.

Since the early twentieth century, al-Kawākibī has continued to attract the attention of Arab scholars, especially in discussions of Arabness and Arabism. He has received scant attention from Western students, however. Indeed, there is little more than a handful of writings in European languages on his work.<sup>11</sup> Western academics have paid much closer attention to his mentor, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and his friend, Rashīd Riḍā. However, the relative neglect of al-Kawākibī in the literature on Middle Eastern studies does not necessarily mean he was less important than these more familiar figures of *al-nahḍa* or others such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Rifāʿa al-Taḥṭāwī.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Kawākibī devoted his life to two essential questions that remain central to debate about politics and society in the Arab world: what are the causes of degeneration (*al-inḥiṭāʾ*) and what are the best means for *al-nahḍa*? The answers he gave to these questions are startlingly relevant to

the modern and contemporary Arab world. His ideas on reform, the focus of this article, are finding resonance in many quarters today. However, as I attempt to demonstrate, the complexities and specificities of al-Kawākibī's thesis on reform are all too often absent from discussions of reform of Arab states and societies. One encounters instead a frequent tendency to ideologize al-Kawākibī, as evidently he has suffered the fate of selective appropriation, and misappropriation, that has befallen other thinkers. Al-Kawākibī has been widely, and rightly, viewed as the forerunner of Arab nationalism.<sup>13</sup> Yet to reduce him to a source of ideological underpinnings of Arab nationalism—or Islamism or secularism—as has often been the case, is to oversimplify and distort his reform project.

The rest of this article consists of four sections. The first section briefly examines al-Kawākibī's manifestos on despotism (*istibdād*), emphasizing his attribution of social decline to the religious and political dimensions of despotism. The second section turns to his conception of reform. It highlights the nuances of his prescriptions for reform, especially his insistence on gradualist and peaceful solutions, along with his advocacy of consultative mechanisms and intellectual leadership. The third section looks at successive waves of modern interpretations of al-Kawākibī, culminating in two streams—*al-nakba*, the Arab catastrophe of 1948, and *al-naksa*, the Arab setback of 1967—in order to demonstrate how different groups have grafted their ideologies onto his thought in attempts to legitimize their political objectives. The fourth section takes up the same theme in the context of more contemporary interpretations. It emphasizes, once again, the proclivity to abstract from al-Kawākibī and to overlook core facets of his thinking about reform, such as his call for self-reliance. A concluding statement suggests why al-Kawākibī's reformist blueprint has much to offer in present efforts toward "reform from within" in the Arab world.

## Despotism and Decline

*Umm al-Qurā* consists of the minutes of an imaginary conference of twenty-two colorful characters, all Muslim leaders of different nationalities, who gather in secret in Mecca to discuss the sorrowful conditions of the Muslim community and, more specifically, to identify the causes of its backwardness and decline. After much lively debate, the conference decides that the germ of the "Muslim disease" (*dā' al-muslimīn*) is ignorance, and that the most pernicious form of ignorance is none other than religious ignorance.<sup>14</sup> Throughout this engaging work, al-Kawākibī offers the reader taxonomies

of the causes of decline, each with an elaborate delineation of primary and secondary causes. But there is no mistaking where he located the foremost cause: in religion. Why does he place religion at the root of the problem of backwardness? And why does he trace the cause to religious despotism and, in turn, to political despotism? The answers to these questions offer insights into the various strands of al-Kawākibī's thinking about decline; they also constitute the point of departure for his reform remedies.

Al-Kawākibī did little to mask his disparaging attitude toward the Muslims of his day. He saw them as altogether ignorant of the essence of Islam as revealed in the Qur'an. To him Islam as a whole had become decadent and ossified. Religious values and beliefs had all but disappeared. The pillars of the faith were seldom observed; religious practices had eroded. Religious knowledge was no longer accessible to the ordinary Muslim. The notion that religion was incompatible with science had become widespread. *Ijtihād*, the exercise of independent reasoning, had been abandoned. There was a pervasive resort to passive imitation, *taqlīd*. And the *umma* had witnessed the accretion of a variety of dubious innovations, along with heresies and superstitions, polytheistic and mystical practices, that perverted the faith and led the faithful away from the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). Of all the calamities that had befallen the religion, few were as damaging as the sin of *shirk*, the association of the divine attributes of God with human beings or any other existence. Unsurprisingly, al-Kawākibī reserves his harshest indictment for the autocrats who arrogate to themselves a share of divine powers and for the clerics who abet them, thereby furthering their social privileges and distancing themselves from the masses. Therein lies the nexus between religious and political despotism that is integral to his thinking. In a withering deprecation of the false guidance offered by those who thrust themselves between God and the people, he writes:

Religious education, among which is scripture, calls upon human beings to fear an extraordinary, intense power whose true nature reason and intellect cannot conceive. This power threatens humans with some form of disaster in the present life in some religions, such as Buddhism and Judaism, and it also imperils the human in the afterlife in other religions, like Christianity and Islam, to the extent that violent fear seizes him and the mind is perplexed, obeying insanity and weakness. But religious education also opens a door for salvation from this fear, granting enduring bliss. However, Brahmins, priests, clerics and others close that door: they do not allow people to enter through the door unless they glorify them. . . . And they are mean-spirited. . . to such a degree that those who close

the door even claim that a person's soul cannot meet God if they do not receive from him tolls to reach the tomb. . . . How dare those religious oppressors frighten people in the name of the anger of God, portending for them calamity and pain, guiding them to a false notion that it is inevitable for them to have recourse to inhabitants of the tombs which are at the command of those oppressors. . . ?<sup>15</sup>

Al-Kawākibī vigorously dismisses as fallacious and misguided any suggestion that Islam is inherently despotic. On the contrary, he maintains, Islam repudiated any kind of despotism and offered the people a pathway to live under liberty and freedom. It was not the religion that was to be blamed but its appropriation by religious and political despots. Islam provided the foundations of a political and social order that combined “the best of democracy and aristocracy.”<sup>16</sup> But that order proved short-lived and was followed by a corrupted Islam and a degenerate *umma*. Islam, and the Qurʾān in particular, had advanced a comprehensive chain of legal thought that constituted the basis for justice and fairness for all people and for any time and place. Its precepts amounted to an unambiguous affirmation of freedom and the removal of tyranny and arbitrariness. Its fundamental principle, which had been subverted by religious authorities through *shirk* and the attendant unreflecting obedience by the masses to temporal power, was *tawhīd*, the simple belief that “There is no god other than God.” *Tawhīd* stood for an end to subservience and servitude.

To al-Kawākibī, true Islam, as embodied in the Qurʾān, is based on reason, and any genuine revival of Islam would require a revival of *ijtihād*. His emphasis on *ijtihād* is of a piece with his general espousal of freedom and his resolute opposition to curtailment of freedom by the state. In his view, Islam embraced a diversity of opinions, as evident in the Qurʾān and the *sunna*. His insistence on the right to exercise one's own reason even leads him to advocate the use of the controversial method of *talfīq*, the selection of rulings from different schools of jurisprudence according to the dictates of individual conscience.<sup>17</sup> Differences of opinions among these schools should not be a cause of conflict; rather, they should be used to relate the *sharīʿa* to changing circumstances. True Islam, he emphasized, was capable of adapting itself, and adjusting its doctrines, to changing conditions. It also was able to accommodate scientific innovations and discoveries.<sup>18</sup> He concludes with a call for reconciliation of the *sharīʿa* to modernity. His fictional conference adopts as its model the *Salafiyya* movement. But, for al-Kawākibī, a return to the tradition embodied by “the venerable forebears”

(*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) was by no means the fundamentalist throwback often associated with the positions of many political Islamists, especially *Salafis*, today. Rather, for him, as for Afghānī and °Abduh, a return to the roots, to the first principles, of Islam represented an affirmation of the values of rationalism and freedom inherent in the faith and imperative for its renewal.

In the despotic state al-Kawākibī saw the antithesis of the values of pure Islam. Notwithstanding the assertion in the introduction to *Ṭabā'ī*<sup>c</sup> *al-istibdād* that his vitriolic treatise was not directed against any particular government or dictator, he left little doubt about what he considered to be the primary example of such a state: the Ottoman administration of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. He defines political despotism as an “attribute of the absolute government that conducts the affairs of its subjects willfully and arbitrarily, with no fear of accountability or punishment.”<sup>19</sup> If those living under a just and responsible government are free and confident citizens, the subjects (*ra'īyya*) of a despotic state are crushed, wretched, fearful, and passive. But, he warns, even an elected and constitutional government can be despotic if it is not restrained by checks and balances and mechanisms of accountability.

[T]he forms of despotic government are varied. . . . [T]he quality of despotism applies not only to the government of the single despot who had seized power by force and usurpation, but includes also the government of a limited and legitimate ruler by hereditary succession or by election, in cases where such ruler is not held accountable. The term despotism applies also to the government of the group even though that group was elected to office, because the mere fact of deliberation preceding a decision does not necessarily make a decision any the less despotic. It may modify it somewhat, but it may also be more tyrannical and more injurious than the tyranny of a lone despot.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Kawākibī considered Ottoman political hegemony a major cause of the decline of Islamic communities. He emphasized, in particular, the absence of representative institutions, such as the mechanism of *shūrā* (consultation), which once allowed the Arabs a measure of democratic participation as well as a mode of decision-making that reflected the will of the citizenry. He also decried the delegation of authority over the provinces of the empire to autocratic governors who lacked any affinity with the local inhabitants; the absence of a consistent and harmonious body of laws; and the imposition a single administrative and criminal legal code throughout



the empire irrespective of differences among national identities and local customs.<sup>21</sup> However, the effects of political despotism were even more destructive and pervasive.

The despotic state not only denies people the right to be free and to live in dignity; it also strives to keep them ignorant. The worst kind of tyranny, al-Kawākibī argues, is the tyranny of ignorance. Tyrants emasculate essential knowledge, especially forms of knowledge that would contribute to the development and progress of society. They do not fear philology and other fields of learning that do not immediately threaten their power. Nor do they fear the otherworldly dimensions of religion; on the contrary, they welcome otherworldly resignation as it serves to distract the people and thereby strengthen their power. But, he adds, they “writhe with fear of crucial knowledge” such as theoretical speculation, rationalist philosophy, civil rights, law, politics, history, and ethics, for these fields of knowledge “uplift the spirit, broaden the mind, and teach people the idea that they have rights, the extent to which they are deprived of those rights, and how they should demand, attain, and preserve them.”<sup>22</sup> Above all, al-Kawākibī maintains, tyrants dread *ijtihād*, because the understanding of true Islam made possible by independent inquiry is likely to be a source of their undoing. Hence, he saw “a perpetual war between despotism and learning” and also “a perpetual chase: on the one hand, scholars pursue insight and enlightenment of the intellect and, on the other hand, despots desperately seek to extinguish the flame.” For both, the object in this struggle is to attract the populace to their side. But, he asks, “[who] are the populace (*al-‘awāmm*)?” His answer is trenchant: “They are the ones who fear if they become ignorant, and who surrender if they fear, as they are the ones who speak when they learn, and who take action when they speak.”<sup>23</sup>

For al-Kawākibī, despotism is demoralizing and debilitating to all of society. From the despot himself down to the street sweeper—all are given to tyrannical behavior. The debasement of public morality seeps down from the fawning officials who indulge the despot to the lower classes. Consequently, all fall prey to dishonesty and hypocrisy. The victims of such a despotic regime are ultimately deprived of the one feature that distinguishes animate from inanimate objects: will. Without the ability to act on free will, progress is impossible and decline is inevitable.

What is striking about al-Kawākibī’s discourse on despotism and decline is his refusal to lay the blame on European encroachments or machinations. Nor for him the animus against “Occidentalism” or a “clash of civilizations.” He does not see a Western or Christian threat to the Arab-Islamic world. The causes of decay are not external but internal; it is Muslims,



particularly the Ottoman Turks, rather than non-Muslims who are responsible for the degeneration of the Muslim community. As was the case with his reformist predecessors, he cautions against the wholesale and thoughtless importation of Western ideas and culture. But here, too, in accounting for *taqlīd*, he attributes the behavior to internal weakness. Moreover, like ʿAbduh and Afghānī, al-Kawākibī finds plenty to admire about the West, especially its institutions. He believes the progress of the West owes much to “the adoption of logical and well-practiced rules that have become social duties in these advanced nations and which are not harmed by what appears to be a division into parties and groups, because such a division is only over the methods of applying the rules and not over the rules themselves.”<sup>24</sup> Britain he takes to be an exemplar of control over the rulers by the ruled. The secret to British success lies in “their self-awakening, which is not intoxicated by victory. . . . They never neglect to keep an eye on their kings even for a moment. . . . and the kings in Britain have come to lose everything except their crowns.”<sup>25</sup> The United States, on the other hand, he considers to be a country that had struck a balance between loyalty to the nation and the pursuit of personal freedom while also forging national unity despite religious and regional differences. He describes the attachment of Americans to their country as a sentiment of participation in a voluntary association, and he pronounces America to be the country where freedom “has reached its utmost.”<sup>26</sup>

## The Road to Reform

Al-Kawākibī's reformist project differs in at least one crucial respect from the work of other reformers of his day. Many of those reformers attempted an ideological discourse that would transcend both the rising Western hegemony and traditional Islamic values. Al-Kawākibī's concern, by contrast, was decidedly practical. His objective certainly was grand—to bring about a revival of the Arab realm. He envisaged reform (*iṣlāḥ*) as a multi-dimensional phenomenon: political, social, religious, and moral. He also tethered his reform scheme to a humanistic perspective on man and society. Hence his dedication to the principles of freedom through expression and enlightenment through education and his calls for the establishment of checks and balances and the separation of religion from the state. At the same time, however, his reflections on reform did not amount to a mere set of abstract formulas. He seldom strayed from the practical aspects, especially the concrete measures, of reform. And throughout, he remained preoccupied as much with the

process of reform—the prerequisites and the methods—as with the endpoint itself.

Some observers, citing al-Kawākibī's life-long struggle against tyranny, his steadfast opposition to the Ottoman Turkish administration, and his stormy personal encounters with its officials, claim he was revolutionary by nature.<sup>27</sup> A careful reading of al-Kawākibī's work suggests otherwise. That he remained firmly moored within Islamic orthodoxy—as attested to by his desire to restore Islamic practices and institutions, along with his insistence that state and society conform to the *sharī'a*—alone would confound the suggestion that he was a revolutionary. Moreover, al-Kawākibī stands out as a champion of peaceful and incremental change. He is explicit in this and makes it one of three cardinal principles that should dictate the removal of despotism: "Despotism must be fought not with violence but, rather, with gradualism and gentleness."<sup>28</sup> It cannot be defeated overnight; instead its eradication must be the product of evolutionary and incremental change, above all a transformation in the consciousness of society at large through a long-term process of education.

Al-Kawākibī is dismissive of the notion that force can be checked by force. The coercive controls at the disposal of a tyrannical regime, he avers, cannot be confronted directly. These controls include the military, which may have the support of a foreign army, and a wide array of instruments of repression and terror. Added to them is the support of the wealthy class and the religious establishment. Al-Kawākibī is especially contemptuous of the organized military, which he brands, along with the ignorance of the *umma*, as among the greatest calamities to have been inflicted on society:

The inventor of militarism must have been Satan. He exacted revenge from Adam through his sons as harshly as he possibly could. . . .As long as this [Ottoman Turkish] militarism, which has lasted for more than two centuries, continues to weaken the tolerance and patience of society, it will lead it to collapse. . . .Indeed, militarism corrupts the morals of society. It instructs society in ruthlessness, submissiveness, and dependence, while killing initiative and independence, and imposing on it intolerable expenditures. All of these tend to support disastrous despotism.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Kawākibī's anti-militarist views are so pronounced that, in the words of one scholar, they have "no precedents in classical Arab political thought."<sup>30</sup> His unwillingness to countenance anything beyond pacific resistance against tyranny is all the more telling.

The other two principles al-Kawākibī enunciates for the elimination of despotism are complementary to his calls for enlightenment through education and for peaceful and gradual change. He frames these principles succinctly: First, "[t]he nation in which all, or the majority, of the members do not sense the agony of despotism does not deserve liberty." And, finally, "[b]efore attempting to fight despotism, its replacement must be ready."<sup>31</sup> He elaborates on all three principles by warning about the consequences of relying simply on the overthrow of a tyrant:

People who have been debased for so long that they have become like animals, or worse, absolutely will not demand liberty. They might avenge themselves on the despot, but this will be only to take revenge on his person, not to get rid of despotism. This will not benefit the people, for it will be exchanging one disease for another, like substituting a headache for a stomach-ache.<sup>32</sup>

Such a people might also prevail in getting rid of a despot by collaborating with another despot. In either case, the eventual result will be not to uproot tyranny but to replace an old tyranny with a new tyranny.

Al-Kawākibī's cautionary position is borne of a realization of the magnitude of the burdens awaiting the reformer. Among other tasks, a concrete substitute for the despotic regime would need to be ready. A framework of constitutional consultation (*shūrā dustūriyya*) would have to be created. And channels for communicating to the population about the objectives and direction of reform would have to be established in order to forge a broad consensus, avert confusion and conflict, and ward off co-optation by supporters of the status quo. At the same time, al-Kawākibī's sentiments about gradualness and enlightenment as the essential means of reform appear to reflect more than a little skepticism about what the masses of his day stood to achieve through political action. The despot, he wrote, is sustained not only by the instruments of coercion but also by the ignorance of the common people. The populace (*al-ʿawāmm*) is usually apathetic. It is also capricious. Life under absolutism will not arouse it to indignation and rebellion except under three exceptional circumstances: when oppression becomes too bloody and painful; when a despot is deposed after defeat in war; or when a plunge in spending by the state triggers an economic crisis.<sup>33</sup> Under these circumstances, the people may pour into the streets, fill the public squares, and cry for rights and justice. However, the excitement and passions of a revolutionary moment are likely to be fleeting. They will bring bloodshed and destruction; hence, they will only perpetuate the cycle of

tyranny. They will not pave the way for enduring reform because the foundations of reform efforts in a setting where the idea of freedom has yet to be properly grasped will be fragile. The successful pursuit of reform, therefore, is predicated on a collective understanding of the nature of despotism and a collective willingness to support a hitherto untried alternative. Such a process necessarily would require patience and determination.

If reform is contingent on a process of enlightenment, who is to lead the process? Al-Kawākibī's answer is unequivocal: the intellectuals. It is intellectuals who are to serve as the vanguard of the reform movement. It is intellectuals who are to be the leaders of *al-nahḍa*. And, more specifically, it is intellectuals who are to awaken society to the depredations visited by despotism. The importance he attached to their role is made clear in the introductory statement to *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*:

I have another objective: to alert those who care about their nation (*al-ladhīna qaḍaw naḥbahum*) to the causes of the invisible malady, wishing they would know that they themselves are the cause of what has been inflicted upon them, and that they should blame neither foreigners nor fate but rather ignorance (*al-jahl*), lack of endeavor (*faqḍ al-humam*), and apathy (*al-tawākul*), all of which prevail over society. . . . I only hope those who care about their nation will be able to comprehend their calling before it becomes too late.<sup>34</sup>

This, then, was al-Kawākibī's challenge to the men of learning: to realize their responsibility in making society "sense the agony of despotism." He considered it incumbent on intellectuals to share their insights and concerns with the rest of the nation. Ultimately, this could be done only through education. Inasmuch as despotism thrived on ignorance, education emerges in al-Kawākibī's thesis as the antidote to both despotism and ignorance. He did not treat education as end in itself; what he was after was "essential knowledge," the kind that would impart a dedication to free inquiry. Toward that end, education itself would have to be rescued, as it had deteriorated under the lack of intellectual freedom. "Inadequate sciences" would have to be replaced with "better and purer ones." The study of law, politics, administration, history, economics, philosophy, geography, medicine, and theology—all these, and more, would have to be advanced.<sup>35</sup>

The emphasis on learning is shared by other prominent reformers of the age, among them al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and ʿAbduh. But al-Kawākibī goes further in calling for the diffusion of knowledge and understanding throughout society. In his view, a people that had not experienced a mode of rule other than

tyranny would have no basis for adopting and adapting itself to democratic governance and individual liberty. He emphasized that knowledge should not be the monopoly of a select few.<sup>36</sup> It would have to be shared across the populace in order to arrive at a common perception of the causes of and the cures for despotism and decay. Thereby, he looked to a process that would “spread to tens, hundreds, and thousands of people, eventually reaching the point where it prevails in every sphere of the community.”<sup>37</sup> Underlying al-Kawākibī's argument appear to be two related premises. First, for him only an intelligent society would have the ability to banish tyranny; the enterprise is simply beyond the wherewithal of the unenlightened. Second, the reformist enterprise requires the mobilization of an entire society. What needs to be mobilized, above all, is its collective conscience. Intellectuals can use their perspicacity, along with their intellect, to initiate and perhaps accelerate the transformation, but until a threshold of intelligence and mobilization is attained any reformist moment, like a revolutionary moment, would be premature.

It was not only intellectuals for whom al-Kawākibī envisaged a leading role in reversing Muslim decline. He also wanted the Arabs, whom he regarded as the natural custodians of Islam, to spearhead the reform mission. Both *Umm al-Qurā* and *Ṭabāʿi<sup>c</sup> al-istibdād* are redolent with pride in Arab culture and history. In fact, much of his work is a paean to Arab achievements. The glories of Islam—from the Prophet and the language of the Qurʾān to its first political community and its moral-legal pillars—were Arab contributions. Of all the world's Muslims, in the Arabs—particularly the Arabs of the Arabian peninsula—he saw distinctive virtues: solidarity, courage, loyalty, generosity, and resilience. The Arabs of early Islam, even in the *jāhiliyya*, the period before the rise of Islam, engaged in consultation in public affairs. They were respectful of the principles of democratic exchange and equal rights. They fiercely guarded their liberty and independence and were least accepting of authoritarianism. Yet more, al-Kawākibī contends, among Muslims, the Arabs remained practitioners of the purest form of Islam. That Islam has been corrupted, and rigidified by obscurantist theologians, is due to non-Arabs, he maintains. He even expresses regret that non-Arabs, especially Turks, had embraced the faith.<sup>38</sup>

To Arabs al-Kawākibī credits the central role in creating and nurturing Islamic civilization. And to Arabs he turns to assume the burden of rescuing Islamic civilization from decay and ruin. He was not the first among the reformers to emphasize the primacy of the Arabs in the revival of Islam. Here, he was following the footsteps of ʿAbduh and Riḍā. But al-Kawākibī goes further than either of these thinkers in devising a framework for

political order for which the Arabs are to have the pre-eminent responsibility and in which they are to occupy the commanding position. His principal objective, contrary to what some have suggested, was not pan-Islamism, and it would be misleading to characterize him as a pan-Islamist. To be sure, al-Kawākibī upheld the ideal of Islamic unity. He also wanted a return to a pristine version of Islam. In the first Islamic community he saw the embodiment of an ideal political community. He proposes the installation in Mecca of an Arab caliph of Quraysh descent who would have spiritual authority throughout the Muslim realm, which he would exercise through an advisory council whose membership would be drawn from all Muslim countries. Yet to infer from all this the idea that he was a champion of pan-Islamism would be a bold leap.

Clearly, al-Kawākibī aspired to a regeneration of both the Islamic world and the Arab world, and he regarded the two as interdependent. However, what he sought in the main was to give political expression to a collective identity apart from that of religion. This identity he found in Arabism; in doing so, he became the first Arab thinker to develop the modern concept of “Arabness.” His was a challenge to what appeared to be an immutable feature of the political landscape under Ottomanism: the differentiation of communities on the basis of religion rather than nationality. Al-Kawākibī strove to make Arabism, in contradistinction to Islam, the main basis of attachments in the Arab parts of the empire as well as a defining element of political order.

It is in this context that we need to understand many of the ideas that have led some to place al-Kawākibī under the rubric of pan-Islamism. The call for an Arab caliphate was at bottom a call for a shift in the locus of power and authority from the Turks to the Arabs. He did not push the cause of Arab independence, although he did press for administrative autonomy. The Arab nationalist movement was at too a nascent stage and the hold of the Ottoman empire was still too firm for him to take the notion of self-determination to its logical conclusion. But, as one scholar notes, al-Kawākibī was instrumental in creating “an ideological opening through which Arabs, as Muslims, could oppose Ottoman rule.”<sup>39</sup> In championing a distinctive political consciousness that transcended religious and sectarian differences, he also was able to direct his reformist message to adherents of other faiths, especially Arab Christians, for whom he expressed considerable admiration. He addressed them as follows:

O people, and I mean you the non-Moslems who use the letter *dad* [who speak the Arabic language and are Arabs], I appeal to you to forget past

wrongs and rancour, and what has been committed by fathers and grand-fathers. Enough has been suffered at the hands of trouble makers. I do not consider it beyond you, you who had the priority of enlightenment, to find the means for union. . . . Let the wise men among us tell the non-Arabs and the foreigners who instigate ill-will among us: allow us to manage our own affairs. . . . Permit us to manage our affairs in this world, and make religions rule only the next. Let us come together around the same declarations: Long live the nation! Long live the *watan*, the fatherland! Let us live free and strong.<sup>40</sup>

That al-Kawākibī should admonish the Arabs to struggle for unity on an organizing principle other than Islam and that he should declare religion a force to be consigned to "rule only the next [world]" underscores the secular aspect of a good deal of his work.<sup>41</sup> Even in his musings about a caliphate, al-Kawākibī does not hesitate to call for the separation of religion and state: the caliphate would be far from a theocracy; instead, it would be almost entirely spiritual. The caliph's temporal authority would be confined to the Hejaz; otherwise, he would enjoy no political or military powers. As al-Husri wryly observes, with only slight exaggeration: "It is clear that Kawakebi's Caliph has ceased to be *khalifat rasul Allah*, the viceregent of the Apostle of God, *amir al-mu'minin*, commander of armies, *imam al-muslemin*, the leader of all Moslems, and has come to be a mere *monsieur le Président* of the Third French Republic that Kawakebi so admires."<sup>42</sup> In yet another context, al-Kawākibī asserts that religion should be treated on the level of individuals and not of society. "[Religion] is what the individual believes in, not what the crowds believe in."<sup>43</sup> He even interprets the renowned *sūra* 3:104 about enjoining right and forbidding wrong to be an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*), not a collective duty (*fard kifāya*).<sup>44</sup>

The separation of temporal and religious authority is also a central theme of al-Kawākibī's discussion of the ideal polity. Although he demands that a replacement for tyranny be found before it is overthrown, he ventures that it is beyond the scope of his argument to define the best form of government, which he pronounces to be "the most problematic issue in human history."<sup>45</sup> The task, he adds, is contingent on a resolution of fundamental questions such as, What is the government? Who is the citizenry? What are public rights? It would also require answers to such conundra as the scope of individual rights; the obligations of citizens; the functions of government; the controls over the government; the determination of revenue and expenditure; the safeguarding of public security; the ways and means of legislation; the power of the law; the ensuring of judicial justice; the place of



religion and culture at the state level; and the separation of political, religious, and educational authority. He does not hesitate to dispatch the latter issue. "Should two authorities, or three, be gathered in one organ?" he asks. "Or, should each function—political, religious, and educational—be relegated to the institution that carries it out as its specialty?" He cites *sūra* 33:4, "God has not made for any man two hearts inside his body," and concludes that power should not be concentrated in one person or organ.<sup>46</sup>

Al-Kawākibī does not leave much doubt about the overall principles of the polity that would consummate his reform project. It would be a constitutional government with a balance of power and checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Its constitutional framework would institutionalize a system of consultation (*shūrā dustūriyya*) between ruler and ruled.<sup>47</sup> It would be a representative government with ultimate accountability to the people. Revealingly, al-Kawākibī insisted that even the caliph be elected every three years by representatives of the people. The government would apply the rule of law equally to all the citizenry.<sup>48</sup> It would also give full rein to the exercise of individual freedoms, especially freedom of expression.

In the final analysis, al-Kawākibī's message was a plea for the Arabs to strive for autonomy and to rely on their own resources and ingenuity. Self-awakening, in his view, necessitated the recovery of long-lost virtues, virtues that were to be found in their own Arab and Islamic past.

## Modern Interpretations

How, then, was al-Kawākibī's message received? Although Western scholarship on Arab nationalism and Arab reformism has paid only scant attention to al-Kawākibī, his work has elicited intense interest from Arab scholars. Interpretations of al-Kawākibī began to appear as early as the 1920s, less than two decades after his death, and gained momentum in the interwar period as his role in the formation of Arab nationalism became more widely recognized and his message gradually reached audiences from the Mashriq to the Maghrib. His ideas about the imperatives of Arab self-awakening and self-reliance seeped into the debates among Arab nationalists during this period.<sup>49</sup> However, the more sustained focus on al-Kawākibī's thoughts is to be found in the years after World War II. It was defined in great part by two traumatic events: *al-nakba*, the crushing defeat of Arab armies by the newly formed state of Israel in 1948; and

*al-naksa*, the even more humiliating rout in the June 1967 war. In the wake of *al-nakba*, notably in the 1950s and 1960s, al-Kawākibī was portrayed predominantly as a pioneer of pan-Arabism. His efforts in developing an independent Arab political identity drew broad appeal among Arab intellectuals and even some political leaders. After *al-naksa*, especially in the decades from the 1970s onward, al-Kawākibī's championship of Arab nationalism was de-emphasized. Instead, he came to be presented alternately as an Islamist or a secularist.

The interpretations of al-Kawākibī in each of these periods were far from uniform: elements of the "Islamist al-Kawākibī" were present in the 1950s and 1960s, while the "nationalist al-Kawākibī" did not disappear even in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the shifts in interpretations of this seminal thinker are readily discernible and reveal three larger points that bear on the central argument of this article. First, as to be expected from the syncretistic qualities of many of al-Kawākibī's ideas, there is a great degree of malleability in his work. Second, all too often al-Kawākibī has been used as a source of ideological legitimation by different quarters. Third, and relatedly, by reducing him to a defender or detractor of particular "isms," modern Arab writers, almost without exception, have disregarded some of the most salient aspects of al-Kawākibī's reformist thesis.

It is hardly surprising that the 1948 *nakba* should have triggered a series of political convulsions and a phase of painful introspection across the Arab realm. The war saw not only the failure of the military might of seven Arab states, but also the expansion of the Jewish nation and the collapse of plans for an independent Arab Palestinian state. The effect on the Arab world was captured by Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq, the prominent Christian Palestinian scholar: it was "a *nakba* (catastrophe) in every possible meaning of the word. . . the most severe disaster inflicted upon the Arabs in their long history."<sup>50</sup> Far worse than any material loss, Zurayq observed, was the sense of despair and "the spiritual and psychological blow" it dealt to the Arab people. The event, in his words, also laid bare "the suspicion of Arabs toward their governments. . . and the self-distrust of Arabs in their functioning as an *umma*."<sup>51</sup>

The crisis sparked new appeals for Arab unity. It was in this setting, particularly during the heyday of pan-Arabism in the 1950s and early 1960s, that Arab nationalists of many stripes turned to al-Kawākibī as they sought to forge an Arab political identity and Arab political discourse. What they found particularly attractive were al-Kawākibī's assertions about the distinctiveness of the Arabs, of Arab virtues, and Arab

values—of Arabness or Arabism (*‘urūba*) in general. And thus al-Kawākibī came to be harnessed to the nationalistic ideologies of the day.

Among prominent Arab intellectuals who placed a singular emphasis in al-Kawākibī’s call for strengthening Arabism, Muḥammad ‘Imāra rejected attempts to portray al-Kawākibī as an advocate of an Islamic caliphate and an Islamic state in which nationality would be subordinated to belief in Islam. “The majority of the people,” ‘Imāra argued, “have misunderstood al-Kawākibī’s stance on the issue of Arabism, mixing his view on this matter with his statements on the religion of Islam and the spiritual connection among the Muslims.”<sup>52</sup> The foremost significance of al-Kawākibī’s thought, he insisted, lies in his contributions to the ideas of Arabism (*‘urūba*) and Arab nationalism (*qawmiyya*).

The ascendance of *qawmiyya*—an expression of nationalism that ultimately treats existing territorial and political divisions among Arabs as artificial and gives primacy instead to the oneness of the Arab people—prompted many others to press al-Kawākibī into the service of pan-Arabism. Sāmī al-Dahhān, whose reading of al-Kawākibī is summed up in the heading of a chapter section, “The Nationalistic al-Kawākibī (*al-Kawākibī al-waṭanī*),” maintained that al-Kawākibī envisioned the Arab homeland much as the Umayyads had viewed it after their triumphant conquests: it would “stretch from the boundary of the province of Sind [West Pakistan] to Tétouan [Morocco] and connect all parts of the region by the bonds of Arabism, language, and religion. He also struggled for this broad homeland just as some of the reformist leaders are struggling for it now.”<sup>53</sup> Al-Dahhān’s book on al-Kawākibī was one of several works published in the late 1950s and early 1960s that drew inspiration from the Syrian sage in order to further the aspirations for Arab unity.<sup>54</sup> It is not a coincidence that many of these works appeared during the zenith of post-war pan-Arabism, epitomized by the union of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic (UAR) from 1958 to 1961. Few of these writers hesitated to conflate the nationalistic components of al-Kawākibī’s thought with the political agendas of Arab leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser.<sup>55</sup>

A more overt quest for validation of nationalist ideology and practice through appeals to al-Kawākibī is represented by *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī* (“Commemoration of al-Kawākibī”). The book, a collection of speeches by Arab intellectuals in Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo celebrating al-Kawākibī’s work, was published in 1960 by the government of the UAR and thus had an official imprimatur. Dedicated specifically to elucidating the contemporary relevance of al-Kawākibī’s insights for the Arab world, it

framed his ideas as the theoretical bedrock for Arab unity. In the introduction, Yūsuf al-Subā'ī exclaimed:

The revolutionary thought that al-Kawākibī advocated was a magnificent seed, which began to grow and thrive until its fruit appeared. We can see that fruit in the works and efforts of the Arab League, the Islamic Congress, and the Afro-Asian Conference, as well as what we have honorably achieved through the establishment of the United Arab Republic by the hands of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. . . .<sup>56</sup>

Al-Subā'ī thereby explicitly connected al-Kawākibī to the policies and actions of Arab nationalists of the day, the foremost among whom was Nasser. He emphasized that all of al-Kawākibī's struggles had taken place in the two lands of the UAR. That al-Kawākibī had lived in both Syria and Egypt, he argued, provided leading figures of the two intellectual centers of Arab states with an opportunity to draw the support of the entire Arab realm behind an acceleration of the process of *al-waḥda*, Arab unity. Thus al-Kawākibī was viewed as the foremost prophet and promoter of the cause of transcendence of modern state boundaries. As a tangible symbol and expression of Arab aspirations, the UAR was presented as a translation into practice of the pan-Arab nationalist element of his thought. Al-Subā'ī remarked in his speech in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*: "Al-Kawākibī emerged in Egypt, and from there to the entire Arab world, to spread his call for Arab unity. He was one of the messengers of the unity between Syria and Egypt, and his two books. . . were part of the spiritual foundations on which the UAR was established."<sup>57</sup>

Not all the appeals to nationalism centered on the expansive conception of *al-urūba* or *al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya*. Some intellectuals who raised the al-Kawākibī banner espoused *al-quṭriyya*, the more conventional, territorially constrained nationalism identified with the individual nation-state.<sup>58</sup> Yet others displayed patriotism on a more local level. Some speakers in Aleppo, in particular, did not hesitate to suggest that their city, the second largest in Syria, had a distinguished pedigree, culturally and intellectually, inasmuch as it was the birthplace of al-Kawākibī.<sup>59</sup> However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s al-Kawākibī was portrayed principally as a supporter of *al-waḥda*. Hence, in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī* his notion of nationalism was preponderantly one that transcended modern state boundaries. In a speech entitled "Al-Kawākibī's Concept of Arab Nationalism," Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿUryān argued that al-Kawākibī had called for the

establishment of the Arab Union (*al-ittihād al-ʿarabī*) and even claimed that the venture to which al-Kawākibī dedicated himself in the nineteenth century had established a basis for the creation of the UAR.<sup>60</sup> In a reflection of the rivalry between Arab nationalism and state nationalisms, as well as the fervor of the Syrians in *al-qawmiyya*, another writer, Maḥmūd Ghānim, called on Iraq to unite with the UAR in order to achieve another milestone in the fulfillment of al-Kawākibī's pan-Arab vision.<sup>61</sup> In a similar vein, Egyptian thinkers expressed special admiration for al-Kawākibī as "The Arab Citizen," to quote the title of an address by Qaṣdī ʿAlam. The torch carried by al-Kawākibī, ʿAlam averred, had not been extinguished; on the contrary, its flame still lit the path of Arabs toward unity.<sup>62</sup>

Another major theme of commentary on al-Kawākibī in this period was socialism. Here, too, the emphasis was in great part ascribable to the political milieu of the day, as by the early 1960s Arab socialism had become the official ideology of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Several authors in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī* ventured that socialism occupied a pivotal place in al-Kawākibī's thinking. Šāliḥ al-Ashqar, in a speech in Damascus, singled out socialism (*al-ishtirākīyya*)—along with freedom (*al-ḥurriyya*), Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiyya*), patriotism (*al-waṭāniyya*), sciences (*al-ʿilm*), and literature (*al-adab*)—as a central concern of al-Kawākibī.<sup>63</sup> Revealingly, the first three of these terms were soon to be employed as the slogan of the Baʿth Party of Syria, which was all but indistinguishable from the state itself: *al-waḥda wa-l-ḥurriyya wa-l-ishtirākīyya* (unity, freedom, and socialism). Ibrāhīm Rifʿat, in a book entitled *Al-Thāʾir al-ʿArabī*, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī ("The Arab Revolutionary: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī"), proclaimed al-Kawākibī to be "among the first and the most prominent advocates of socialism."<sup>64</sup> ʿImāra contended that, unlike other reformist figures, al-Kawākibī did not rely on European ruminations about socialism or communism to formulate his ideas about social justice and social equality. Instead, ʿImāra stressed al-Kawākibī's view that the Islamic ideal of state and society is inherently socialistic and that the early Arab-Islamic community embodied the exemplar of equity and equality.<sup>65</sup> This point is carried further by al-Husri, who underscored al-Kawākibī's identification of socialist elements in Islamic precepts such as *zakat* and *waqf*. To al-Kawākibī, al-Husri noted, socialist life under Christianity had never moved beyond the realm of potential. Under Islam, on the other hand, the rightly guided caliphs had succeeded in establishing the perfect social order, one that effaced the gaps between ruler and ruled and between rich and poor.<sup>66</sup> These interpretations of al-Kawākibī were broadly congruent with prevailing political currents in the Arab world: as with the

nationalist filter, the tendency to view him through a socialist filter reflected a constellation of ideas and trends that were dominant in the 1950s and 1960s.

Not unexpectedly, the expositions of al-Kawākibī took a dramatic turn with the altered social and political landscape ushered in by the *al-naksa* of 1967. The Arab defeat in the June war struck grave blows to the struggles of a generation of Arab intellectuals since the late 1940s.<sup>67</sup> It led to the collapse of the main pillar of political ideology, Arab nationalism, the nostrums of which had already begun to fade by the early 1960s. And it led to a search for alternative models for political thought and action. Although it would be futile to specify a date for the emergence of a phenomenon as complex and variegated as that of Islamic resurgence, it is clear that the 1967 *al-naksa* marked a turning-point.

As noted earlier, emphases of the Islamic nature of al-Kawākibī's thought were to be found in the 1950s and 1960s. However, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s, with the entry of Islam into the mainstream of Arab political and cultural discourse, that al-Kawākibī came to be viewed primarily as an exponent of Islam rather than as the standard bearer of Arabism who staunchly opposed Ottoman imperialism. In a book published in 1970, Ghassān al-ʿAṭīyya declared that al-Kawākibī's foremost objective was the unification of all Muslims. By extension, he argued, Islam needed to be seen as the driving force behind *al-nahḍa*.<sup>68</sup> The weight of Arab nationalism was not dismissed, but it became an appendage. The same line of thinking is evident in a book written a decade later by Asʿad al-Saḥmarānī, who depicted al-Kawākibī first and foremost as an Islamic thinker. Taking what he saw as a cue from al-Kawākibī, Saḥmarānī condemned clerics who collaborate with the state and rulers such as Anwar Sadat and the Shah of Iran, who suppressed Islam and frustrated the aspirations of Muslims.<sup>69</sup> The metamorphosis of al-Kawākibī into an Islamist became apparent in yet other ways. Increasingly, he came to be referred to as "Imam al-Kawākibī." Even his physical appearance was transformed. As Raz, commenting on two editions of *Umm al-Qurā*, separated by a span of three decades, observes:

Whereas the 1959 edition shows Kawakibi dressed in traditional Arab robe and a kafiyya, a common picture in Arab journals from the beginning of the century through the 1950s and the 1960s, the 1991 edition presented him wearing a turban of a Muslim cleric. In addition, the praises for the Arab nation on the cover of the earlier edition were replaced in the latter by a drawing of the Kaʿba in Mecca.<sup>70</sup>

Not all writers joined the wave of rendering al-Kawākibī as a religious revivalist. Given his patent secularist leanings and pronouncements, al-Kawākibī was not the obvious choice for Islamists seeking to legitimate their projects in the ideas of eminent reformers of the Arab world. For this, Rashīd Riḍā or Muḥammad ʿAbduh were far more suitable. Thus some writers, running against the stream of political Islam, which had triumphed over other ideologies and movements in many countries after the 1970s, continued to adhere to the secularist hallmarks of al-Kawākibī's thinking. However, in the context of the 1980s and 1990s, theirs was largely a defensive posture, designed to uphold his central ideas and values in the face of the markedly altered milieu of intellectual discourse. Nevertheless, some scholars did reject the characterization of al-Kawākibī as an Islamist and argued that he was better viewed as a pragmatic thinker who strove to reconcile a traditional understanding of Islam with rapidly changing political and social conditions. Jān Dāya, in *Al-Imām al-Kawākibī: Faṣl al-dīn ʿan al-dawla*, offered a reprise of the secular dimensions of al-Kawākibī's work. Dāya highlighted al-Kawākibī's advocacy of the separation of religion and the state, but also noted that it was the product of an effort by a spiritual figure to illuminate the true essence of Islam.<sup>71</sup> In an introduction to Dāya's book, Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī insisted that his grandfather never drew much distinction between Islam and Christianity since to him they shared the most fundamental religious principle, *tawḥīd*. He also found much common ground between al-Kawākibī qua a secularist and Christian pioneers in the age of *al-nahḍa* such as Buṭrus al-Bustānī, among whom he detected convergent perspectives on the pursuit of reform and modernization of the Arab region.<sup>72</sup>

In other quarters, however, the theme of al-Kawākibī as an Islamic revivalist continued to exercise a hold on the imagination. Samīr Abū Ḥamdān, in a chapter entitled "Between Islam and Islamism," maintained that al-Kawākibī believed that the sparks of *al-nahḍa* could emerge from Islam alone.<sup>73</sup> Another author, Nazīh Kubbāra, placed al-Kawākibī alongside the leading Muslim reformists of his age. Kubbāra argued that al-Kawākibī, like Afghānī, ʿAbduh, and Riḍā, considered *Salafiyya* doctrine, as represented by Ibn Taymiyya's treatises on the corruption of government and of Islam, to be the bedrock for the pursuit of reform.<sup>74</sup> Yet the Islamist and secularist lines of interpretations of al-Kawākibī were not monolithic. Some writers did not see any incompatibility between al-Kawākibī's ideas about secularism and his call for a return to the true faith of Islam. Even among those who gravitated toward either a secular or Islamist interpretation of al-Kawākibī, there were many who attempted to come to grips with both strands of his thinking.<sup>75</sup>



## Contemporary Echoes

An examination of Arab literature on al-Kawākibī after the defeats of 1948 and 1967 shows the popularity of his work among intellectuals in search of ideological principles on which they could pin their aspirations for the recovery of the Arabs' proper place in the world. That same examination reveals two other, often related, tendencies in the treatment of al-Kawākibī, both of which are present in the more recent literature as well. First, there have been frequent attempts by individuals or groups to employ al-Kawākibī as a prop for particular political and social schemes. At times, debates about al-Kawākibī have coaxed governments themselves to turn to al-Kawākibī for ideological legitimation, and quite often al-Kawākibī acolytes have proven willing to reciprocate. For example, al-Kawākibī's declarations about secularism have provided a springboard for extolling the dedication of the Syrian Ba'ath to the separation of religion and state.<sup>76</sup> The Egyptian government and Egyptian intellectuals have joined forces in sponsoring the publication of works by al-Kawākibī, along with such writers as Qasim Amin and Farah Antun, as liberal rejoinders to the promulgations of Islamists.<sup>77</sup> Al-Kawākibī continues to be summoned by the adherents of ideologies across the political spectrum. Even pan-Islamists have persisted in trying to frame his classics as a source of support for their cause. In a recent article, entitled "Return to *Umm al-Qurā*," the columnist Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Lādhīqānī proclaims that "Muslims in every corner of the world can solve most of the contradictions they have encountered in recent history" by absorbing the lessons of al-Kawākibī's imaginary conference.<sup>78</sup>

The second tendency—a resort to theoretical and abstract categories at the expense of a consideration of al-Kawākibī's reform proposals—has been even more durable than the first. Whether the focus was on Arabism or nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, or on Islam or secularism after the 1970s, discussions of al-Kawākibī have rarely evinced an inclination to depart from theoretical, often grandiose, questions. Instead, the discussions have usually proceeded on a rarefied terrain; all too frequently, al-Kawākibī is cited in ways and for ends that are little more than rhetorical. What is lost in the process is a recognition that al-Kawākibī's purpose was to offer concrete principles for the *praxis* of reform in the Arab realm. It is this aspect of his enterprise—the multiple dimensions of his reformist project, the measures he prescribed, the methods he emphasized, the requirements he postulated for successful reform, and the values animating his reformist vision—that is either downplayed or overlooked altogether.

There is no simple explanation behind the wont of Arab intellectuals to cast *al-nahḍa* reformers such as al-Kawākibī into a particular ideological mold or to shy away from a consideration of the specificities of reform. In part it is attributable to convictions that a revolution in thinking, and the attendant adoption of new ideological constructs, is itself essential for the reconstruction of Arab identity in the world today.<sup>79</sup> But lack of freedom of expression also plays a part: reliance on grand formulas is a means of coping with the restrictions and repressions of life under autocratic regimes. In many Arab countries the generalizations afforded by remaining at the level of theory and ideology become a safer alternative to investigating how the prescriptions of a figure such as al-Kawākibī might be translated into action in specific settings, let alone producing their own detailed reform programs.

In the last two decades, we do encounter greater efforts to situate concepts for social and political change—including reform, democracy, progress, and humanism—within the context of the internal affairs of individual Arab states. Some of these efforts are closer to the lines of inquiry called for by al-Kawākibī. We also find a refreshing attempt to de-ideologize the discourse on al-Kawākibī. In contrast to earlier years, the resort to polemics and sloganeering has become less common, while the quality of analysis of his work is more rigorous.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, much of this body of scholarship continues the tradition of approaching al-Kawākibī in theoretical and conceptual terms. The exploration of his recipes for reform, and their contemporary implications, remains cursory and episodic.

In recent years, a new set of actors has turned to al-Kawākibī: civil society groups, notably non-governmental organizations in the areas of human rights and democratic reform. Some of these groups have picked up the cause of al-Kawākibī with much zeal. However, most of them have been at best selective in their reading of al-Kawākibī. Their singular focus has been on his denunciation of despotism, as if there were nothing else to his argument. Al-Kawākibī's call for transcending religious and sectarian differences, his appeal to intellectuals to take the lead in fighting ignorance and apathy, and, above, all, his insistence that the Arabs rely on themselves rather than outsiders to effect reform—all these, along with other themes that are central to his reform thesis, have received short shrift.

This point is illustrated by a landmark statement adopted by forty leading civic groups from the Middle East and North Africa that met in Beirut on September 5, 2004. A final version of the statement was presented to foreign ministers from the Group of 8 and Arab countries who met in New

York later that month. It also was taken up later that year by the Forum for the Future, which resulted from the G8 June 2004 summit in Sea Island, Georgia.<sup>81</sup> The statement begins by proposing three “imperatives”—freedom, democracy, and justice—that are cornerstones of the al-Kawākibī canon. It also prescribes seven “programs for structural reform”—equality and participation; the rule of law; freedom of expression and organization; a thorough revision of education, including religious education, to encourage inquisitive thinking; economic inclusion; combating corruption at all levels in order to ensure bureaucratic accountability and transparency; and creative artistic and literary expression.<sup>82</sup> Noting that “the situation is grave in the Middle East, and most governments turn a deaf ear to internal calls for reforms,” it urges the G8 to redouble its support of political, social, and economic reform in the Middle East. Toward this end, it looks to “an open, committed partnership between democrats in our region and like-minded citizens in the international community, both as civil society leaders and as officials in willing democratic governments.” It adds that “[w]hile the participation of concerned governments in the region would be welcome, we cannot wait.” In several evocative passages, it turns to al-Kawākibī, the only Arab thinker it mentions: “While the belated rallying of some Western leaders to the central importance of democracy in our states is welcome, Middle Eastern democrats need a more solid commitment. Over a century ago, Kawakibi identified dictatorship as a crime against society. Dictatorship must now be declared a crime against humanity.” The statement adds that “[t]he Kawakibi tradition never abated, but it now suffocates under the joint pressures of authoritarian governments and extremists within our societies. Both continue to remain unpunished for grave abuse of our freedoms, and extremism is coterminous with marginalization and suppression of intellectual and political movements and leaders.”

The civic groups returned to al-Kawākibī in their September 24, 2004 declaration in New York:

We did not wait for this occasion to defend democracy and call for the respect of human rights. The three religions which emerged from our lands and the cultural and religious diversity, of which we are proud, have claimed justice and freedom as their call and our societies, like all societies on the planet, have time and again resisted “the patterns of authoritarianism”. Yet this tradition has been often tarnished. Abdalrahman al-Kawakibi, the author of the famous pamphlet “The Patterns of Despotism [The Nature of Despotism]” in the 19th century, was poisoned for his

frankness and courage, and for identifying despotism as a crime against society. Religion has been sometimes used to justify human rights violations and undemocratic forms of Government.<sup>83</sup>

We can only wonder what al-Kawākibī would have made of this statement. No doubt he would have welcomed the recognition of despotism as “a crime against humanity,” although he would have been dismayed by its persistence as a dominant hallmark of Arab political order more than 100 years after his passing. All the other ills that are decried by the statement—especially the emasculation of opportunities for freedom of expression and the “hegemony of extremist religious discourse”—would have been all too familiar to him. He would have applauded the elevation of democracy, freedom, and justice as the ultimate objectives of reform, and he would have endorsed all the planks of the proposed reform program, which are clear echoes of his treatises, particularly constitutional measures to limit executive authority and institutions that are accountable to the people. He also would have hailed the professed commitment to nonviolent means of action, which is stressed repeatedly. On the other hand, given his insistence that the Arabs rely on their resources and their own channels in the pursuit of reform, he probably would have frowned on the heavy emphasis on external support, all the more so given the complaint that “[o]ur societies also suffer from international real-politik, which sacrifices principles in support of a status quo and the entrenched interests which this status quo protects.”

Perhaps most puzzling, both in this and other declarations by Arab civic groups that have discovered al-Kawākibī,<sup>84</sup> is a neglect of the larger corpus of work in which his ideas about tyranny are embedded. These statements, along with the more detailed studies that support them, eagerly invoke al-Kawākibī. Yet rarely, if ever, do they descend the ladder of generality to come to grips with issues such as the prerequisites of reform, especially the principle of self-reliance and self-help, that he took to be inviolable. General flourishes—such as the reminder that a hallowed “native” critic living in the nineteenth century denounced tyranny and branded it as the primary cause of Arab social decline—might serve to legitimize the causes they espouse. Otherwise, there appears to little interest in pursuing the particulars of his injunctions for reform.

Al-Kawākibī’s precepts on despotism, although not his reformist remedies, have also reverberated in the contemporary literature of Islamists. In an article entitled “Tyranny and Knowledge: The Saudi Connection,” liberally spiced with quotations from *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād*, Fatima Ali finds a direct parallel between the tyrants in al-Kawākibī’s masterpiece and the

rulers of Saudi Arabia today. These rulers, she argues, offer a "prime example of a power that suppresses knowledge in the name of the religion that was meant to expand the very meaning of the word." She elaborates:

They want to keep their subjects in the dark. As Kawakibi declares, "*Knowledge is a blazing coal from the torch of God*". . . and . . . God . . . "*caused knowledge, like that torch, to illuminate what is good and reveal what is evil.*" The tyrants, such as the Saudi regime, are trying to hide this illumination, and are, we could argue, leading towards the evil. The essence of the argument is that those tyrants that are in power, are power mongers, and wish to keep knowledge away from their subjects, lest they find out the truth about the ruler. Kawakibi comes to a realization at the end of his article which perhaps sums this up the best: "*Tyrants always have been and always will be idolaters and enemies of learning,*" and some day, when the common people are liberated from the societies that have kept them in the dark, and rise up, then perhaps the tyrants themselves will realize what true knowledge is."<sup>85</sup>

Similar statements abound in the popular press. Common to all is the use of al-Kawākibī as the point of departure for highlighting the connections between authoritarian rule and banes such as corruption and censorship.<sup>86</sup> Notwithstanding the genuflections to al-Kawākibī, and the deployment of his arsenal against despotism as a prong for criticizing the policies of Arab-Islamic regimes, most of these statements stop short of a serious effort to deal with the multiple dimensions of al-Kawākibī's reform project. In sum, while on the whole treatments of al-Kawākibī in recent years show an advance over the erstwhile exercises in politicization, they typically fail to provide a meaningful interpretation or application of his ideas about reform in the Arab world.

Perhaps the outstanding exception to the latter generalization is the recent *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)* series produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).<sup>87</sup> Each of the three *AHDRs* that have appeared to date was written by a team of more than 100 Arab intellectuals and specialists. Together, they offer one of the most comprehensive and articulate analyses of the state of human development in the twenty-two Arab countries. They also constitute the most important manifesto of change produced by Arabs in modern times. No Arab thinker figures more prominently in the *AHDRs* than al-Kawākibī. The 2003 and 2004 reports each contains four boxes of quotations from his texts. There is al-Kawākibī declaiming on rights and freedom: "The tyrant is the enemy

of rights and of freedom; indeed their executioner. Right is the father of humanity and freedom their mother.”<sup>88</sup> There is al-Kawākibī on the importance of holding ruling authority accountable: “[G]overnment, of any sort, is not absolved of being described as oppressive as long as it escapes rigorous oversight and is not made to answer for its actions without fail.”<sup>89</sup> There is al-Kawākibī on the need for religious reform: “We need sages who revive the investigative study of religion, thus restoring the lost aspects thereof, and refining it from any false impurities—which normally attach to any old religion. . . . [E]ach religion needs innovators who restore it to its pure, uncontaminated origins that can reinstate human will and human happiness.”<sup>90</sup> And, most eloquently, following the observation that “[o]ne need only note the characteristics of autocracy as sharply delineated by Al-Kawakibi and his successors, and how such autocracies corrupt people’s morals and values and inhibit creativity and development”<sup>91</sup>—a statement intended to be as applicable to Arab realities in the twenty-first century as it was to those in the nineteenth—there is al-Kawākibī decrying the perverse expectations imprinted on society by autocratic rulership:

We became accustomed to regarding abject submission as polite deference; obsequiousness as courtesy; sycophancy as oratory; bombast as substance; the surrender of basic rights as nobility; the acceptance of humiliation as modesty; the acceptance of injustice as obedience; and the pursuit of human entitlements as arrogance. Our inverted system portrayed the pursuit of simple knowledge as presumption; aspirations for the future as impossible dreams; courage as overreaching audacity; inspiration as folly; chivalry as aggression; free expression as impertinence; free thinking as heresy; and patriotism as madness.

In your helplessness you accept a miserable life, and you call it contentment; you abdicate responsibility for your daily existence, saying “God will provide” and you believe yours is not to reason why because what befalls you is God’s will. But, in God’s name, this passivity is not the proper status of humankind.<sup>92</sup>

Quotations aside, the *Arab Human Development Reports* are permeated with themes that echo al-Kawākibī’s narrative of decline and renewal. The parallels are specially evident in three areas. First, both in explaining the causes of Arab predicaments and in proffering blueprints for reform, the reports place the onus on internal factors. They do not shy away from external sources of Arab problems—they candidly address the effects of British and French colonialism and the toll exacted by the Israeli occupation of

Palestinian territories and the American occupation of Iraq—but the emphasis is preponderantly on the internal. Dismissing suggestions that initiatives for change can come only from outside, the 2003 *AHDR* insists that “[s]elf-reform stemming from open, scrupulous and balanced self-criticism is the right, if not the only alternative to plans that are apparently being drawn up outside the Arab world for restructuring the area and for reshaping the Arab identity” and warns that “[t]urning a blind eye to the weaknesses and shortfalls of the region, instead of decisively identifying and overcoming them, can only increase its vulnerability and leave it more exposed.”<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, the report expresses “the unwavering conviction that reform efforts ... must be initiated and launched from within.”<sup>94</sup> Like al-Kawākibī’s challenge to intellectuals, the authors of the *AHDRs* argue that the successful pursuit of reform requires a consensus among elites in order to prevent entrenched political regimes from dividing the vanguards of change and also to forestall the likelihood that political action will erupt into chaos and violence.<sup>95</sup> And also like al-Kawākibī, they insist that reformers must strive to reclaim “some of the myriad bright spots”<sup>96</sup> of Arab and Islamic traditions, such as political consultation and social justice.

Second, the *AHDRs* highlight an inexorable connection that al-Kawākibī took as axiomatic: that between freedom and development. The reports consider individual freedom to be the ultimate objective as well as the foundation of human development. And, much like al-Kawākibī’s pronouncements on *al-nahḍa*, they hold that “[o]f all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn.”<sup>97</sup> From Arab despots who appropriate Islam to perpetuate their rule and the political structures that emasculate democratic institutions, to the absence of legal restraints on executive power and “the vicious circle of repression and corruption”<sup>98</sup>—the examination of the state of freedom in Arab lands at the beginning of the new millennium offers a catalogue of wrongs that could have been lifted directly from the pages of al-Kawākibī. The answer offered by the *AHDRs* is no less an echo of his words. “[T]he Arab world’s capacity to face up to its internal and external challenges,” states the 2004 *AHDR*, “depends on ending tyranny and securing fundamental rights and freedoms.”<sup>99</sup>

Third, the *AHDRs* give knowledge the pride of place that al-Kawākibī accorded it in his prescriptions for reform. Indeed, a “knowledge deficit” is identified, along with a “freedom deficit” and a “women’s empowerment deficit,” as one of the three “deficits” that are at the core of Arab decline; an entire volume is devoted to “building a knowledge society.”<sup>100</sup> The *AHDR* survey of the state of knowledge in the Arab region reiterates, at times with



his very words, a recurring theme in al-Kawākibī. The diffusion, production, and application of knowledge are all found to be stagnant—in fact, knowledge today “appears to be on the retreat.”<sup>101</sup> Instead of stimulating critical inquiry, education in Arab countries encourages “submission, obedience, subordination and compliance.”<sup>102</sup> Societal incentives and value systems, along with political and ideological conflicts, have stifled creativity and innovation, eroding the “ethics of knowledge”<sup>103</sup> and weakening development opportunities. The marginalization and isolation of Arab intellectuals, and, more generally, the curtailment of the freedom of maneuver by the producers of knowledge, further serves to undermine capacities for social and economic development as it “extinguishes the flame of learning and kills the drive for innovation.”<sup>104</sup> The authors of the *AHDR* see the crisis in knowledge as a function of a crisis of politics and, hence, they trace it back to where al-Kawākibī started: despotism. Ultimately, they maintain, it is none other than authoritarian governance, and the panoply of measures of control and repression, that obstructs the free flow of ideas and condemns every salient aspect of knowledge to backwardness. By extension, they argue, a fundamental condition for resolving the knowledge crisis is the creation of a new political order and, more specifically, democratic transformation.<sup>105</sup> The *AHDRs* look to the creation of an “authentic, broadminded and enlightened Arab knowledge model.”<sup>106</sup> The requirements posited for such a model include reforms that are central to the al-Kawākibī paradigm, foremost among which are liberating Islam from political exploitation, honoring *ijtihād*, respecting the right to differ in doctrinal interpretations, and incorporating the distinguished ingredients of the Arab cultural heritage. Finally, the authors call upon Arab intellectuals to reject compromises with the status quo, to resist the exploitation of knowledge for political ends, and to strive to create a knowledge domain independent of that of power. They also urge the Arab intelligentsia to build democratic alliances dedicated to democratic reform and to actively engage all citizens in reform efforts.<sup>107</sup>

For the present discussion, the latter appeal cannot be dismissed as a mere platitude. More than ever before, Arab intellectuals today are displaying an appreciation of al-Kawākibī's insistence that his assignment to them—to disseminate knowledge across society and awaken it to the ruinous effects of despotism—cannot be fulfilled without bridging the vast gulf that separates them from the masses. The distance between intellectuals and the general citizenry has generated growing concern in recent years. At the 2002 conference marking the 100th anniversary of al-Kawākibī's death, Māhir al-Sharīf lamented the results of calls for reform and ascribed

their failure to the isolation of intellectuals, particularly their lack of a broad social base supported by the general citizenry.<sup>108</sup>

The concern is expressed more explicitly by Muḥammad Jamāl Taḥḥān, a Syrian scholar who has written several works concentrating on the ideas of al-Kawākibī.<sup>109</sup> In the introduction to *Al-Muthaqqaf wa-dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-‘abīd* (“The Intellectual and the Democracy of Slaves”), Taḥḥān describes Arab citizens as “the product of unsteady systems constantly oscillating between tradition and modernity” and caught between powers “collaborating with each other in oppressing and impoverishing them.”<sup>110</sup> Arab intellectuals, on the other hand, are to him a stratum that does not regard itself as belonging to a distinctive cultural heritage, or even as part of a society rooted in that heritage. Arab intellectuals, he argues, fail to distinguish between publics and regimes. They limit their interactions to a narrow circle of like-minded individuals; for the average citizen, they have neither respect nor trust. So detached are they from the rest of society that they do not have a common idiom with its other members. “Arab intellectuals, almost without exception, use a technical jargon that the citizenry does not comprehend.... They speak in a completely unintelligible manner. . . . Little by little, they force the citizenry to turn their ears away from any intellectual.”<sup>111</sup> Taḥḥān upbraids intellectuals for their complacency and their failure to establish a dialogue with the wider public. Thus, he concludes, for the futility of their reform efforts they have mainly themselves to blame—a rare self-reprimand that echoes al-Kawākibī’s warning that “they [intellectuals] should know that they themselves are the cause of what has been inflicted upon them.”<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

More than a century before it was showered by outsiders with mantras about “freedom agendas” and “good governance,” the Arab world had a figure for whom these concepts represented imperatives for stanching the decline of the Arab-Muslim realm and restoring its position in the world. Arabs seeking a homegrown blueprint for human, political, social, and civil rights need not search very far. Al-Kawākibī offered a strategy for reform that rested on a penetrating analysis of tyranny and its ramifications for polity and society. A lifelong advocate of freedom of expression and freedom of association, al-Kawākibī’s commitment to the principles of liberty and justice was as unflinching as it was unequivocal. Beyond its constituent elements, his was

a humanistic vision, one that coupled an emphasis on moral renewal on both individual and societal levels with an affirmation of the values of the exercise of human reason and free inquiry. His works, especially his two published books, *Umm al-Qurā* and *Ṭabāʿi<sup>c</sup> al-istibdād*, have earned him a rightful place in the pantheon of luminaries of the Arab national movement known as *al-nahḍa*. As contributions to that movement, his writings, in the words of George Antonius, “stand in a class apart, for their originality, their range and their audacity.”<sup>113</sup>

As successive generations have rediscovered him, al-Kawākibī has attained an iconic status. And yet, as we have seen, the reception of al-Kawākibī has taken some odd turns over the last half century. From pan-Arabist to Arab socialist, from secularist to Islamist—he has been recast time and again in line with changes in the political current of the day. He also has been an object of poaching by a medley of literary pugilists and political ideologues who casually dip into his works to pluck a variety of nuggets that can be marshaled behind their causes. The propensity to ideologize an al-Kawākibī is testimony to Michael Hudson’s observation that “political discourse in the Arab world . . . has been awash in ideology.”<sup>114</sup> Such a discourse is itself partly a reflection of the enduring struggle over alternative identities, one of the very themes that al-Kawākibī wrestled with throughout his intellectual odyssey. However, debates about whether al-Kawākibī was an Arab-firster or Islamic-firster, or whether he should be read as a secularist or a revivalist, amount to little more than trivial parlor games. Elements of each of these rubrics—and others—can be discerned in al-Kawākibī. But his thinking does not lend itself to easy categorization and he cannot be reduced to any single one of them.

Recent years have seen a move away from the cruder resort to politicize the discourse on al-Kawākibī. While the change can only be welcomed, much of the latest wave of scholarship on al-Kawākibī, as the analysis above has suggested, fails to do justice to him: the profusion of encomiums notwithstanding, seldom is the wide array of his ideas for reform seriously addressed. Of late, a few Arab civic movements have attempted to revive both the spirit and practice of his reformist project. However, the precarious struggles of these movements are illustrated by the tribulations that have plagued the Kawākibī Forum for Democratic Dialogue. The Kawākibī Forum, launched in Aleppo by a group of intellectuals under the leadership of Mājid Manjūna, is one of several discussion circles that sprang up during the “Damascus Spring” that followed the death of President Hafiz al-Assad in 2000. It soon became the most prominent of such circles in Syria, attracting a following across the country as growing numbers of writers and

activists convened regularly for open debate about the nature of the state, oppression, justice, democracy, and avenues for peaceful reform. But the “Damascus Spring” proved to be illusory, and before the end of 2003 the Kawākibī Forum, along with other reform groups, had become the victim of a harsh crackdown by the regime of Bashar al-Assad.<sup>115</sup>

The Arab world has not wanted for reform initiatives. Indeed, with the faint stirrings of democracy that began shortly after the turn of the millennium, it became inundated with them. Calls for “reform from within,” some deriving their inspiration from al-Kawākibī, continue to be sounded. But Arab reform movements today face intractable difficulties, both external and internal in origin. The 2003 *Arab Human Development Report* reflects somberly on the consequences of a turbulent international political environment in which the region has been subjected to “grave threats, and the dignity and rights of Arabs, especially the right to self-determination, have been grossly violated.” In such unfavorable circumstances, the report observes, the challenge of internal reform “has undoubtedly become more perilous, certainly more arduous and possibly more tenuous.”<sup>116</sup> In addition, much of the agenda of reform—often framed under rubrics, themselves suspect, such as “democracy promotion” and “good governance”—has become tainted by virtue of its association, both real and imagined, with the machinations of outsiders, especially the United States.<sup>117</sup>

However, the more formidable source of obstacles facing Arab reformers today are endogenous. Authoritarianism not only endures; in many states, it is as entrenched as ever. As yet, there is little to suggest a reversal of the reality that Arab countries have the lowest level of freedom of any region in the world.<sup>118</sup> In most settings, political liberalization is at best a faltering process. The amount of political space in which reformers can maneuver remains severely constricted; in some countries, it has become even more so in recent years. Arab reformers are also contending with the gauntlets thrown down by Islamists. Political Islam has succeeded in appropriating some of the very constructs that are the currency of reformers—including civil society, democracy, citizenry, and women’s rights—and infused them with an Islamic content. In addition, by claiming that legitimacy resides wholly outside the realm of the state, it has challenged the very object that reformers have made the focus of their reform efforts.

In such a setting—one in which no aspect of reform is free of contestation—the pedagogical mission al-Kawākibī entrusted to intellectuals is as daunting as ever. It remains relevant, nevertheless. Al-Kawākibī laid down two essential conditions that were integral to his reform project and that Arab reformers today can ill afford to ignore. First, he argued that reform

will not occur spontaneously, nor can it be imposed from outside. Rather, it requires conscious planning by leaders committed to challenging the established political and social order through a process of gradual and peaceful change. Second, he was at pains to emphasize that reform cannot succeed without both a consensus on ends and means among the reformers and a sustained dialogue between them and the broader public. Few Arab intellectuals dedicated to the cause of reform could, or would, claim to have fulfilled these dual tasks. The imperative of doing so in societies that are still in grip of autocracy and tyranny remains al-Kawākibī's enduring challenge and legacy.

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## Notes

1. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, *Umm al-Qurā*, in *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila li-ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*, ed. Muḥammad ʿImāra (Beirut: al-Muʿassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1975), p. 154.

2. From the conference proceedings in Māhir al-Sharīf and Salām al-Kawākibī, eds., *Tayyār al-islāḥ al-dīnī wa-maṣāʾiruhu fī l-mujtamaʿāt al-ʿArabiyya: Awraq al-ʿamal al-muqaddima fī l-nadwa al-munʿaqida bi-munāsabat al-dhikrā al-miʿawiyya li-raḥīl al-imām ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī* (Damascus: French Institute of Arab Studies, 2002), pp. 9–11. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations in this article are mine.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–7.

4. For elaboration, see, for instance, William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), p. 125; and Cleveland, *Islam against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), introduction.

5. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

6. For biographies, see the account of his son, Asʿad al-Kawākibī, “ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī,” *Al-Hadīth* (Aleppo), 1952: 542–58; Muḥammad Jamāl Ṭaḥḥān, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila li-l-Kawākibī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1995); Sāmī al-Daḥḥān, *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, 1854–1902* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1959); and Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī, *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī: Al-Sira al-dhātīyya* (Beirut: Bīsān, 1998). Al-Kawākibī's date of birth is a matter of dispute. Some have placed it in 1849; others, in 1854 or 1855. Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī, his grandson, offers detailed reasons (pp. 35–6) for why it was 1855. In e-mail communication with the author, his great-grandson, Salām al-Kawākibī, insists the exact date was September 7, 1855.

7. The extent of this influence has been the subject of much controversy. Some scholars maintain that his two major works were derived largely from Vittorio Alfieri's *Della Tirannide* and Wilfred Blunt's *The Future of Islam*. See, for instance, Peter Partner, *A Short Political Guide to the Arab World* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1960), p. 107. The claim is put most forcefully by Sylvia Haim in “Alfieri and al-Kawākibī,” *Oriente Moderno* 34 (1954): 321–34 and “Blunt and al-Kawākibī,” *Oriente Moderno* 35 (1955): 132–43. A skeptical

response to Haim is offered by Khaldun S. al-Husri in *Three Reformers: A Study in Modern Arab Political Thought* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), pp. 71–3 and 94–9. A more nuanced view is presented by Hourani, who maintains that, the connections to the thought of European authors such as Blunt notwithstanding, there is an original element in al-Kawākibī's writing (*Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 271). Al-Kawākibī himself acknowledges his indebtedness to European scholars. Nevertheless, it is evident that his ideas on such themes as the nature of despotism and its impact on the Ottoman-controlled Arab lands contained arguments that are both original and specific to the region.

8. Al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, p. 56.

9. Al-Raḥḥālāh Kāf [ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī], *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād wa-maṣāriʿ al-istiʿbād*, ed. Muḥammad Jamāl Ṭaḥḥān (Damascus: al-ʿAwāʾil, 2003).

10. Two other book manuscripts, apparently among works by al-Kawākibī that were seized by agents of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, have been attributed to him, but neither has been found. See Asʿad al-Kawākibī: 549, and al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, pp. 56–7.

11. In English: al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, ch. 4; Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), ch. 5; George N. Atiyeh, "Humanism and Secularism in the Modern Arab Heritage: The Ideas of al-Kawākibī and Zurayk," in George N. Atiyeh and Ibrahim M. Oweiss, eds., *Arab Civilization: Challenges and Responses* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 42–59; Ronen Raz, "Interpretations of Kawakibi's Thought, 1950–1980s," *Middle Eastern Studies*: 32-1 (1996): 179–90; Joseph G. Rahme, "'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī's Reformist Ideology, Arab Pan-Islamism, and the Internal Other," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 10-2 (1999): 159–77; and Haim, "Alfieri and al-Kawākibī" and "Blunt and al-Kawākibī". Among French works, see Norbert Tapiéro, *Les idées réformistes d'al-Kawākibī, 1265-1320=1849-1902: contribution à l'étude de l'Islam moderne* (Paris: Les Éditions Arabes, 1956).

12. There are more than a few affinities between the ideas of al-Kawākibī and those of other exponents of *al-nahḍa*. Like ʿAbduh and Riḍā, he believed that it was up to the Arabs to reverse the decline of the *umma* and that Arab revival would serve as the spearhead for revival of the Muslim world at large. And like Afghānī, he strenuously rejects blind imitation (*taqlīd*) and insists on independent interpretations of sacred texts (*ijtihād*). The points of departure between al-Kawākibī and these other thinkers are also notable. Although the discussion that follows occasionally touches on others in the *al-nahḍa* movement, a comparison between al-Kawākibī and them is beyond the scope of this article.

13. See, for example, al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, pp. 102–12.

14. *Umm al-Qurā*, p. 334.

15. *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād*, pp. 61–2.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

17. Al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, p. 62.

18. Al-Kawākibī asserts that "Islam is the first religion to actually encourage the sciences." As testimony, he notes that "the first word sent down from the Qurʾān is the injunction of reading (*iqrāʾ*) . . . The pious ancestors understood the significance of this order and this test as the obligation of all Muslims to acquire literacy." *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād*, pp. 92–3.

19. Quoted in al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, p. 64.

20. *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād*, pp. 52–3. Trans. by and quoted in Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, *The Ideas of Arab Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 130.

21. Rahme, "Al-Kawākibī's Reformist Ideology": 163.

22. *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād*, pp. 86–7.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–5.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

27. See, for example, al-Dahhān, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*, p. 37; Ibrāhīm Salīm al-Najjār, *Al-Ḥadīth* 25 (1951): 118; Jān Dāya, “Fī dhikrāhu al-Miʿawiyya, al-Kawākibī: Tajribat al-ṭaṣaddī li-aʿdāʾ al-ḥurriyya,” *Al-‘Arabī* 537 (August 2003): 64–7; and Eliezer Tauber, “Three Approaches, One Idea: Religion and State in the Thought of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Najib ‘Azuri and Rashid Rida,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21–2 (1994): 190. Al-Husri notes that “in the rhetorical passages” of *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād* “he had been revolutionary.” Al-Kawākibī, he maintains, “does not rule out completely the advisability of revolution and of revolutionary action” (*Three Reformers*, pp. 67, 69).

28. *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*, p. 84.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

30. Al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, p. 71.

31. *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*, p. 210.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

36. Al-Kawākibī was profoundly conscious of the status of women and singled out “the neglect of the education of women” as one of the major factors behind Muslim decline. See Rahme, “Al-Kawākibī’s Reformist Ideology”: 166–7.

37. *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*, p. 212.

38. *Umm al-Qurā* is replete with aspersions about the Turks’ Islam.

39. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 126.

40. Quoted in al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, pp. 103–4.

41. The stance was not without controversy. Atiyeh (“Humanism and Secularism,” p. 5) notes that Rashīd Riḍā was so taken aback by al-Kawākibī’s ideas about separation of religion and state that when he serialized *Umm al-Qurā* in his journal, *Al-Manār*, he attempted to excise the passages attacking the Ottoman empire.

42. *Three Reformers*, pp. 93–4.

43. *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*, p. 71.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 208–9.

47. The concept of *shūrā* occupies a hallowed place in al-Kawākibī’s prescriptions. As one contributor to the centenary conference remarks: “What is the solution al-Kawākibī envisioned for removing despotism? The answer is *shūrā dustūriyya*.” ‘Alī Ḥamiyya, “Al-Thawra al-fikriyya al-Kawākibiyya,” in al-Sharīf and al-Kawākibī, *Tayyār al-iṣlāḥ*, pp. 13–15.

48. Al-Kawākibī’s writings do not make clear what legal order he had in mind for the Arab realm. He expressed disenchantment with the Ottoman millet system, but he did not explicitly call for its abandonment, nor did he advocate a specific alternative.

49. Early commentaries include Louis Sheikh, *Al-Mashriq* 23 (1925); Kāmil al-Ghāzī, *Al-Ḥadīth* 3 (1929); and Ibrāhīm Sālīm al-Najjār, *Al-Ḥadīth* 14 (1940). See also Raz, “Interpretations of Kawakibi’s Thought”: 179–80. For a discussion of the struggles over Arab identity and competing loyalties in the two decades after World War I, see Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), ch. 4.

50. Zurayq, *Maʿnā al-nakba* (“The Meaning of the Catastrophe”) (Beirut: Dār al-ʿUlūm li-l-Malāyīn, 1948), p. 7.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

52. Muḥammad ʿImāra, *Al-ʿmāl al-Kāmila li-ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī maʿa dirāsa ʿan ḥayātihī wā-āthārīhī* (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Taʿlīf wa-al-Nashr, 1970), p. 35.

53. Al-Dahhān, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*, p. 69.



54. For another, see Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿUryān, *Maḥmūd al-qawmiyya al-ʿArabiyya ʿinda al-Kawākibī* (Aleppo, 1959).

55. This generalization applies to both al-Dahhān and al-ʿUryān.

56. Yūsuf al-Subāʿī, in al-Jumhūriyya al-ʿArabiyya al-Muttaḥida (United Arab Republic), *Mihrajān ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī* (Cairo: Majlis al-Aʿlā li-Riʿāyat al-Funūn wa-l-Adab wa-l-ʿUlūm al-Ijtīmāʿiyya, 1960), p. 8. The book contains transcripts of speeches delivered in Aleppo (November 1959), Damascus (December 1959), and Cairo (December 1959).

57. Ibid., p. 23.

58. Raz presents a similar argument about the approaches of Arab, especially Syrian and Egyptian, thinkers to al-Kawākibī in the 1950s and 1960s. "Interpretations of Kawakibī's Thought": 181.

59. See, for instance, the speech by ʿAbd al-Ḥamid Ḥasan in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 25–31.

60. Al-ʿUryān in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 39–46.

61. "Ghānim, "Al-Kawākibī as a Pioneer of Arabism," in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 139–43.

62. Qaṣḍī ʿAlam, "The Arab Citizen," in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 159–63.

63. Ṣāliḥ al-Ashqar in *Mihrajān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 85–91.

64. Ibrāhīm Rifʿat, *Al-Thāʿir al-ʿArabī: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya, 1962), p. 5. According to Raz ("Interpretations of Kawakibī's Thought": 184), *Al-Thāʿir al-ʿArabī* was "designed to be an indoctrination pamphlet for Egyptian soldiers."

65. Imāra, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila li-ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*, pp. 66–7.

66. Al-Husri, *Three Reformers*, pp. 73–8.

67. For a contemporaneous analysis of how the defeat was perceived by Arabs, see Quṣṭantīn Zurayq, *Maʿnā al-Nakba Mujaddadan* (The Meaning of the Catastrophe, Revisited) (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1967).

68. Ghassān al-ʿAṭiyya, *Maʿālim al-fikr al-ʿArabī al-iṣlāḥī al-Salafī* (Baghdad: Dār al-Ṭabʿ wa-l-Nashr al-Ahliyya, 1970), p. 26.

69. Asʿad al-Saḥmarānī, *Al-Isṭibdād wa-l-istiʿmār wa-ṭuruq muwājahatihimā ʿinda al-Kawākibī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1984).

70. Raz, "Interpretations of Kawakibī's Thought": 184–5.

71. Jān Dāya, *Al-Imām al-Kawākibī: Faṣl al-dīn ʿan al-dawla* (London: Dār Sūrāqiyā, 1988).

72. Introduction by Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī in Dāya, *Al-Imām al-Kawākibī*, pp. 7–15.

73. Samīr Abū Ḥamdān, *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī wa-falsafat al-istibdād* (Beirut: al-Sharikah al-ʿĀlamīyah lil-Kitāb, 1992), ch. 2.

74. Nazīh Kubbāra, *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī: Ḥayātuhu wa ʿaṣruhu wa-ārāʾuhu* (Tripoli, 1994), pp. 108–9.

75. This generalization applies to several of the writers mentioned above, including Jān Dāya, Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī, Nazīh Kubbāra, and Samīr Abū Ḥamdān. See also ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Hāshimī, *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, ʿAbd al-Ḥamid ibn Bādīs* (Beirut and Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1996), pp. 21–44; and Aḥmad al-Raḥbī, *Al-Afkār al-Siyāsiyya wa-l-ijtimāʿiyya ʿinda al-Kawākibī* (Damascus: al-Aḥālī, 2001).

76. Saʿd Zaghlūl al-Kawākibī in Dāya, *Al-Imām al-Kawākibī*, p. 9.

77. Raz, "Interpretations of Kawakibī's Thought": 186.

78. *Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* (London), January 28, 2005.

79. These convictions were expressed in conversations the author held between February and May 2004 with Māhir al-Sharīf and others at the French Institute of Arab Studies in Damascus.

80. See, for instance, Dāya, *Al-Imām al-Kawākibī*; Hamdān, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*; and Rihāb ‘Akkāwī, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī: al-Sayyid al-Furāṭī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 2003). See also Raz: “Interpretations of Kawakibi’s Thought”: 185–6.

81. The Forum for the Future is part of the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative that grew out of the summit. The Forum, intended to be an annual affair, provides a venue for a dialogue on political and economic reform between senior officials in the region and G8 countries. Its participants have also included representatives of the region’s business and civil society groups. A round of preparatory meetings for the Forum was held in New York September 23–4, 2004, and in Washington, DC, October 1, 2004. The first official Forum for the Future convened in December 2004; the second was held in Bahrain in November 2005. For descriptions, see U.S. Dept. of State, “Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Advancing Civil Society and Reform,” February 15, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/61403.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2006); G8 Research Group: “Broader Middle East & North Africa Initiative: Forum for the Future/Democracy Assistance Dialogue,” Final Compliance Report, July 1, 2005, [http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2004seaisland\\_final/01\\_2004\\_seaisland\\_final.pdf#search=%22%22unveiled%20by%20the%20united%20states%20at%20the%202004%22%22](http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2004seaisland_final/01_2004_seaisland_final.pdf#search=%22%22unveiled%20by%20the%20united%20states%20at%20the%202004%22%22) (accessed February 9, 2006); and Jeremy M. Sharp, Congressional Research Service, “Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview,” February 15, 2005, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/43293.pdf> (accessed December 4, 2005).

82. “Three Middle Eastern Imperatives: Statement by 40 MENA Civil Society Groups,” *The Daily Star* (Beirut), September 25, 2004, <http://www.mallat.com/DS25904.htm> (accessed January 18, 2005). All quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

83. “Partnership for Peace, Democracy and Development in the BMENA [Broader Middle East and North Africa]: Civil Society Statement for the ‘Forum for the Future,’” U.S. Dept. of State, September 24, 2004, [http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive\\_Index/Partnership\\_for\\_Peace\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Development\\_in\\_the\\_BMENA.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive_Index/Partnership_for_Peace_Democracy_and_Development_in_the_BMENA.html) (accessed January 22, 2005). All quotations in this paragraph are from this statement.

84. Among prominent Arab non-governmental organizations concerned with questions of democratic reform, see the reports of the Arab Reform Forum and the Arab Civil Forum.

85. Fatima Ali, “Tyranny and Knowledge: The Saudi Connection,” *Shia News*, June 16, 2002, <http://www.shianews.com/hi/articles/politics/0000255.php> (accessed March 25, 2005). Italics in original.

86. See, for example, articles in *Al-Nahār* (Beirut) by Muḥammad al-Ramihi on corruption in Kuwait (December 12, 2004) and by Ilyās Ma’lūf on censorship in Lebanon (December 1, 2004).

87. *Arab Human Development Report [AHDR] 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (New York: United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2002); *AHDR 2003: Building a Knowledge Society* (New York: UNDP, 2003); and *AHDR 2004: Toward Freedom in the Arab World* (New York: UNDP, 2005). The first two reports were co-sponsored by UNDP/Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). In addition to UNDP and AFESD, the third report was co-sponsored by the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations. The fourth installment in the series, subtitled *Empowerment of Arab Women*, was scheduled to be published in 2005, but had yet to appear by the end of the summer of 2006.

88. *AHDR 2004*, p. 2.

89. *AHDR 2004*, p. 63.

90. *AHDR 2003*, p. 173.

91. *AHDR 2003*, p. 141.

92. *AHDR* 2003, p. 142.

93. *AHDR* 2003, p. iii. From the foreword by Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, and one of the principal architects of the *AHDRs*.

94. *Ibid.* The 2003 *AHDR* also explicitly eschews an emphasis on external impediments to development: "Taking refuge in externalities weakens the resolve and undermines the capabilities required for self-reliant development. It also leads to underestimating the task of self-improvement upon which Arab dignity and the national, regional and international prospects of the region must be constructed" (p. 21).

95. *AHDR* 2004, pp. 142–3.

96. *AHDR* 2003, p. 12.

97. *AHDR* 2004, p. 5.

98. *AHDR* 2004, pp. 17, 135.

99. *AHDR* 2004, p. 8.

100. This is the subtitle of the 2003 *AHDR*.

101. *AHDR* 2003, p. 163.

102. *AHDR* 2003, p. 53.

103. *AHDR* 2003, p. 9.

104. *AHDR* 2003, p. 150.

105. This is the major theme of an entire chapter, "The Political Context," of *AHDR* 2003.

106. *AHDR* 2003, p. 172.

107. *AHDR* 2003, pp 151–2; *AHDR* 2004, pp. 171–2.

108. Al-Sharīf and al-Kawākibī, eds., *Tayyār al-iṣlāḥ*, pp. 266–7.

109. They include *Al-Istibdād wa-badā'iluhu fī fikr al-Kawākibī*, *Dirāsa* (Damascus: Ittihād al-Kuttāb al-ʿArab, 1992); *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila li-l-Kawākibī*; and *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād wa-maṣāriʿ al-istiʿbād: Dirāsa wa-taḥqīq* (Damascus: al-Awāʿil, 2003).

110. Ṭaḥḥān, *Al-Muthaqqaf wa-dimuqrāfiyyat al-ʿabid* (Damascus: al-Awāʿil, 2002), p. 22.

111. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.

112. *Ṭabāʿiʿ al-istibdād*, pp. 45–6.

113. *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), p. 97.

114. *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 20.

115. Private communication in 2004 and 2004 with Salām al-Kawākibī, Māhir al-Sharīf, and other scholars at the French Institute of Arab Studies, Damascus. The travails of civic groups in Syria are amply documented in recent reports by Amnesty International (AI) and the Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC). See AI, "Syria," *Amnesty International Report 2004*, <http://web.amnesty.org/report2004/syr-summary-eng>, and "Syria," *Amnesty International Report 2005*, <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/syr-summary-eng> (both accessed December 15, 2005); and SHRC, "Annual Report on Human Rights Situation in Syria 2004," <http://www.shrc.org.uk/data/pdf/ANNUALREPORT2004.pdf>, and "Annual Report on Human Rights Situation in Syria 2005," <http://www.shrc.org.uk/data/pdf/ANNUALREPORT2005.pdf> (accessed January 8, 2006). According to one activist, Farid N. Ghadry, president of the Reform Party of Syria, "Beginning in September 2003 . . . the Assad regime moved against the Kawakibi Forum, beginning a campaign of systematic harassment against Manjouneh [Mājid Manjūna] and the forum's board of directors. Having sent agents to report on the open forum discussions, [Hassan] Khalil [head of Syrian military intelligence] ordered his men to break down doors in the middle of the night and arrest almost all the reformers. Syrian security imprisoned many and tortured others; they murdered several dissidents." Ghadry, "Syrian Reform: What Lies Beneath," *Middle East*

*Quarterly* 12-1 (2005), <http://www.meforum.org/article/683> (accessed February 4, 2006). See also Volker Perthes, *Syria under Bashar Al-Asad: Modernisation and the Limits of Change*, Adelphi Paper 366, (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2004), pp. 7–26, 61–7; and Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2005).

116. *AHDR 2003*, p. iii. Similar observations can be found in al-Sharīf and al-Kawākibī, eds., *Tayyār al-iṣlāḥ*.

117. Reflecting on the combination of enthusiastic reactions in the West and negative responses on the part of many Arab critics to the 2002 *AHDR*, the 2003 *AHDR* acknowledges that “special interest groups might exploit their [the *AHDRs*] outspoken approach, to the detriment of Arabs. Indeed, the authors are well aware that their work might be misused or misinterpreted to serve the purposes of parties ... whose interests run counter to an Arab awakening” (*AHDR 2003*, p. iii). The authors of the 2004 *AHDR* open with a similar acknowledgment: “Unfortunately, as with other Arab reform initiatives, some forces outside the Arab world have used these Reports for their own purposes. This has led some Arabs to call for a halt to self-criticism in order to avoid giving others a pretext for interfering in Arab affairs” (*AHDR 2004*, p. 1).

118. This is one of the principal findings of the 2002 *AHDR*.