

# Inventing the Geography of Egyptian Nationalism (*Waṭanīya*)

A Review of Gamal Hamdan's *The Personality of Egypt*  
and his Personal History

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Introduction

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## ***Introduction***

Gamal Hamdan (Jamāl Ḥamdān: 1928-1993), known as the author of *The Personality of Egypt* (*Shakhṣīya Miṣr*), is one of the most distinguished nationalist thinkers after the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952. He attempted to establish the geography of Egyptian Nationalism (*waṭanīya*) by a unique method and through comprehensive encyclopedic descriptions. The question of “the Egyptian personality” (*al-shakhṣīya al-miṣrīya*) has been attracting Egyptian intellectuals as part of an inquiry into the national identity of Egypt since the 1920s. This voluminous book is considered one of the most eminent and impressive works to address this intellectual controversy. Its publication provoked great repercussions among the Egyptian intellectual society during the crisis caused by the country's defeat in the Six Day War of 1967.

Gamal Hamdan died in 1993 after the long and solitary life of intellectual “seclusion” he had lead after leaving his post at the university. He was obliged to choose this secluded life, facing difficulties in the era of socialist transformation by the nationalist authoritarian regime established after the 1952 July Revolution. His death was an unexpected blow to Egyptian intellectuals. They re-evaluated his works and admired his poor and honest life. He came to attract great respect from them as an exceptional and solitary intellectual who had kept a distance from both political and academic authorities, refusing to give in to the allure of oil money.

This essay aims to review Gamal Hamdan's *The Personality of Egypt*. But it will also give

attention to the author's personal history. It is my intention to examine the thoughts of this nationalist geographer of the political and social personality of Egypt in relation with his own personal history and experiences, within the society under the nationalist authoritarian regime in particular.

In this review of *The Personality of Egypt*, I will examine only four of the topics addressed in the comprehensive research plan of the personality of Egypt: homogeneity (*al-tajānus*), unity (*al-waḥda*), centralism (*al-markazīya*), and Pharaonic tyranny (*al-tughyān al-fira'ūnī*). I chose these topics because they constitute some of the main ideas discussed in his research plan, and are deeply related to the question of the historical origins of political authoritarianism in Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

### ***I. The Personal History of Gamal Hamdan and His Main Works***

#### **1. The Death of Gamal Hamdan and the Intellectual Crisis**

Gamal Hamdan died in solitude on April 17, 1993, in a humble apartment in the quarter of al-Dokki on the west side of the Nile River in Cairo.<sup>2</sup> The news of his death was a great blow to Egyptian intellectuals. They fervently started writing many memoirs and essays of condolence. To them, his death was a symbolic incident carrying a critical significance in their intellectual life.<sup>3</sup>

Besides these condolence essays, we found an article reporting a "terrorist" attempt to throw bombs at crowds attending the festival of *Shamm an-Nasim* at Aswan, in Upper Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Gamal Hamdan passed away during the *Shamm an-Nasim*, a festival from the Pharaonic age which also coincides with the Coptic Easter (*'īd al-qiyāma*). At this spring festival, both Muslim and Coptic Egyptians go out on picnics, especially on banks of the Nile, to smell the sweet

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on my article written in Japanese: "Centralism of Egypt: A Note of Gamal Hamdan's *The Personality of Egypt*," from *The Central Power and Regionalism in the Middle East* (Akira Goto and Hitoshi Suzuki, eds.), Institute of Developing Economies, 1997. I have written two other articles on the same topic: "Egyptian Intellectuals and the Multi-layered Culture: The Case of Gamal Hamdan's *The Personality of Egypt*," published in *Multi-layered Structure of West Asia*, Japan Center for Area Studies, 2003; and "To Know the Regional Thought: The World of an Egyptian Geographer, Gamal Hamdan," from *The Future Image of Asian Studies*, (Institute of Oriental Culture ed.), the University of Tokyo Press, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Gamal Hamdan was found dead in his kitchen after a butane gas bomb explosion (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 19, 1993). But some journals and magazines aroused doubts on the real cause of his death, indicating that it might have been a conspiracy (*al-Sha'b*, April 20, 1993; *al-Majalla*, May 4, 1993; *Rūz al-Yusūf*, May 17, 1993, among others). His funeral was conducted on April 18, 1993, at the 'Umar al-Makram mosque, a famous mosque near the Tahrir Square in the city center which had held funerals for many important persons (*Al-Ḥayāt*, April 19, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> I asked the Al-Mahrusa Center for Media Service and Information to collect essays and memoirs written on Gamal Hamdan in major journals and magazines. The total number of these articles reached one hundred and three until April 1994, a year after his death.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Ahrām*, April 20, 1993.

spring breeze. It seems not accidental that this eminent thinker who gave deep geographical and philosophical insight on the Nile died during this festival. In Upper Egypt in particular during those years, many attacks and incidents of harassment occurred on popular cultural activities-theatre, dancing, and the like-as the participants were accused of *bid'a* (heresy, contrary to Islam).<sup>5</sup>

The intellectual crisis in contemporary Egypt (and the Arab world) is exhibited in these violent attacks denouncing “non-Islamic” aspects in society. Gamal Hamdan was respected as an exceptionally brave and pure hearted “secularist” thinker. He showed clearly his strongly held position of secularism in his posthumous manuscripts: “Secularism (*al-‘almānīya*) is not the denouncement of religion, but the denouncement of fanaticism (*darwisha*). It advises that piety (*tadayyun*) act as a mediator between religion and this world (*al-dunyā*). Secularism is piety free of fanaticism and piety free of hysteria and radicalism,” and “Secularism is rationalism, neither more nor less.”<sup>6</sup>

The violence of radical Islamic movements increased in those years, especially since 1992. For example, the security forces’ suppression of radical Islamic groups was intensified in the slum areas of Greater Cairo (“the republic of *al-Gamā‘āt al-Islāmīya*” in the Imbaba district in particular) and Upper Egypt. One of most shocking incidents was the assassination of Farag Fawda, a liberal and secularist writer, who had strongly criticized political Islam.<sup>7</sup>

Gamal Hamdan condemned the phenomenon of political Islam in his posthumous manuscripts, using severe words: “The Islamic awakening, as referred to by radical groups, is nothing but the awakening of the dead or the dance of the slaughtered. It has not ceased for one or two centuries. In other words it is the ‘oily awakening’ (*ṣaḥwa naftīya*) revived by the crazy power of petroleum.” He pointed out the socio-economic change caused by the oil money boom since the 1970’s as a background of the re-emergence of political Islam. “Political Islam had emerged as a phenomenon in the past, in the nineteenth century in particular, as the result of political incapability; that is, the backwardness of civilization faced with the crisis of imperialism. Political Islam is a political reaction, a display of ignorance toward civilization and of religious *Jahiliya* (the pre-Islamic time of ignorance). In the twenty-first century, it will be a form of superstition inherited from backwardness and a terrible nightmare—not a pleasant dream.”<sup>8</sup> He also predicted that Islam would be regarded as an ideology antagonizing the West in place of Communism in the post-Cold War era, and criticized this idea.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For example, according to *Al-Ahrām*, April 6, 1992, “radicals” attacked a folk entertainment troupe showing an “immoral” dance at a *mawlid* (birthday festival) of a Sufi saint in Esna, Upper Egypt.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Muṣawwar*, April 15, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Faraj Fawdah, *qabla al-suqūt* (Before Downfall), Cairo: 1992; *al-irhāb* (Terrorism), Cairo, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> “*awraq jamāl ḥamdān*” (Gamal Hamdan’s Papers), *Al-Muṣawwar*, April 15, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Jamāl Ḥamdān [edited by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamdān], *ṣafḥāt min awraq-hu al-khāṣṣa tanshur li-awwal marra* (Pages from His Private Papers Published for the First Time), Cairo: Dār al-Ghadd al-‘Arabī Maktaba Madbūlī, 1996, p.115.

## 2. Gamal Hamdan and his Generation

The death of Gamal Hamdan invoked a big dispute among Egyptian intellectuals. *Al-Qāhira* (Cairo), a leading liberal cultural magazine, formed a special issue of Gamal Hamdan, “Gamal Hamdan in the Egyptian Culture.” Its editor and a leading thinker, Ghali Shukri, known as the author of books criticizing the Sadat regime<sup>10</sup> wrote the introductory essay “An Egyptian of Our Age” in this issue. “Our Age” means the age of the July Revolution both he and Gaman Hamdan belonged to, while he considers the intellectuals of the older generation “children of the 1919 Revolution.”<sup>11</sup>

All the other authors who contributed articles to this special issue may agree with this argument concerning the different generations of intellectuals. One of them, Hasan Hanafi, an innovative Islamic thinker, argues in his essay “Strategy of Colonialism and Liberation,” that Hamdan “belongs to the 1960’s,” the era of nationalist liberation, attempting to redefine liberation on the basis of *turāth* (intellectual heritage) in his aim to fulfill “the dream of the 1960s” in the field of geography.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to regard the different generations of intellectuals from the historical viewpoint and to view their relationship to economic and political powers as a means through which they defined themselves. Hamdan himself explains the role of intellectuals in the contemporary history of Egypt: after the age of revolution ended, the 1970’s became a reactionary age under the government of Sadat and “the revolution fell to the hands of the coalition of feudalism and capitalism instead of the coalition of intellectuals and the military [in the 1960’s].” Then when “this coalition ended its role, the military and capitalists formed a new coalition [after the 1980’s under the Mubarak regime].”<sup>13</sup>

Many intellectuals paid their respects to Gamal Hamdan not only because of his eminent intellectual body of work—considered masterpieces in the academic activities of their age—but also because of the consistency and integrity of his intellectual attitude toward the rapidly changing political and ideological trends. Mahmoud Abdel Fadil, an eminent scholar of radical economics, wrote in his collection of essays, *The Dialogue with the Future* (1995), “Gamal Hamdan was a still shining symbol in a society where many symbols collapsed and values and meaning disappeared. Gamal Hamdan will remain a symbol of resistance against the ‘era of oil’ (*al-ḥiqba al-naftīya*) in our history.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Shukri’s description, in “the age of the petro-dollar” (*zamān al-bitrūdulār*), where international conferences, airplanes, and the “ten-star hotels” were the norm for many

<sup>10</sup> Ghālī Shukrī, *al-thawra al-muḍadda fī miṣr* (The Counter-revolution in Egypt), Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘a, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Ghālī Shukrī, “*miṣrī min zamān-nā*,” *Al-Qāhira*, No.126, May 1993, p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Ḥasan Ḥanafī, “*istirāṭījīya al-isti‘mār wa al-tahrīr*,” *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>13</sup> Jamāl Ḥamdān, *shakḥṣīya miṣr* (1984), vol.3, p.62.

<sup>14</sup> Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Faḍīl, “*jamāl ḥamdān wa ramzīya al-mawqif*” (Gamal Hamdan and the symbolism of location), in *ḥiwār ma‘ al-mustaqbal*, (*Kitāb al-Hilāl*, No.531), Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, March 1995, p.78.

scholars, Hamdan spent the days of his honest and simple life in “a house more humble than the rooms of monks.” “Refusing to marry and create a family that would protect him from the pains of life,” he worked hard at his desk from twelve to eighteen hours a day, doing his own washing and cleaning, and being his own secretary in a small apartment of two rooms without so much as a transistor radio.<sup>15</sup>

Gamal Hamdan spent a life of “seclusion” in this humble apartment for thirty years since his resign from Cairo University in 1963. But his student, Abdel Fattah al-Ghunaymi, questions the description of his life as “seclusion” in his biographical book, *Dr. Gamal Hamdan in the Memory of History* (1993). Criticizing some newspaper and magazines articles, he points out that the door of Hamdan’s apartment was always open for any guest, and asserts that solitude (*al-in ‘izālīya*) is necessary for any scholar.<sup>16</sup>

However, his ascetic and righteous attitude toward political authorities and his refusal to accept any flattery and toadyism are important factors which lead Egyptian and Arab intellectuals to consider his “seclusion” in a positive light.<sup>17</sup> Yusuf al-Qa‘id, a leading novelist and one of Gamal Hamdan’s few friends, tells that Hamdan did not enter any government building after the Camp David Agreement.<sup>18</sup>

In his “secluded” life, Gamal Hamdan kept a distance from political despotism and vulgar social relations, but at the same time he did not lose his interest in contemporary society, repeatedly critiquing its problems in his writing. As I will discuss later, the main topic of *The Personality of Egypt* is to examine the tradition of autocratic rule as seen in modern Egypt, with its roots in the negative aspects of the Nasser regime in particular when he wrote its first edition in the 1960’s. His argument on this topic is rich with insight into the problem of democratization in the world today. And in the third volume of this encyclopedic book, “The Economic Personality,” he severely criticized the open door economic policy, by examining debt problems and economic dependency.

Both Hamdan’s “seclusion” from Egyptian society and his harsh criticism with regards to its problems are mutually connected. In other words, his “seclusion” is related to his academic attitude, his so-to-speak “national self-criticism,” as seen in his descriptions in *The Personality of Egypt*. It is impossible to describe the total image of this intellectual giant, even as a rough

<sup>15</sup> Shukrī, “*miṣrī min zamān-nā*,” p.6.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Maqlad al-Ghunaymī, *al-duktūr jamāl ḥamdān fi dhikra al-tārīkh*, Cairo: Dār ‘Aṭāwa li-Ṭibā‘, 1993, pp.48,134.

<sup>17</sup> al-Ghunaymī cites an example that Hamdan refused to meet a particular student any more since he brought sweets to get his favor (ibid., p.134).

<sup>18</sup> According to al-Ghunaymī, Hamdan refused to enter the building of the governmental publishing company any more and received his reward of the revised edition of *The Personality of Egypt* on the street outside of the building (ibid., p.144). He told me an episode that once President Mubarak sent his secretary to invite Hamdan, but he refused this invitation by writing on a small piece of paper only one word: “ ‘a‘tazir (I apologize)” (Interview with ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Maqlad al-Ghunaymī, March 31, 1996).

sketch, but I would like to indicate some hints to suggest a link between his own personality and “the personality of Egypt.” As an introduction to such an argument, I will describe briefly his personal history, especially the process whereby he chose a life of “seclusion” in particular, as documented by limited sources such as biographies written on him by the aforementioned al-Ghunaymi, and *The Holder of the Personality of Egypt and Characteristics of the Genius of Time* (1993) by his brother Abdel Hamid.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. A Brief Personal History of Gamal Hamdan

Gamal Hamdan, as mentioned above, belongs to the generation of intellectuals who experienced rapid changes caused by the 1952 Revolution. I will show his personal history briefly, but firstly I must confess that this review of his personal history is based solely on secondary materials such as biographies and condolence articles.

Gamal Hamdan (Jamāl Maḥmūd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān) was born on the 4th of February, 1928, in Nāy village of the al-Qaliyubiya Governorate about forty kilometers north of Cairo.<sup>20</sup> The Hamdan family is a typical middle class family from rural Egypt. The root of the Hamdan family descends from one Arab tribe, the Jadh dhām tribe, who came to Egypt and settled down at the time of the Islamic conquest.<sup>21</sup> Gamal’s father, Mahmud Hamdan, was born as the son of an ordinary farmer. But his intellectual capability was highly acknowledged by a *shaykh* (a teacher in Qur’an school) in the village and he was given the opportunity to study in al-Azhar, Cairo. He wanted to continue his studies to become a lawyer, but he was obliged to leave the school after he participated in nationalist demonstrations at the time of the 1919 Revolution. He abandoned this aspiration and became an Arabic teacher.<sup>22</sup> Gamal is the second son of Mahmud Hamdan. Each of his brothers is successful in different occupations as a writer, a professor of Islamic history in Paris, a major general in the army, and as a businessman.<sup>23</sup>

Gamal and his brothers grew up in the Shubra district, a popular quarter in northern Cairo. Before starting school, they began their learning at home-tutored by their father, an Azhar intellectual. According to al-Ghunaymi, this learning cultivated his “innovative capability” of the Arabic language. His father’s teaching also developed the self-discipline that was to support him in the days of studying abroad alone and during the thirty years his solitary academic life. The affectionate milieu of his typical middle class family fostered his sensitive,

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān, *ṣāḥib shakhṣīya miṣr wa malāmiḥ min ‘abqarīya al-zamān*, Cairo: Maktaba Madbūlī, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. pp.7-8, 10. His mother gave birth to Gamal in his grandfather’s house in this village after his elder sister died a premature death. According to al-Ghunaymī, his birthday is the 28th of February (al-Ghunaymī, op cit., p.17.).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.10. In this part, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān, professor in Islamic history teaching in France, described the history of villages of al-Qaliyubiya.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp.10-11.

<sup>23</sup> al-Ghunaymī, op cit., p.17.

benevolent, and pious personality before the revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Gamal enrolled in the Shubra Elementary School, where his father was a teacher and later schoolmaster. Gamal graduated at the age of eleven in 1939, and went to the al-Tawfiqiya Secondary School. He successfully passed his *Tawjihīya* examination (the baccalaureate examination) in 1944. His exam result was the sixth highest in the entire country. In the same graduating class as Gamal Hamdan were several leading figures in contemporary Egypt such as Subhi Abdel Hakim, the former chairman of the Shura Council, and Rif'at Mahgub, the former speaker of the People's Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

In 1944, Gamal Hamdan entered the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University at sixteen years old. He chose the Department of Geography. According to al-Ghunaymi, the reason was that he was good at illustrations and drawing maps, in addition to the fact that he knew a teacher of geography in the al-Tawfiqiya School and respected him.<sup>26</sup> Al-Ghunaymi explains that Gamal Hamdan was an outstandingly diligent student, devoting almost all his time to searching books in the library of the Department of Geography, but at the same time was a very sociable student participating in parties and trips, and writing articles in wall-newspapers with his friends. His friends had always proclaimed that the geography of Egypt started with Sulayman (Huzayyin) and ended with Hamdan.<sup>27</sup> Professor Sulayman Huzayyin was Hamdan's professor in the Department of Geography and, along with Shafiq Ghurbal, professor of history at Cairo University, a pioneer scholar in the humanities and social science in modern Egypt.<sup>28</sup> Gamal Hamdan was expected to play a leading role in Egyptian geography in the future, and he himself seemed confident of it.

After graduating from Cairo University in 1948, Gamal Hamdan became a research assistant of the Faculty of Arts due to his excellent academic abilities, and was given the opportunity to study abroad at Reading University in England.<sup>29</sup>

Five years later, he obtained his Ph.D. Degree in 1953. The theme of his Ph.D. dissertation was "The Population of the Nile Mid-Delta, Past and Present." In the same year, Gamal Hamdan began to work as lecturer in the Department of Geography of Faculty of Arts of Cairo University. According to his brother Abdel Hamid, he "found out that many changes were taking place in Egyptian society following the 1952 Revolution. He was looking forward to

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp.30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp.17-19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamdān, op cit., p.16.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Ghunaymī, op cit., pp.22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Sulaymān Ḥuzayyīn kept his position as president of the Egyptian Society of Geography for a long time. He is the author of *ḥaḍāra miṣr: arḍ al-kināna* (The Civilization of Egypt: The Land of the Kinana Tribe), Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> According to his brother, Gamal studied under the supervision of one professor who was much interested in Arab history and medieval Arab geography. This professor had planned to translate al-Maqrizi's works. Gamal Hamdan was a bachelor throughout his life, but in England he had met a girl whom he wished to marry. ('Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamdān, op cit., pp.32-33).

making a positive contribution to the development of Egyptian society through his intellectual and scientific efforts.”<sup>30</sup>

He was promoted to associate professor in 1958. But in 1963, after only five years, he suddenly resigned from the university. Several explanations have been made as to the reason of his resignation, but it is difficult to find a clear conclusion. One professor argued that Gamal Hamdan felt displeasure about the document of his promotion to professor. He got angry at a minor point that his name was listed after another associate professor who was promoted after him. When he gave a letter of resignation, the dean of the faculty tried in vain to persuade him by treating it as a temporary absence, but he was adamant.<sup>31</sup>

However, as al-Ghunaymi points out, it is necessary to consider the political situation of the time in which he decided his resignation. The process which led to his ultimate despair of university life and into “seclusion” was complex and delicate. Al-Ghunaymi writes, “He resigned from Cairo University by will, not forced by violence or threat,” that “he faced problems exceeding the limit of rationality and felt cornered if he were to stay at that place,” and that “intellectual terrorism pushed him out from the university.”<sup>32</sup>

In the years between 1961 and 1963 before his resignation, Egypt went through an experimental period of “socialist reform,” and as part of this reform “the control of universities by the regime was strengthened.” Al-Ghunaymi explains it as follows. “...For example, the director of administration of Cairo University was recruited from outside the university for the first time in its history. This position became to be filled by men from the military. In 1963, the year of Hamdan’s resignation, ‘a secret organization’ under the control of the Minister of Interior Affairs was organized in the national universities. After that, some university teachers started watching and spying their comrades. Others who had close relations to the authorities joined in the Arab Socialist Union and the Youth Organization. And teachers who did not join these organizations became silent and stopped speaking openly about matters.” During that time, in addition to Gamal Hamdan, three professors including the dean of the Faculty of Arts left Cairo University because of political reasons.<sup>33</sup>

Abdel Hamid continues to explain his brother’s relations to the Nasser regime in those days: “My brother started to notice the effects of political, social and cultural disorder shaking and disturbing the country. It seemed to him that whole political system of the revolution consisted of nothing but the strong centralization (*markazīya*) of power accompanied by the complete hegemony of the military. In that [centralization], personal relations (between *ahl al-thiqa*: trusty persons) and political relations are intermingled. *Shilal* (cliques or factions)

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<sup>30</sup> Saleh Hamdan, “Introduction,” in Gamal Hamdan (edited by Saleh Hamdan), *Gamal Hamdan Collected Works: Part (2)*, (Prism Book series 5), Cairo: Foreign Cultural Relations, Ministry of Culture, 2000, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> al-Ghunaymī, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

dominated the country and real democratic guarantees were diminished.”<sup>34</sup>

Within this political situation, his honest attitude incurred the displeasure of the political authorities. He openly criticized the policy of the government toward Sudan and refused a proposal asking him to be a councillor to the Islamic Conference (*al-Mu'tamar al-Islāmī*) that the government had organized.<sup>35</sup> In the words of his brother, Abdel Hamid, “dinosaurs” (*al-dināṣūrāt*) who were close to “certain persons” [who had political authority] ordered him to stop his lectures and harassed him. They ordered him to teach a lesson in cartography that used to be taught by young research assistants, and finally made the decision to dispatch him to teach in the Khartoum branch of Cairo University in Sudan.<sup>36</sup> Gamal Hamdan then attempted to study again in England. He believed that academic work was the only effective weapon with which to fight these “dinosaurs.” When his request was refused, he decided to leave the university.<sup>37</sup>

As for these “dinosaurs,” al-Ghunaymi also cited the remarks of one professor in his essay entitled “Terrorism and the Personality of Egypt”: “Scholars and agents and reptiles, who were both opportunists and bribed ones” are “the factors and reasons why Gamal Hamdan resigned.” And he adds, “[his resignation] was his sole method of revenge (*al-tha'r*) against the oppression (*ẓulm*) of those people, who were extremely inferior to him, and who treated him unjustly.”<sup>38</sup> His decision to resign was the result of his critical attitude towards “fundamentalists” who were filled with the faults (*'uyūb*) of society and always obeyed the decisions of organizations.

Al-Ghunaymi describes the personality of Gamal Hamdan when he was a university student, which was extremely different from those of his friends, who were “blind followers exhibiting adulation, inconstancy, and who clung to each other (*al-tawā'um aw al-talā'um aw al-talāhum*).”<sup>39</sup> Because of his fastidious and unyielding personality (or character), he could not accept these ugly characteristics of Egyptian society. These were traits of “the Egyptian personality” he typically found in his friends and “dinosaur” comrades in the university, as we will show later. It is worth noting that this ugly side of Egyptian society was cultivated in the relations between the masses and the political authority. In the university this situation appeared in a concentrated form, and seemed to compel him to “seclusion.” Abdel Hamid added: “With his rare, high sensibility, Hamdan found out he was unable to cope with the negative social events affecting his academic career.”<sup>40</sup> It seems that his ethical interest to define the Egyptian personality became a strong incentive for him to write a considerable

<sup>34</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamdān, op cit., p.39.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp.40-41. During his stay in Sudan, he wrote an article in English on the city of Khartoum. Ironically it became an opportunity for him to develop his study on Sudan and African states.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>38</sup> al-Ghunaymī, op cit., pp.42-43,45.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>40</sup> Saleh Hamdan, ibid.

number of his academic works.

However al-Ghunaymi mentioned, “It was beneficial for Egypt, its people, scholars and intellectuals that he decided to leave the university and to concentrate on scholarly activities secluded from the rotten society.” By his resignation, “He showed thousands of scholars and researchers an ideal model (*ṣūra*).”<sup>41</sup> Abdel Hamid explains, “He preferred to withdraw from the hustle and bustle of public life and willingly abandoned his academic career. Although Hamdan lived, physically, in voluntary almost hermit-like seclusion, he was most productive as a thinker and scholar. Apparently, this self-imposed solitude provided for him the right atmosphere for unceasing, uninterrupted and free mediation, research and innovation.”<sup>42</sup>

In his posthumous manuscripts, Gamal Hamdan presents his critical views on the academic situation in Egyptian universities. “No knowledge [can exist] without university! It is impossible that a distinguished scholar may work outside universities (or semi-university-like institutions like academies and research centers)...But it is a pity that when knowledge enters the university, it becomes converted into a mere occupation, it stops being knowledge and becomes a part of officialdom. University professors [become] nothing but officials of knowledge! Then knowledge suddenly becomes stifled into tradition. Geography in university is now the traditional geography of our ancestors: rigid, mummified, formalistic, and underdeveloped, it is basically ‘the work of a donkey’.”<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Main works of Gamal Hamdan

The following is a chronological list of Gamal Hamdan’s main works written in Arabic.

- 1958: “The Personality and Regional Unity of the Arab World,” in *Studies on the Arab World* (joint work)
- 1959: *Growth and Distribution of Population in Egypt; Patterns of Environments* (Second Edition: 1978)
- 1961: *Urban Geography* (Second Edition: 1971, Third Edition: 1978)
- 1963: *The Arab City;*  
*Colonialism and Liberation in the Arab World*
- 1964: *Arab Petroleum: A Study of Human Geography*
- 1966: *The New Africa: A Study of Geopolitics*
- 1967: *The Personality of Egypt* (Second Edition: 1970, Third Edition, in four volumes: 1980, 81, 84);  
*The Anthropological Jews*
- 1968: *The Strategy of Colonialism and Liberation* (Second Edition: 1982)

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<sup>41</sup> al-Ghunaymī, op cit., pp.44, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Saleh Hamdan, ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Jamāl Ḥamdān 1996, p.58.

- 1971: *The Contemporary Islamic World*  
 1972: *Between Europe and Asia: A Study in Geographic Counterparts*  
 1973: *The Arab Republic of Libya: A Study of Geopolitics*  
 1974: *6th October in the World Strategy*  
 1975: *The Suez Canal: Egypt's Pulsation;*  
       *New Africa*  
 1984: *The Egyptian Agricultural Map*  
 1993: *Cairo*

As for his works in English, after his death, his brother Abdel Hamid edited his English articles into two volumes: *Gamal Hamdan, Collected Works: Part One* for his studies on Egypt, and *Part Two* for his studies on Sudan, the Arab World, and Africa in 2000.<sup>44</sup>

Among these numerous books, the book which should be called his masterpiece is of course *The Personality of Egypt*. Until its publication in 1967, Gamal Hamdan was not well known in Egypt except within the circle of scholars.<sup>45</sup> *The Personality of Egypt* was published in July 1967, one month after the defeat of Arab states in the Third Middle East War (the Six Day War). This book provoked a great response among intellectuals, who were confused and depressed by the shock of the defeat. At the time of the “season of sadness,” they started to rethink the national identity of Egypt and to consider the reasons for their defeat in the contemporary Egyptian political and social system. Gamal Hamdan’s work encouraged them to engage in this intellectual inquiry because it contained both pride for the national identity and self-criticism for the actual situation of the nation. As I will refer later, this book became one of major works in the history of the controversy the Egyptian personality (*al-shakhsīya al-miṣrīya*), which has started in the 1920s.

As I showed in the list of his works, Gamal Hamdan dealt with various topics within the subject of geography. These can be organized systematically into the grand design of his research plan. After his death, some researchers attempted to clarify this structure of his research works. One of them, ‘Umar al-Faruq, in his book entitled *The Triplicity of Hamdan* (1995)<sup>46</sup> explains the triple structure of Hamdan’s studies as follows: (1) the personality of Egypt, (2) studies of the Arab World, and (3) the contemporary Islamic World.

In his discussion on the generations of Egyptian intellectuals, Ghali Shukri elucidates this triple structure of Hamdan’s works. He compares his and Hamdan’s generation (our generation) to the older generation before the 1952 Revolution. According to him, the latter are the “children of the 1919 Revolution” which stemmed from the *Nahḍa* (Arab intellectual

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<sup>44</sup> Gamal Hamdan (edited by Saleh Hamdan), *Gamal Hamdan Collected Works: Part (1), Part (2)*, (Prism Book series 4, 5), Cairo: Foreign Cultural Relations, Ministry of Culture, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Umar Fārūq, *thalāthīya ḥamdān*, (*Kitāb Hilāl*, No.533), Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, May 1995.

renaissance) movement in the beginning of the twentieth century. They tackled the intellectual question of searching the roots of Egyptian nationhood and reconciling its national intellectual heritage and the western civilization. Contrary to this question, “the *Nahḍa* of ‘our generation’ has been attempted in different spheres: that is, as an inquiry to solve contradictions between Egyptian Nationalism and Arab Nationalism, Arab Nationalism and Islam, and Islam and contemporary problems. In other words, it is to rethink mutual relations between Egypt, its Arabness (*‘urūba*), its Islam, and the age of humanism developing in the world.”<sup>47</sup>

Other researchers argue different interpretations of the theoretical structure of Hamdan’s studies. Muhammad Usfur points out three main topics in Hamdan’s works: (1) the personality of Egypt, (2) Islam and international politics, and (3) the strategy of colonialism and liberation.<sup>48</sup> Fathi Muṣaylahi classified three dimensions in the research history of Hamdan’s works: (1) scientific thinking (1953-64), (2) guided Egyptian nationalist (*waṭanī muwajjah*) thinking (1961-84), and (3) Arab nationalist (*qawmī*) thinking (1984-1993).<sup>49</sup>

Gamal Hamdan’s death was an extraordinary shock to Egyptian intellectuals. One reason was their aforementioned sympathy to his reclusive life. To them, it seemed to present an ethical model at a time of political despotism and the affluence of oil money. Further, hearing of his death, they might have remembered the impact of the first publication of *The Personality of Egypt* twenty-six years before. The intellectual crisis of the Arab world (and Egypt) is considered to stem from the defeat experienced in the 1967 War. They noticed that they were still unable to answer the intellectual question that Gamal Hamdan addressed by writing his book in the “season of sadness.”

## II. The Contents of *The Personality of Egypt*

### 1. The Methodology of “Regional Personality”: Site (*al-mawḍi‘*) and Situation (*al-mawqī‘*)

Before reviewing the contents of this book, let us look at its title, *The Personality of Egypt* (*shakhṣīya miṣr*), and the author’s geographical methodology concerning the question of “regional personality” (*shakhṣīya iqlīmīya*) in general. As mentioned before, this book is considered one of the eminent works addressing the controversy of the Egyptian personality (*al-shakhṣīya al-miṣrīya*). But Hamdan did not intend to write this book as a study of the Egyptian people’s personality, or any kind of study of so-called “national character.” In his terminology, the “personality of the Egyptian people” should be strictly differentiated from the “personality of Egypt” as a case study of one regional personality. “This is essentially a study of the personality of Egypt as a country or a region, not of the personality of the Egyptian

<sup>47</sup> Shukrī, op cit., p.9.

<sup>48</sup> Muḥammad ‘Uṣfur, “jamāl ḥamdān wa al-islām wa al-siyāsa” (Gamal Hamdan, Islam, and Politics), *al-Qāhira*, op cit., p.84.

<sup>49</sup> Fathī Muṣaylahī, “jamāl ḥamdān fī al-madrasa al-jūghrāfiya” (Gamal Hamdan in the Geographical School), *ibid.*, p.74.

people (*al-insān al-miṣrī*)." The reason is that "geography is 'the science of things', not 'the science of humans'." "The subject of the personality of human beings as a group in any location is deeply connected with the idea of 'national peculiarities' (*al-tawābi' al-qawmīya*)." And this idea of "[national] peculiarities" easily serves chauvinistic propaganda in cases such as Nazism and "the writings on Arabs and Egyptians by Israeli and Zionist 'researchers' after June [the June War in 1967] in particular" (*the Personality of Egypt*, Vol. I, pp.32-33: I-pp.32-33).

Hamdan explains the concept of "regional personality" in his geographical methodology in the beginning of the first volume of *The Personality of Egypt*. "Geography is, in the dominant trends in contemporary schools, 'aerial differentiation'; that is, the perception of major differences in parts and levels of the earth. Therefore it is natural that the summit of geography is the perception of regional personality (*shakhṣīyāt al-aqālīm*)." "This regional personality transcends a mere mathematical amalgamation of characteristics and the distribution of regions; that is, it exceeds a mere body (*jism*) of regions itself. It defines what characterizes an area (*minṭaqa*) and differentiates it from other areas. It is an attempt to approach 'genius loci' (*rūḥ al-makān*) to clarify 'its own ingenuity' (*'abqariyāt-hu al-dhātīya*) that define its hidden personality" (I- p.11).

Throughout his description of the regional personality of Egypt, Hamdan used a pair of key concepts: "site" (*al-mawḍi'*) and "situation" (*al-mawqī'*). He explains these two concepts in the introduction of this book.

"The general theory we use to interpret this regional personality is based on interaction — be it harmonious or contradictory — of two essential sides of its existence: site (*al-mawḍi'*) and situation (*al-mawqī'*). Site means an environment and its characteristics, its size, and its resources; that is, the inundatory riverine environment with its unique nature, the shape of valley (*jism al-wādī*), its form and its composition." "As for situation, it is a comparative characteristic (*ṣifa nisbīya*) that is decided in relation to the distribution of land, population and production in our region and is regulated by spatial connections attaching it. Site is a local, inner, tangible specialty, but situation is an invisible geometrical idea" (I-p.35).

"We can interpret the personality of our Egypt by using these two fundamental elements and their changing relationship. They are independent of each other; for example the size of the site [Egypt] has not always satisfied its decisive [important] situation in the cornerstone of the world. The former makes [Egypt] able to withstand its seclusion [from the world], but the latter makes [Egypt] actively seek close contact [with the outer world]. And when both elements come together, immediately they give rise to both political unification and violent centralism. The rein connecting them to each other is not only a completely domestic one but related to distant outer factors" (I -pp.35-36).

This argument seems to reflect Hamdan's critical opinion of contemporary Egypt, during the period of the Nasserist regime in particular. Egypt's situation forced the nation to bear the burden of playing a leading role in national liberation movements in the Arab world and the African continent, but these burdens sometimes exceeded her power and the resources

restricted by her site. This gap between her site and situation drove Egypt to defeat in the Six Day War and later the Camp David Agreement. Hamdan criticizes a one-sided and essentialist explanation as leading to the formation of the authoritarian regime in modern Egypt.

“Some foreign scholars characterized Egypt as a ‘land of paradoxes’ or a ‘land of anomalies’ by emphasizing the salient contrast between ancient vestiges and humble village houses, or between the fertile [Nile] valley and barren deserts, symbolizing the co-existence of life and death. While it is difficult to say that all of these views are superficial and partial, they can be safely said to be inappropriately narrow, only showing one aspect [of Egypt’s regional personality]. The same can be said of the country’s characterization as a ‘land of tyranny,’ and this primitive simplification may prove to be a disfigurement,” “Rather, like other regions, Egypt is characterized by many features, but it is the assemblage of these features that gives true uniqueness [to her personality]” (I-p.34).

In this argument concerning Egypt as a “land of tyranny,” Hamdan explains that he does not agree with basing the personality of Egypt on the concept of Pharaonic tyranny, as seen later. Rather, he seems to think that contemporary tyranny can be attributed to the historical contradiction between Egypt’s site and situation.

## **2. The Composition of *The Personality of Egypt: Its Chapters and its Main Themes***

Gamal Hamdan’s *The Personality of Egypt* was first published in 1967, and the second edition was published in 1970 with almost five hundreds pages.<sup>50</sup> Later he rewrote and enriched it into four volumes: the first volume (841 pages) in 1980, the second and third (1018 pages and 973 pages, respectively) in 1981, and the last (720 pages) in 1984. The four volumes total 3552 pages in all.

Comparing the first edition and the revised edition, we find not only an increase in its content and more detail in its descriptions, but changes in the composition of chapters and the arrangement of themes of the personality of Egypt. The composition of the first edition and the revised edition is as follows:

(The First Edition)

Introduction: On the Regional Personality

Chapter One: Homogeneity and Unity Based on Natural Homogeneity

Chapter Two: From Feudal Tyranny to Socialist Revolution

Chapter Three: Expansion but Centralism

Chapter Four: From Colonialism to Colony: Between Site and Situation

Chapter Five: From Civilizational Precedence to Backwardness

Chapter Six: Structure of Civilization and its Natural Basis

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<sup>50</sup> I knew the existence of the second edition from Mahmoud Abdel Fadil’s essay, ‘Abd al-Faḍīl, op.cit., p.66.

Chapter Seven: Variety of Dimensions

Chapter Eight: Continuity and Discontinuity: Pharaonism or Arabism

Chapter Nine: Egyptian Nationalism (*waṭanīya*) and Arab Nationalism (*qawmīya*)

(The Revised Edition)

Volume One

Introduction: On the Regional Personality

Part One: The Natural Personality of Egypt

Section One: From Geology to Geography

1. The Land of Egypt
2. Life History of the River
3. Historical Changes of the Nile
4. The Appearance of Egypt

Section Two: The Deserts

5. The Western Deserts
6. Regions of the Western Deserts
7. Regions of the Western Deserts (Continued)
8. The Eastern Deserts
9. Regions of the Eastern Deserts

10. Sinai

Section Three: The Nile Valley

11. Physiography of the River
12. Morphology of the Valley
13. The Valley and al-Faiyum
14. The Nile Delta

Volume Two

Part Two: The Human Personality of Egypt

Section Four: Homogeneity

15. Natural Homogeneity
16. Material Homogeneity
17. Homogeneity of Population
18. Homogeneity of Habitat
19. Human Homogeneity

Section Five: Geographical Constancy and Historical Variations

20. From Civilizational Precedence to Backwardness
21. Political Unity
22. From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution

Section Six: The Political Personality of Egypt

- 23. From Colonialism to Colony
- 24. Modern European Colonialism
- 25. The Strategic Personality of Egypt
- Section Seven: Structure of Civilization and its Natural Basis
- 26. The Heart of World: The Geographical Site of Egypt
- 27. The Gift of the Nile
- 28. Control of the Nile

Volume Three

Part Three: The Integral Personality of Egypt

Section Eight: The Economic Personality of Egypt

- 29. The Economic Map of Egypt
- 30. The Egyptian Agriculture from Map to Planning
- 31. From the Vertical Expansion
- 32. To the Horizontal Expansion
- 33. The Industrial Egypt
- 34. Industries in Egypt: Basic Agro-industry
- 35. Industries in Egypt: From the Chemical Industry to the Metalworking Industry
- 36. Mineral Resources and Metalworking Industry

Volume Four

Section Nine: The Map of Egyptian Society

- 37. Overcrowding without Immigration: The Population of Egypt
- 38. The Population of Egypt between Problem and Solution
- 39. Centralism in Spite of Expansion: Cairo of Egypt

Section Ten: Horizon of Time and Dimensions of Place

- 40. Plurality of Dimensions
- 41. Medium and Equilibrium
- 42. Continuity and Discontinuity

Section Eleven: Egypt and the Arab

- 43. Between Egyptian Nationalism and Arab Nationalism

As shown above, *The Personality of Egypt* was rewritten from the first edition, composed of only nine chapters, into the extensive revised edition composed of four volumes with three parts, eleven sections, and forty-three chapters. The main differences in the composition of these two editions are the following: the revised edition is divided into three parts: “Part One: The Natural Personality of Egypt” (Volume One), “Part Two: The Human Personality of Egypt” (Volume Two), and “Part Three: The Integral Personality of Egypt” (Volumes Three and Four). Of these three parts, almost completely rewritten are: “Part One: The Natural Personality of

Egypt”; “Section Eight: The Economic Personality of Egypt” (Volume Three, Part Three); and Chapters 37 and 38 of “Section Nine: The Map of Egyptian Society.” Other chapters in the first edition are rewritten extensively with the addition of more detailed descriptions, their position within sections and chapters being altered in the revised edition. The relation between the chapters in the first edition and the sections and chapters in the revised edition are as follows:

Chapter One in the first edition was moved to Section Four in the revised edition  
 Chapter Two was moved to Chapters 21 and 22 of Section Five  
 Chapter Three was moved to Section Nine  
 Chapter Four was moved to Section Six  
 Chapter Five was moved to Chapter 20 of Section Five  
 Chapter Six was moved to Section Seven  
 Chapter Seven was moved to Chapter 40 and 41 of Section Ten  
 Chapter Eight was moved to Chapter 42 of Section Ten  
 Chapter Nine was moved to Section Eleven.

It is important that the position of the chapters dealing with the main elements of the personality of Egypt — “Centralism” (or “Centrality”: *al-markazīya*) in particular — that I will review in this essay was changed in the two editions. For example, “Chapter Three: Expansion but Centralism” was moved back into Section Nine, Chapter 39, in Part Three. Also “Chapter Five: From Precedence of Civilization to Backwardness” was rewritten and moved forward into Section Five, Chapter 20, placed after Chapter 1 from the first edition and between the two parts corresponding to Chapter Two of the first edition.

In the first case, “Part Three” deals with the features of “integral personality,” followed by discussions of “natural personality” (Part One) and “human personality” (Part Two), such as economy, society (population), history, and nationalism. This discussion, in addition to the newly written Chapters 37 and 38, deals with the topic of “Expansion but Centralism” as one of the main problems of population distribution.

But in order to examine the logical relation between “Centralism (Centrality)” and “Homogeneity,” the sequence “Homogeneity” (*al-tajānus*), “Unity” (*al-waḥda*), and “Centralism” (*al-markazīya*) that Hamdan originally settled on in the first edition seems to be more understandable than that of the revised edition.

Therefore in this essay I will review the contents of *The Personality of Egypt* in the revised edition by reassembling its composition according to the original order: “Homogeneity,” “Unity” and “Centralism” in the following sections. But as I mention repeatedly, this review covers only a small part of this voluminous book; that is, a few topics of the grand-scale research plan of Gamal Hamdan.

In this plan, he shows “the most salient characteristics” of the personality of Egypt as follows (I-p.47):

- (1) Natural, material, civilizational, and human homogeneity
- (2) Natural and political unity
- (3) From civilizational precedence to backwardness
- (4) From colonialism to colony
- (5) From Pharaonic tyranny to socialist revolution
- (6) Outer natural basis of structure of civilization
- (7) Centralism in spite of expansion
- (8) Overcrowding without immigration
- (9) Plurality of dimensions
- (10) Medium and equilibrium
- (11) Continuity and discontinuity
- (12) Duality of nationalism: Egyptian Nationalism and Arab Nationalism

He mentions, “In order to define these features, we can not follow the traditional order of chapters in writing the natural and human geographies of Egypt” (ibid.). Rather, he distinguished the methodology of his own geography of the regional personality from that of conventional geography, and he attempted “a fusion of geography and history.” He thinks that “geography is an integral science,” “a bridge connecting natural and social sciences,” (I-p.14) and that “the conventional regional geography is a description of place, but the regional personality is a philosophy of place. The former is only a reporting geography, but the latter is super-geography, transcendental geography” (I-p.17). As mentioned above, *The Personality of Egypt* was designed as an attempt to “integrate and transcend” the conventional discipline of geography; therefore its contents have a unique order of topics distinguished from that of an ordinary textbook of geography.

Gamal Hamdan explains the contents of *The Personality of Egypt* as follows:

“Part One: The Natural Personality of Egypt” begins with a traditional description of natural geography, from a general description of the morphology of Egypt, then the basic two sides of its environment; that is, the Nile Valley and the deserts, and finally on to a more detailed study of all parts of Egypt (I-pp.47-49).

But in this study, in order to “grasp the spirit of the place and the hidden genius of country,” we must move from particularization (*al-takhṣīs*) to generalization (*al-ta'mīm*), from the parts to the total, from the “regions of Egypt” to “the region of Egypt” (in the medieval Arab expression, from “*kurāt miṣr*” to “*kura miṣr*”) (I-p.49).

By using “the old Arab perception,” while Part One is a study of “*taqwīm al-buldān*” (topography of countries) based on compilation (*al-ḥaṣr*), description (*al-waṣf*), and reporting (*al-taqrīr*), the following parts are a study of “*taqyīm al-buldān*” (assessment of countries), that is, weighing (*al-waẓn*), typification (*al-tamaththul*), and evaluation (*al-taqdīr*) (ibid.).

The latter study of grasping the total characteristics of “waṭan” (homeland) of Egypt (Part Two: The Human Personality of Egypt) begins with the analysis of “Homogeneity” (Section

Four) that has several dimensions: “Natural Homogeneity” of land and temperature (Chap. 15), “Material Homogeneity” of agriculture and crops (Chap. 16), “Homogeneity of Population” concerning the population distribution (Chap. 17), “Homogeneity of Habitat” concerning cities and villages (Chap. 18), and “Human Homogeneity” dealing with the origins and racial characteristics of the population composition (Chap.19). Then “from ‘Homogeneity’ we logically proceed to ‘Unity’” (Chap.21), to the political unity consisting of regional, national, linguistic, religious, and psychological, aspects, among others (ibid.).

Then follow historical descriptions documenting change: “From Civilizational Precedence to Backwardness” (Chap. 20), “From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution” (Chap.22), and “From Colonialism to Colony” (Chap. 23). The last chapter leads to the next two chapters of “Modern European Colonialism” (Chap. 24) and “The Strategic Personality of Egypt” (Chap. 25).

After discussing the political and strategic personality of Egypt (Section Six), we move to the conclusion of Part Two, “Structure of Civilization and its Natural Basis” (Section Seven), consisting of two factors, site: “The Heart of the World: The Geographical Site of Egypt” (Chap. 26) and situation: “The Gift of the Nile” (Chap.27) and “Control of the Nile” (Chap. 28) (I-pp.49-50).

Then, he says, “on this solid basis, we are automatically located on the road to studying the economic personality of Egypt (Section Eight),” and “from economy we logically move to society,” that is, to the discussion of the social personality of Egypt (Section Nine).

The discussion of social personality began with the population problem under the title “Overcrowding without Immigration” (Chap.37), then proceeded to the urban problem as part of the theme “Centralism in Spite of Expansion” (Chap.38). These are the first parts of Part Three addressing “The Economic Personality” (Section Eight) and “The Map of Egyptian Society” (Section Nine), and as he says, “we [move] with freedom and speed to the two circles of ‘Horizon of Time’ and ‘Dimensions of Place’ (Section Ten)” and finally to the last section on the relation between Egypt and the Arabs (Section Eleven) (I-p.50).

As mentioned above, I choose the four topics of homogeneity, unity, centralism, and Pharaonic tyranny from among twelve of “the most salient characteristics” of the personality of Egypt. And I will review his argument of these four topics by rearranging their order as mentioned before. The text which will be used for this review consists of the following sections from the revised edition:

- (1) Section Four: Homogeneity
- (2) Section Five, Chap. 21: Political Unity
- (3) Section Nine, Chap.39: Centralism in Spite of Expansion: Cairo of Egypt
- (4) Section Five, Chap. 22: From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution

### **III. Homogeneity**

As mentioned above, Hamdan starts discussing the personality of Egypt from the aspect of homogeneity (*al-tajānus*). Homogeneity is the basis of all the features of the personality of Egypt, giving consistency to the regional personality as a whole. Homogeneity has five dimensions: (1) the natural (*ṭabī'ī*), (2) the material (*mādī*), (3) the population (*'umrānī*), (4) habitat (*haḍarī*), and (5) the human (*basharī*). (1) Natural homogeneity is the basis of homogeneity of Egypt as a whole, which results in (2) material homogeneity in productive activities, agriculture in particular, depending on natural resources. Homogeneity in both (3) the population and (4) habitat are also strongly influenced by the natural environment, the Nile River in particular. Population describes the regional distribution of population ("human coverage": *al-ghīṭā' al-basharī*) in the land of Egypt. Habitat means residential forms of villages and cities.

After describing how people have built and expanded cities and villages on the land of Egypt, the author tries to explain (5) human homogeneity, the racial homogeneity of the people themselves.

In this section, I will review Hamdan's discussion of homogeneity by paying attention to its relation to the other main features of the personality of Egypt: political unity and centralism, as well as his description of the Nile. This section covers chapters 15 to 19 in Section Four (Part Two). I will list the contents of these chapters in detail, and then summarize their text.

#### **1. Natural Homogeneity**

The following is content of "Chapter 15: Natural Homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-ṭabī'ī*)" (II-pp.13-58) in detail:

- Chapter 15: Natural Homogeneity
  - (1) On Natural Geography
  - (2) Unity of Nature
  - 1. The Climate of Egypt
    - (1) Migratory, Continental, and Continual Climate
    - (2) On Balance
    - (3) Strategy of Climate
      - a. Summer
      - b. Winter
    - (4) Temperature Cycle
      - a. Summer
      - b. Winter

## (5) Rainfall Map

- a. Basic Characteristics
- b. Geographical Distribution
- c. Climate Zones of Egypt

According to Hamdan, “natural homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-ṭabī‘ī*)” is the core characteristic of the Egyptian environment. The Egyptian environment is summarized in the description “the valley (*al-wādī*) as a whole becomes a unit of inundation.” The river formed a single valley, and the river is the fundamental regulator of the natural landscape of Egypt. Therefore it is the Nile that bestows the land of Egypt its homogeneity (II-p.13).

As a western scholar argues, Egypt is “a country dramatically separated” between the Nile valley and the deserts. Compared to this apparent disparity, the disparity between Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta seems only secondary in significance. However, in spite of this disparity between the Nile valley and the deserts, we should not consider that the nature of Egypt is characterized by a “two-toned” (*zweiklang: al-naghma al-thunā‘īya*) structure. Rather, if we take into consideration the life in the land of Egypt, that is, as “the peopled Egypt” (*miṣr al-ma‘mūra*), Egypt must be considered a “monotone” (*einklang: al-naghma al-wāḥida*) country, because it has a complete environmental unity based on the inundation of the Nile (II-pp.13-14).

Homogeneity, or the process of homogenization (*al-tajnīs*), originates in the formation of the river itself, basically its alluvial nature. All the processes of formation of alluviums are subject to the rule of the natural and mechanical slow graduation (*al-tadarruj*). Homogeneity is the basic rule for the formation of the Egyptian environment, and graduation is its complementary rule (II-p.14).

As its content shows, most of this chapter is devoted to the topic of “climate homogeneity.” The author has already described in “Part One: The Natural Personality of Egypt” that the Nile characterizes the homogeneity of Egypt’s landscape. Hamdan describes the dual structure of Egypt’s climate: “The Mediterranean Climate” and “the Desert Climate.” But he concludes that “homogeneity of climate” dominates in Egypt by asserting that the former covers only the coastal area, whereas the latter the main body (*jull jism*) of Egypt itself (II-p.58).

## 2. Material Homogeneity

The contents of “Chapter 16: Material Homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-mādī*)” (II-pp.59-165) are as follows:

### Chapter 16: Material Homogeneity

1. The Agricultural Map of Egypt
2. Ecological Conditions
  - (1) Soil

- (2) Irrigation
- (3) Temperature
- (4) Population
- (5) Cities
- 3. The Composition of Egyptian Agriculture
  - (1) Crop Pyramid
  - (2) Crops Between Dispersion and Concentration
  - (3) Measure of Homogeneity
    - a. Density
    - b. Concentration
    - c. Crop Curve
    - d. Accumulation Rate
- 4. Foundation of Homogeneity
  - (1) Density of Agriculture
  - (2) Crop Dynamics
    - a. New Crops
    - b. Extension and Shrinking
    - c. Crop Migration
  - (3) Distribution of Crops
    - a. Compounding Features
    - b. Profile of Crops
- 5. Agricultural Zone of Egypt
  - (1) Basis of Agricultural Classification
    - a. Fundamental Quartet
    - b. Local Crops
    - c. Fruit Crops
    - d. Group of Miscellaneous Crops
- 6. Agricultural Personalities of Governorates: Typological Study of Development
  - (1) Extreme City Type
    - a. Alexandria
    - b. Ismailiya and Suez
  - (2) Central City Type
    - a. al-Giza
    - b. al-Qaliyubiya
    - c. al-Buhaira
  - (3) Standard Developmental Type
    - a. al-Munufiya — al-Faiyum
    - b. Damietta
    - c. al-Daqhaliya — Kafr al-Shaykh

- d. al-Sharqiya — al-Gharbiya
- (4) Standard Traditional Type
  - a. Bani Suwayf
  - b. al-Miniya — Asiyut
  - c. Suhag
- (5) Non-Standard Traditional Type
- 7. Geographical Agricultural Zones
  - (1) North Delta
    - a. al-Barrari Complex
    - b. Pocket of Zone
  - (2) Middle Delta
  - (3) South Delta
  - (4) Triangle of Capital
  - (5) Al-Faiyum
  - (6) North Upper Egypt
  - (7) Middle Upper Egypt
  - (8) The Southernmost

In this chapter the author attempts to detect material homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-mādī*): the homogeneity of productive activities, mainly agricultural production, conducted on the basis of the aforementioned natural homogeneity. At the beginning, he points out the influence of natural homogeneity analyzed in the preceding chapter — the homogeneity of climate in particular — to agricultural production. Then in Section 2, he explains the ecological conditions for agricultural production in succession: soil, irrigation, temperature, population, and cities. It is interesting that the author includes under “ecological” conditions, human elements such as population density and proximity to cities that affect distribution of agricultural labor forces and demand of agricultural products. Among these ecological conditions, the description of irrigation is most noteworthy.

The author asserts that homogeneity in Egyptian agriculture has been based on homogeneity of irrigation. This homogeneity was most powerful and salient in the time of basin irrigation (the traditional irrigation system using natural inundation of the Nile, which had developed since Pharaonic times). Since the nineteenth century, perennial canal irrigation came to substitute basin irrigation. This modernization of irrigation would have been expected to promote differentiation and disparity in the agricultural map of Egypt. However, what actually happened was that this modern irrigation technology reduced geographical differences in Egyptian agriculture by providing the benefit of irrigation to water-scarce areas. It is the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1970 that completed the process of homogenization of agricultural production based on modern irrigation technology (II-pp.62-63).

The homogeneity of Egyptian agriculture was the result of irrigation taking the place of

rainfall, and thus redrawing the rainfall map. Consequently in the valley, “the geography of Egypt was almost transformed into hydrology” (II-p.63).

On the basis of these ecological conditions of agricultural production, the author analyzes the details of the regional structure of Egyptian agriculture by using the “crop pyramid” model that shows the regional distribution of cropped areas by each crop. Through this analysis based on both (1) “measure of concentration” (*miqyās al-tarakkuz*): the composition of cropped area by kind of crops in each governorate and (2) “measure of density” (*miqyās al-takāthuf*): the distribution of crop area of each crop by governorate, he concludes that he can find homogeneity in Egyptian agriculture. It is the conclusion that there is salient homogeneity in the distribution of four main crops: *berseem* (Egyptian clover), wheat, maize, and cotton (II-p.92).

Hamdan uses the combination of these four crops, named the “fundamental quartet” (*al-rubā’iyya al-qā’idīya*), as the main criteria for the classification of Egypt’s agricultural zones. The share of total of crop area of these main four crops (“fundamental quartet”) in each governorate fluctuated between 40.4% in Alexandria and 89.4% in Suhag in Upper Egypt. But he asserts that the former is an exceptional case of the “extreme city type” agriculture and that the “fundamental quartet” provides basic homogeneity to Egyptian agriculture (II-pp.119-120).

His strong preference to seeking homogeneity using the model of the “fundamental quartet” crops might remind Japanese readers of a traditional discourse on Japanese culture stressing the central role of rice cultivation in Japanese society. The author seems to explain the qualitative variation of crop distribution as a problem of quantitative variation by the calculation of cropped areas. He actually “invented” the discourse of homogeneity by using the aforementioned “graduation” rule: Regional differences can be interpreted as quantitative variation in a homogeneous entity.

Hamdan points out two conditions for the homogeneity of Egyptian agriculture (“foundation of homogeneity”): (1) “density of agriculture” and (2) “crop dynamics.” The “density of agriculture” can be calculated by the ratio of land use (ratio of crop area to cultivated area). This ratio differs in each governorate by between 180% and 220%. He concludes that “the Egyptian land is almost one field”; that is, a field with the same ratio of density (II- pp.105-107).

The term “crop dynamics” refers to the migratory movement of crops such as in the case of new crops being introduced. For example, maize, one of new crops introduced in modern times, moved from the Nile Delta to Upper Egypt as usual, but in some cases of traditional crops such as lentils moved to the south when pushed out by the development of the perennial irrigation system from the north. The author concludes that these movements of crops eventually contributed to the homogenizing process of Egyptian agriculture (II-pp.108-112).

In the latter half of this chapter, Hamdan describes the characteristics of agricultural production in each governorate and agricultural zones by using the “fundamental quartet” as

the main criteria, but in addition to this he uses the crop ratio of rice and fruits as the second criteria. He classifies five types of “agricultural development patterns”: (a) the “extreme city” type with a low ratio of the “fundamental quartet” and a high ratio of fruits; (b) the “central city” type, whose ratio of the “fundamental quartet” is higher than (a) and ratio of fruit is not high like (a); (c) the “standard developmental” type between the rural and urban types, with a high rate of subsistence food crops in the “fundamental quartet” and a high rate of rice cultivation in northern governorates; (d) the “standard traditional” type: northern and middle Upper Egypt, with its high ratio of the “fundamental quartet” between 75 and 90%, growing basic food crops (wheat and maize) in particular because of its high population density, and with a low ratio of fruits; (e) the “non-standard” traditional type: found in the southernmost governorates (Qena and Aswan), it lacks of main crops in the “fundamental quartet” (cotton and *berseem*), with a high rate of miscellaneous crops like sugarcane (II-pp.125-148).

### 3. Homogeneity of Population

The following is a detailed account of the contents of “Chapter 17: Homogeneity of Population (*al-tajānus al-‘umrānī*)” (II-pp.166-211).

#### Chapter 17. Homogeneity of Population

##### 1. Human Coverage

- (1) Degree of Homogeneity
- (2) Level of Density
- (3) Type of Density: Upper Egypt
  - a. The South
  - b. The Middle
  - c. The North
  - d. Profile of Upper Egypt
- (4) The Delta
  - a. The Triangle Summit
  - b. The Middle Area
  - c. The North Area
  - d. Five Pivotal Lines
  - e. Network of Relation and Ecological Declination

##### 2. The Geographical River

- (1) Population Density and Distribution of Cities
  - a. Location of River
- (2) The Nile and Morphology of Cities
  - a. Social Topography of Cairo
  - b. The Nile and Pivotal Cities
- (3) Human Morphology of Egypt

The third dimension of homogeneity is the homogeneity of population. In this review, I translate *'umrān* as “population” and *ḥaḍāra* as “habitat.” As is well known in the case of Ibn Khaldun’s terminology in *al-muqaddima*, both have the meaning of “civilization” in certain usages. The author uses *'umrān* to mean the distribution of population and *ḥaḍāra*, the forms of cities and villages.

As with the important features of Egypt’s personality, it is the Nile that most decisively influences homogeneity within the population distribution as well. The Nile brought life to Egypt, and provides transportation to distribute these lives throughout the land on the surface of its waters. It is responsible for the “human coverage” (*al-ghitā' al-basharī*) within the land of Egypt (II-p.166).

In “Section 1: Human Coverage,” the author analyzes the variation of “human coverage”: the population density of governorates other than Cairo. He found that Upper Egypt has a higher population density as well as homogeneity of the population density than the Delta does. Also, in the case of the Delta, population density changes depending on altitude; that is, we can see a tendency that southern governorates have a higher population density than northern ones. Hamdan asserts a correlation between population density and altitude, or in other words between population density and land graduation that is formed by the flow of the Nile (II-pp.193-198). As with the other cases, the Nile gives homogeneity to the population density of Egypt. The rule of graduation plays an important complementary role in this homogenization process.

In “Section 2: The Geographical River” (*al-nahr al-jūghrāfī*), the author asserts that the river regulates the distribution of population units (villages and cities) and their mass as well as their density. While the scale of small cities are closely related to the density of their population, the formation of large cities (over fifty thousand people) depends more on functions of inter-city networks, such as administrative services of the central government. As a result, the population of large cities in Upper Egypt is distributed around clusters 100 kilometers apart, and in the Delta, 50 kilometers. In spite of this difference, it is the river that bears the most fundamental influence on all cities. The Nile bestows homogeneity to city-networks as it does in the case of “human coverage” (II-pp.198-202).

Hamdan looks at the morphology of cities through the homogeneity of city-networks, focusing on influences of the “site of the river” (*al-mawqī' al-nahrī*) as in riverbanks and junction points. In this argument of the morphology of cities, the influence of the river on “social topography” (*tūbūghrāfīya ijtimā'īya*) is indicative because the residential composition based on income strata and the regional distribution of city functions are closely related to distance from river (II-pp.204-209).

The Nile is the most important player in composing the phenomena of “population” (*'umrān*) as a whole. It regulates population distribution, population density, scales of cities, distances between cities, and even the scale of villages, and influences residential composition in cities and geographical distribution of class composition (II-pp. 209-211).

#### 4. Homogeneity of Habitat

The following are the contents of “Chapter 18: Homogeneity of Habitat (*al-tajānus al-ḥadarī*)” (II-pp.212-254).

##### Chapter 18. Homogeneity of Habitat

##### 1. The Egyptian Village

###### (1) Anatomy of the Egyptian Village

- a. Man-made Hills
- b. Circular Shapes
- c. Clustered Housing
- d. Plans without Planning
- e. Fission of the Village: Families of Names

###### (2) The *'Izba* Revolution

- a. the Nature of *'Izba*
- b. The March of *'Izbas*
- c. Village and *'Izba*, or Agglomeration vs. Scattered
- d. Return to the Beginning

##### 2. The Egyptian City

###### (1) Development and Growth

- a. Ancient Form
- b. The First Planning
- c. The Forced Planning
- d. Complex Planning

###### (2) Morphology of the Egyptian City: Old City

- a. Housing Area
- b. The Medieval City
- c. Decline of Old City

###### (3) Modern City

- a. Structure and Formation
- b. Northern “Bahri” Location
- c. Commercial Center
- d. Residential Function
- e. Administration
- f. Services
- g. Industry
- h. Urban Personality

Homogeneity of habitat can be observed both in cities and villages in Egypt. In Section 1, the author explains the homogeneity of a traditional village (*qarya*) in Egypt. He writes that

villages are constructed on man-made hills for protection from the annual inundation of the Nile, and that for this reason, in most cases are round in formation. Village alleys (some are blind alleys) radiate from the center of the circle, where a mosque is sometimes built. Hamdan calls this type of village plan structured with radial alleys as a “plan without planning” (*khiṭṭa bi-lā takhīṭ*). In this circular village, houses were clustered like anthills. These houses are similar to each other in shape, featuring northward windows and building materials such as sun-dried brick (II- pp.212-218).

The modernization process began to change the shape of this traditional village. The aforementioned transformation of the irrigation system and the introduction of private land ownership resulted in the building of new types of villages. Generally referred to as *‘izba*, these new villages were built on newly reclaimed agricultural land brought by the perennial irrigation system. It is sometimes constructed as a daughter village divided from an original village (*qarya*). The author calls the mass construction of these new villages as “the *‘Izba* Revolution.” New villages do not need any more man-made hills and other considerations for security to be constructed against inundation. In *‘izbas*, tenant farmers’ houses in modern standardized form are built by landowners of new agricultural land for cotton cultivation. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the “march” of the construction of *‘izba* started from the north of the Delta to the south, and the landscape of rural Egypt changed rapidly (II- pp.220-223).

However, as time passed, the shape of *‘izba* changed from its original standard style to a more traditional village style equipped with mosques and other community institutions. At the same time, traditional villages (*qarya*) also came to replace new forms of building. As a result, we find the phenomenon of a “return to the beginning,” that is, a return to homogeneity in village formation in the three-layered structure: “independent house — *‘izba* — village (*qarya*).” In other words, the new duality of “*qarya* — *‘izba*” became the basis of homogeneity of the Egyptian village (II- pp.223-227).

In Section 2, the author asserts that he can draw a similar conclusion on the homogeneity of cities in Egypt. The modernization process did not ruin the homogeneity of cities, but rather created a new pattern of homogeneity.

According to him, dwelling forms in both cities and villages within any country share similar characteristics. This is, so to speak, the unique personality of each country’s housing forms. But urbanization in modern times rapidly changes the original dwelling form of cities that was shared by villages in the same country. Hamdan compares the original “ancient cities” to the modern cities that have been constructed according to modern city planning since Muhammad ‘Ali’s era. He concludes that the modern Egyptian cities came to be characterized by a similar complex form. This form is composed of two parts: (1) old city quarters with its classic round shape and (2) the planned modern city with its quadrangle shape (II-pp.228-233).

The personality of Egyptian cities has preserved its own homogeneity in the transitional process from the ancient form to the modern complex form. In this meaning, cities in

Egypt share a unique personality distinguishable from cities in other countries. In fact, it is remarkable that each city in Egypt almost lacks its own personality distinguished from others (II-pp.228-233). The characteristics of a weak personality of each city in Egypt, local cities in particular, is deeply related to the problem of the centralism of Egypt, the superiority of Cairo, that will be discussed later.

## 5. Human Homogeneity

The following are the contents of “Chapter 19: Human Homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-basharī*)” (II-pp.255-359).

### Chapter 19. Human Homogeneity

#### 1. The Racial History of Ancient Egypt

- (1) Human Being in the Stone Age
  - a. The Old Stone Age
  - b. The New Stone Age
- (2) Before the Ancient Dynasties
- (3) Ancient Egyptians
  - a. A Theory of their Origins: The Eastern Hamite
  - b. The Objection
- (4) Physical Anthropology
  - a. Egyptians before the Ancient Dynasties
  - b. Egyptians in the Era of the Ancient Dynasties: Pharaonic Egypt

#### 2. Modern Racial History

- (1) Homogeneity and Homogenization
- (2) Invasion
  - a. Invasion: Immigration of Greeks
  - b. Medieval Ages
- (3) Immigrations
  - a. Hyksos
  - b. Jews
- (4) The Arabs
  - a. Anthropology of Arabisation
  - b Stages of Immigrations
  - c. Distribution Map
  - d. General Assessment

#### 3. Racial Personality of Egypt

- (1) Basic Racial Formation
  - a. Ancient Basic Formation in Prehistoric Times
  - b. Three Formative Periods

- (2) Secondary Influencing Factors
  - a. Historic Human Basin
  - b. Anthropology of Names
- (3) Geographical Pattern of Human Requisites
  - a. Human Periods Turning Back of Hand on the Clock
  - b. Anthropological “Ventilator”
  - c. North East as the Center of Gravity
- (4) Mechanism of Homogeneity: Absorption against Drainage
  - a. Entry but No Exodus
  - b. Kingdom of Absorption
  - c. Factors of Filtration and Absorption
- (5) Geographical Mould and Racial Mould
  - a. Closed Tube not Closed Box
  - b. Firmness but No Iron Cage
  - c. Mixture but Continuity of Homogeneity
- 4. Our Egyptians: Contemporary Egypt
  - (1) Egyptian of the Valley
    - a. The Total Map
    - b. Local Details
    - c. Egyptian Nubians
  - (2) Inhabitants of the Deserts
    - a. The Eastern Deserts
    - b. The Western Deserts
- 5. Profile Compared
  - a. Egypt and India
  - b. Egypt and Italy
  - c. Egypt and Britain

The author launches a stimulating and controversial argument on the racial homogeneity of Egyptians in this chapter dealing with human homogeneity (*al-tajānus al-basharī*), one dimension of homogeneity in the personality of Egypt.

At beginning of this chapter, Hamdan emphasizes that Egypt is not the cradle of humanity, and rather that Egyptians as a nation (*sha‘b*) are formed as a composition of different peoples coming from other various areas (II-p.257). In Sections 1 and 2, he compares the ancient Egyptians and the modern Egyptians. In his argument, the “ancient” time is the prehistory and pharaonic age and the “modern times” begin after this age. As showed in the detailed list of contents, in the former he argues different racial theories such as the East Hamite theory, and in the latter he describes the process of racial homogenization, that is, the assimilation of different peoples coming from outside the country.

It is interesting that he classifies the entry of foreign peoples under either invasion (*ghaz'*) or immigration (*hijra*). The former denotes military aggression and influenced only part of the cities, but the latter had a great influence on rural areas (II- p.279). While the entry of Greeks was an invasion, the entries of Hyksos, Jews and Arabs are instances of immigration. Needless to say, the most important among these was the Arab immigration. He describes the influence of this migration as the “anthropology of Arabisation (*ta'rib*)”. One of the distinctive points in this argument is that the Arabisation of Egypt started even before the arrival of Islam through the immigration of Arab tribes (II-p.298). Here the author outlines a preliminary argument on the problem of the relation between Egyptian Nationalism (*waṭanīya*) and Arab Nationalism (*qawmīya*) in the conclusive chapter in Volume Four.

Hamdan gives a conclusive argument on the racial homogeneity of Egyptians in “Section 3: the Racial Personality of Egypt” (*shakhṣīya miṣr al-jinsīya*). He classifies the racial formation (*al-takwīn al-jinsī*) of Egyptians into three stages: (1) the stage before ancient dynasties, (2) Arabs conquest in the seventh century, and (3) the waves of Arab tribes (Bani Hilal and Bani Salim) in the eleventh century. The flows of races entered Egypt through the main “anthropological ventilator,” the northwestern entrance. However, the racial homogeneity of Egypt was not damaged by immigration of different peoples in its long history. Egypt is, so to speak, a “kingdom of absorption” (*mamlaka al-imiṣāṣ*) that has “entry but no exodus.” The author explains this continuity of racial homogeneity, the basis of the “mechanism of homogeneity,” by a unique geographical mould (*qālab*) of Egypt. This mould is based on the contrast of attraction towards the fertile river and the surrounding deserts discouraging movement away from the river. In this unique geographical structure, population flows in easily, but its outflow faces difficulties (II-pp.315-318). In addition to the function of the deserts disconnecting the area from the outside, the author points out the “filtration and absorption” of different races into the huge scale of the Egyptian population, and the phenomenon of endogamy at local and regional levels (II-pp.318-320). As a result, Egypt is likened to not a “sealed box,” but a “sealed tube,” with “firmness but no iron cage” (II-pp.320-324).

I will skip a review of “Section 4: Our Egyptians: Contemporary Egypt” and “Section 5: Profiles Compared.” But the author’s analysis of Bedouins and the Nubians in Section 4 are controversial. Both groups of people seem to have their own self-perception distinguished from the Egyptians on the Nile. The author emphasizes the Arabisation of Nubian people, and that the Bedouin tribes are proud of their genuine Arab origin.<sup>51</sup> In Section 5, he shows an

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<sup>51</sup> Once I had a chance to discuss *The Personality of Egypt* with a Nubian intellectual. He told me that he felt a tone of contempt toward Nubians in the description of this book, and also asserted that a theory could be argued similar to Hamdan’s on the personality of Nubia, focusing on the central role of the Nile in creating this regional personality. As for Bedouins, it is well known that they have pride in their identity as pure Arabs and show their contempt toward Egyptians in the Nile valley as “*fallahin*” (peasants). See Leila Abu-Luhgod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, Berkeley,

interesting argument of different racial formations by comparing the geographical mould of Egypt with those of India, Italy and Britain.

We should note that the author does not write in the theoretical framework of physical anthropology in the strict sense. In my understanding, homogeneity in his argument does not mean uniformity. He emphasizes the dynamism of the homogenization process, in which the Nile plays a crucial role in creating homogeneity in the personality of Egypt. In the argument of human homogeneity, the idea of homogenization comes to resemble the assimilation of peoples coming to Egypt in its long history. The author, as “a geographer of *watanīya* (Egyptian nationalism)” attempted to reinvent the idea of homogeneity of the people of the nation state of Egypt.

#### ***IV. Unity, Centralism, and Pharaonic Tyranny***

This section reviews the author’s analysis of unity, centralism, and Pharaonic tyranny. Together with the concept of homogeneity reviewed above, these are elemental and interrelated features constituting the personality of Egypt. In order to examine these themes, I will review three chapters: “Chapter 21: Political Unity,” “Chapter 22: From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution” (Part Two Section Five) and “Chapter 39: Centralism in Spite of Expansion: Cairo of Egypt” (Part Three Section Nine).

##### **1. Unity**

The following are the contents of “Chapter 21: Political Unity (*al-waḥda al-siyāsīya*)” (II-pp.457-535).

###### Chapter 21: Political Unity

###### 1. Political Homeland (*al-waṭan al-siyāsī*)

###### (1) The Natural Basis of the Political Homeland

###### (2) Factors of Natural Unity

###### a. From Outside

###### b. From Inside

###### 1) Structural Unity

###### 2) Functional Unity

###### (3) Development of Political Unity

###### a. Stages of Development

###### b. Significance of Development

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University of California Press, 1986. Hamdan discusses Jews, another important “ethnic” group, in *al-yahūd al-anthrūbūlūjīya* (The Anthropological Jews), Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa al-Nashr, 1967.

- (4) The North and the South
- (5) Between Nation (*umma*) and State
- (6) Is Political Homeland Natural or Relative?
- (7) Natural Political Homeland
  - a. Matured Political Landscape
  - b. Unified Political Existence
  - c. Stable Political Plot
- 2. Political Border
  - (1) Development of Border
    - a. New Oldness
    - b. Artificial Nature
  - (2) The Geography of Border
    - a. Total Area
    - b. The South Border
    - c. The West Border
    - d. The East Border
- 3. National Unity
  - (1) Linguistic Unity
  - (2) Religious Unity
    - a. Scale and Development
    - b. Geographical Distribution
    - c. Unity of Origin
    - d. Intervention of Population
    - e. Political Cohesion
  - (3) Psychological Unity

In this chapter, Hamdan examines political unity (*al-waḥda al-siyāsīya*) in Egypt as a “*waṭan*” (homeland, nation). He claims that the correct combination of natural unity and national unity contributes to the formation of political unity (II- p.507). Natural unity depends on the interaction between (1) site (*al-mawḍi‘*) and (2) situation (*al-mawqī‘*). National unity is composed of (1) ethnic, (2) religious, (3) linguistic, and (4) psychological unities. In the latter “quartet,” the combination of (2) religious unity and (3) linguistic unity leads to “cultural unity” (II- pp.507-508). In this review, I will examine the aforementioned two sides of political unity in Section 1 and Section 3. We will not discuss the transformation of the political border addressed in Section 2.

#### (1) Natural Unity

While small rivers frequently provided the basis of one single political unit (*waḥda*, or unity), big rivers sometimes created many states conflicting with each other. But the Nile

valley historically has brought unity into the political homeland (nation: *waṭan*) of Egypt (II- p.458). The natural basis of this political unity was brought “from outside” its situation (*al-mawqīʿ*) in relation to the outer world and “from inside” its site (*al-mawḍīʿ*) on the basis of the Nile valley.

The most salient feature of the situation of Egypt is its solitude from the outer world, intercepted by the deserts. Consequently Egypt has kept unified throughout its long history as a “quasi-oasis” or an “island or a quasi-island in the ocean of deserts.” Both the Eastern Deserts and the Western Deserts have been natural dividers, but it is significant that both have their own backgrounds, the Red Sea and the Libyan Desert, and also share a similar landscape sloping toward the center. All of these elements provide a strong force toward the center, that is, the Nile valley. Egypt has been just an island surrounded by deserts and seas from ancient times (II- p.460).

The second condition of the site produces both structural unity and functional unity. Structural unity (*al-waḥda al-tarkībīya*) means that the Nile in Egypt, marked off by both the cataracts and the Mediterranean Sea, has formed racial and ethnic geographical borders. This point was already mentioned in the section “Human Homogeneity.” The Nile differs in this point from other big rivers, which mostly become political borders dividing countries. The second type of unity, functional unity (*al-waḥda al-waḥḍīya*), is nothing but the function of an irrigation system based on the Nile, in which the “chain of basins” formed an integration of irrigation units in the country. In addition, the Nile contributed to functional unity through the development of water transportation (II-pp.464-465).

## (2) National Unity

The argument of “national unity” (*al-waḥda al-waṭanīya*), its first dimension “ethnic unity” in particular, is also closely related to the subject of “human homogeneity.” But Hamdan emphasizes that this homogeneity is not exclusive because as mentioned above, Egypt is a “kingdom of absorption” which has “entry but no exodus.” A remarkable point in the argument of cultural unity is that “the duality of Muslims and Copts in Egypt neither contradicts national unity, nor religious unity.” Arguing that “the Coptic minority is the heart (*ṣamīm*) of the solid Egyptian body” (II-p.525), he criticizes some western scholars for asserting that Middle Upper Egypt is “the Coptic Belt” (II-p.522).<sup>52</sup>

The last dimension of national unity, psychological unity, is closely related to “the singleness (*aḥadīya*) of the Egyptian environment.” This singleness is distinguished by the historical role of nomads as an outside enemy to the inhabitants of the Nile valley in pre-modern periods. Indeed the medieval history of Egypt is characterized by dual tones: the

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<sup>52</sup> Copt intellectuals have involved in the inquiry of the Egyptian personality. One remarkable result is Miḥād Ḥannā, *al-aʿmida al-sabʿa li-l-shakhsīya al-miṣrīya* (The Seven Pillars of the Personality of Egypt), Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 2nd ed., 1990.

periodical inundation of the Nile and Bedouin invasions (II-p.530). In modern times, foreign invasions of the Western powers contributed to psychological (political) unity of Egypt.

## 2. Centralism

The following are the detailed contents of “Chapter 39: Centralism in Spite of Expansion: Cairo of Egypt (*markazīya raghma imtidād: al-qāhira miṣr*)” (IV- pp.251-395).

### Chapter 39. Centralism in Spite of Expansion: Cairo of Egypt

#### 1. Geographical Centralism

- (1) The Delta: Mean without Nodality
  - a. Precedence of Locations and Sizes
- (2) Upper Egypt: Pivot without Core
  - a. Changing Sizes
- (3) Nodality of Cairo
  - a. Waist and Neck, Summit and Head
  - b. Historical Side
  - c. Summarizing Egypt

#### 2. Functional Centralism: Bureaucracy

- (1) Origin of Bureaucracy
    - a. State of Officials
  - (2) Excess of Bureaucracy
    - a. Bureaucracy and Socialism
  - (3) Geographical Distribution
    - a. Reconsideration of Distribution
3. Centralism of Habitat: Capital-ness (*al-‘āṣimīya*)

- (1) Historical Evidence
  - a. Regional Equilibrium
- (2) Factors of Expansion
  - a. Social Factor
  - b. Situation, Civilization, and Politics

#### 4. Modern Cairo: From Growth to Scale

- (1) Curve of Growth
  - a. Before Greater Cairo
  - b. Greater Cairo
  - c. Balance between Capital and State
- (2) On the Size of Cairo
  - a. In the World
  - b. In the Arab World and Africa
  - c. In the Third World to the First

- d. The Future Growth
- 5. Domestic Migration
  - (1) Migration in Balance
    - a. Healthy Phenomenon
    - b. Damage of Migration
  - (2) Dynamics of Migration
    - a. Symptoms of Migration
    - b. Between Flexibility and Ruralization
    - c. Range of Migration and its Incentives
  - (3) Types of Migration and its Orders
    - a. Levels of Migration
    - b. Its Structure
  - (4) Migration Map
    - a. Old Picture
    - b. Modern Picture
    - c. Balance of Migration
- 6. Urbanization of Egypt
  - (1) Urban Revolution
    - a. Forces of Growth
    - b. Stages of Urbanization
    - c. Excess Problem
  - (2) Pyramid of Cities
    - a. Base of Cairo
    - b. Changing Composition
    - c. Big Cities
    - d. Millionaire Cities
    - e. The Primary City
    - f. The Second City
    - g. The Third City
    - h. Cairo of Cities
- 7. Capital-ness between National and Regional Planning
  - (1) Weight of Cairo
    - a. City of Riches
    - b. The Biggest Pyramid or the Biggest Swelling
  - (2) The North and the South
    - a. Rotation of History and Geography
    - b. Between Delta and Upper Egypt
    - c. Memorable Plan

- (3) Problems of Cairo
  - a. Overcrowd of Population
  - b. Housing Problem
  - c. Transportation Problem
  - d. Pollution Problem
- 8. The New “Silliness” of Capital
  - (1) List of Proposals
    - a. The Governmental Project
    - b. The Premature Situation of Desert
    - c. The Existing Situation
  - (2) List of Criticisms
    - a. The New Philosophy of Capital
    - b. Situation against Geography
    - c. Political Capital or Metropolitanism
    - d. Centralized Service or Administration with Postal System
  - (3) Final Assessment
    - a. What Exists and What is needed
    - b. A Wrong Opinion
- 9. The Closed Capital
  - (1) From Swelling to Ramification
    - a. Swelling
    - b. Stabilization
    - c. Strategy of Ramification
    - d. Political Capital Only
    - e. Not for New Cities
    - f. Regionalism
    - g. Socialism of Place
- 10. On Regional Planning
  - (1) Regional Cities
    - a. Equilibrium Capitals
    - b. Democracy of Emigration
    - c. Pivots of Development
  - (2) Village Reconstruction
    - a. Rural Housing
    - b. Village as the Measure of Change
  - (3) Administrative Framework
    - a. Basis of Division
    - b. Map of Egypt

“Centralism (*al-markazīya*) is probably the most distinct feature of the personality of Egypt. Salient centralism of nature, administration and civilization is a deep-rooted (*mutawattīna*) characteristic because it is old – as old as pyramids – and lasting until today” (IV-p.251). In this chapter, Hamdan describes three sides to the centralism of Egypt: (1) natural centralism, (2) administrative centralism and (3) civilizational centralism in Section 1, 2 and 3. I will skip the other sections from 4 to 10 that discuss modern Cairo, domestic migration, urbanization, urban planning and other topics.

#### (1) Natural Centralism

Hamdan’s famous phrase, “Egypt is not area (*masāḥa*), but distance (*masāfa*)” (IV-p.251), is known as a fine description of Egypt’s geographical uniqueness. This idea is key to understanding the country’s “morphological and structural centralism.” As already discussed, homogeneity in the Nile valley is attributed to its salient contrast to its surrounding deserts. Hamdan explains the interrelation between this homogeneity and centralism using the transportation theory, as seen in the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt.

He describes the Nile Delta as “the middle without nodality” (*tawassuṭ bi-lā ‘aqdīya*), because “we can not easily find any decisive core (*qalb*) or center (*bu’ra*) in it.” “It lacks wide natural pivots connecting the east and the west,” therefore horizontal transportation did not develop well until the introduction of the modern transportation system of railway and automobiles (IV-pp.251-252). As a result, since ancient times, large and important cities of the Delta had located its peripheries: the seacoasts and the borders of deserts (IV-p.254).

In modern times, the new transportation system promoted the development of big cities in the inner area of the Delta (such as Tanta and Mahalla el-Kubra), but Alexandria and cities of the Suez Canal (Suez, Ismailiya, and Port Said) grew faster than these midland cities. Hamdan calls this change a shift from natural nodality to artificial nodality (IV-p.256). It seems that he uses the same logic to explain the persistency of the personality of Egypt in spite of modernization, as seen in the change of the irrigation system and village structure that also produced a new pattern of homogeneity.

Hamdan describes Upper Egypt as “a pivot without center” (*miḥwar bi-lā bu’ra*): Upper Egypt is “an extended rift, a closed tube, and a length without width” (IV-p.256). Like the Delta, it is described as a periphery, which lacks any core and centralism. From the viewpoint of the transportation system, there are found four “disjunctions” (*inqiṭā‘āt*), or joints in Upper Egypt: (1) disjunction of cataract, (2) Qena – Qusail route, (3) Darb al-Arba‘in (caravan route to Sudan), and (4) the neck of Faiyum. All of these are considered to be suitable locations for the formation of cities. In actuality, however, they have never played major roles historically in producing a nucleus nodality by any means. Consequently Upper Egypt has remained “a closed lane” (*zuqāq mughlaq*) (IV- pp.257-258).

Therefore it is only the capital Cairo that could integrate these two parts both lacking centralism: “a line without joint” (Upper Egypt) and “the middle without nodality” (the Delta).

In other words, Cairo is “the waist of the valley” and “the neck of bottle (*‘anq al-zujāja*)” (IV-p.261). However, the location of the capital of Egypt has fluctuated historically between the Delta and Upper Egypt. Hamdan explains this historical fluctuation geographically. When we consider Egypt as a whole composed of the Delta and Upper Egypt, we find an obvious natural nodality in each area: that is, the apex of the Delta and Qena in Upper Egypt. But historically speaking, since ancient times, Egyptian capitals have been confined within four circles, including these two points. These are (1) the apex of the Delta (Memphis and Cairo), (2) Qena (Thebes), (3) the northeast entrance (Tanis etc.), and (4) the northwest entrance (Alexandria etc.) (IV-p.265). It is noteworthy that the author mentions that modern Cairo, as “a condensation of Egypt” (*talkhīṣ miṣr*), is located right at the middle between two ancient capitals in the Pharaonic age in the west and in the Islamic age in the east (IV-p.268).

## (2) Functional Centralism

Functional Centralism (*markazīya wazāfīya*) means an administrative centralism, or a centralized bureaucracy. The most important factor in the creation of this functional centralism is the environment caused by the inundation of the Nile. In a hydraulic society, “irrigation became analogous to organization (*tanzīm*)” and “everyone is voluntarily subordinate to an absolute public power” (IV-p.270). The tradition of “governmental society” (*mujtama‘ ḥukūmī*), inherited from “the heavy and fierce (*‘atīya*) Pharaonic bureaucracy” ruling the land and people, has been rooted deeply in the social history of Egypt, from ancient scribe to contemporary *shaykh al-balad* (village chief) (IV-p.270).

In this hydraulic society, it is inevitable that an immense bureaucratic structure of “control and binding (assessing)” (*al-zabṭ wa al-rabṭ*) had developed, with technocrats controlling irrigation agriculture from the center, surrounded by the financial department calculating the price of water; the police department maintaining security and water rights, and finally administrative department in service to all these departments (IV-p.272).

In the era of basin irrigation during pre-modern times, the ministry of irrigation (ministry of public works) with the absolute power to decide when each basin was to be flooded, was itself “the life of Egypt” (*ḥayā miṣr*), and the introduction of modern perennial irrigation rather promoted the expansion of this hydraulic-bureaucratic structure (IV-p.272-73). Therefore it is natural to conclude that the large contemporary bureaucratic organization was created in the era of Muhammad ‘Ali who started the transformation of the irrigation system. Thereafter, Egyptian society became a “society of officials” (*mujtama‘ muwazzafīn*) and the main cities became “cities of officials” to the maximum (IV-p.273). The army of officials formed a class in itself within the “governmental society,” where the government became the biggest “owner of businesses.” The urban bourgeoisie in Egypt, where irrigation agriculture is dominant, are connected with state bureaucrats rather than the merchant class, as seen in medieval Europe and neighboring countries such as Syria (IV-p.272-273).

The excessive weight of bureaucracy in modern Egypt reached its maximum in the

socialist regime established after the revolution of July 1952. Hamdan points out that the share of public employees in the population and labor force of Egypt is far larger than that of other countries. He asserts that this phenomenon is not new, however, but “a persistent and deep-rooted feature of the existence of Egypt” (IV-p.276).

### (3) Centralism of Habitat

Section 3 of “Chapter 39: Centralism of Habitat (*al-markazīya al-ḥaḍarīya*): ‘Capital-ness’ (*al-‘āsimīya*)” describes the “radical capital-ness” of Cairo. This extraordinary eminence of the capital is expressed in the sentence “Egypt goes where Cairo goes.” This centralism of habitat is attributed to two kinds of centralism: structural (natural) centralism and functional centralism (IV-p.278).

The author describes the development of Cairo in modern times in the style of a historical testimony, and emphasizes that social factors (class-related factors in particular) had contributed to its expansion. We can find that there emerged a salient contrast between the “tyrannical expansion of capital and the extreme meagerness of other regions.” This contrast reflected a peculiar class structure in modern Egyptian society. As I will discuss later, this “unruly centralism” is also organically connected with “Pharaonic feudal tyranny.” “The violent centralism is nothing but an administrative and dwelling translation of political tyranny and social feudalism” (IV-p.283).

The pyramid structure of Egypt’s city system is similar to its class pyramid, both having a “wide but flat base and narrow but lofty summit,” and the middle class almost disappears between the two classes (IV-p.283). “The agrarian feudalism before ‘the revolution’ could be translated functionally into two classes in the rural area: the feudal class and the peasant class.” When the July Revolution abolished “feudalism,” the age of socialism started, and then the age of “the revival of reactionary capitalism” followed. However, in spite of these transformations, the class division between cities and villages did not change. Rather, the open door (*infitāḥ*) economic policy adopted since the Sadat era even promoted the extension of Cairo and made it “a part of America” (IV-p.284). Consequently “we have come to have an actually capitalist capital within a formally socialist society.” In this new meaning, class division in Egypt is still based on the geographical division between the capital and rural area (IV-p.285).

## 3. Pharaonic Tyranny

The following are the contents of “Chapter 22: From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution (*min al-tughyān al-fira ‘ūnī ilā al-thawra al-ishtirākīya*)” (II-pp.536-599).

### Chapter 22. From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution

#### 1. On the Social Geography of Egypt

##### (1) Social Ecology of the Nile

##### a. Hydrological Society

- b. Government and Society
- (2) Social System
  - a. Feudal Theory
  - b. Slavery Theory
  - c. Asiatic Theory
- 2. Pharaonic Tyranny
  - (1) Oriental Production Society
    - a. The Origin of Tyranny
  - (2) Framework of System
    - a. Autocracy
    - b. Bureaucracy
    - c. Priests
    - d. Soldiers
    - e. Neither Feudal Lords, Aristocracy, Nor Bourgeoisie
    - f. A Block of People
  - (3) Multiplication
    - a. Geographical Environment
    - b. Housing Patterns
    - c. Economic Unification
    - d. Foreign Colonialism
- 3. Medieval Ages
  - (1) Oriental Feudalism?
    - a. Types of Feudalism
  - (2) Class Pyramid
    - a. State Officials and Religious Intellectuals
    - b. The Base of Society
    - c. Popular Resistance
- 4. Modern Egypt
  - (1) Emergence of Feudalism
    - a. Class Pyramid
    - b. Popular Resistance
- 5. Social Personality of Egypt
  - (1) The Land of Tyranny?
  - (2) Sediments and Stains
    - a. Wrong Theories
  - (3) Accusation and Defense
    - a. Another Side
  - (4) Ladder of Responsibility
    - a. Democracy is Civilization

“Pharaonic tyranny” is one of most controversial themes in Hamdan’s analysis of the personality of Egypt. In this chapter, he tries to criticize the theory of Oriental despotism, and environmental reductionism in particular. I will review mainly both its introductory part (Section 1) and its conclusion (Section 5). As for the other sections (Section 2, 3, and 4), their historical descriptions (ancient Egypt, the medieval ages, and modern Egypt) will be only briefly reviewed.

#### (1) From Pharaonic Tyranny to Socialist Revolution

At the beginning, the author questions the relevancy of “one environmental theory in social studies that links political tyranny with riverine environment (*al-bī’a al-nahrīya*).” He reviews the history of this theory, which originated from the ideas of Montesquieu until it prevailed in academic circles in the West in the nineteenth century. As a result, as typically found in the theory of Karl Wittfogel, Egypt has been treated as a typical despotic Oriental country based on a hydraulic society (II-p.536-537). But, Hamdan asserts, we should strictly “distinguish two sides or two questions in the theory: the social political phenomena itself and ecological (that is, environmental) relations” (II-p.537). The author starts his argument from “unquestionable and indisputable facts”: that “the greatest fact in the existence of Egypt is the inundational environment (*al-bī’a al-faidīya*) in which its life does not depend on natural rainfall but on the water of the river” (II-pp.537-538), and “Egypt is a typical hydraulic society woven from three strands: water, peasants, and the ruler” (II-p.540). Regarding basin irrigation in pre-modern times, he asserts that “all upper basins could decide the life or death of lower basins” and “If there is no control of the river, the noble Nile would turn into a dry fragmented cataract, and if there is no control of people, the distribution of water would involve the shedding of blood” (II-pp.538-539). In the period of transition from basin irrigation to perennial canal irrigation, as Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi wrote, “each village and each district has its own irrigation canal and bank, and only its inhabitants could use that water. There was no public communal solidarity (*rawābiṭ ‘umūmīya*) between them.” “Sometimes land owners and farmers near to riverside monopolized irrigation water, while other people were deprived of it and this inequality resulted in conflicts with murder and bloodshed” (II-p.539). This is the reason why the government issued the Canal Act in 1894 in order to regulate water use.

“Here the ruler becomes the “mediator” (*wasīṭ*) between man and environment, or a conjunctive particle (*hamza al-waṣl*) between peasant and river.” Government inevitably becomes “an ecological tool integrating environment and man” (II-p.539). The basis of rule is its function as “water court,” following the principle that “justice (*‘adl*) is the basis of civilization (*‘umrān*)” as al-Tahtawi described (II-p.540).

Then Hamdan describes the relations between state and society in Egypt: a “centralist government and cooperative society are two crucial phenomena to inundational Egypt” (II-p.544). After examining several scholars’ opinions arguing the “inevitability of the centralist government,” he explains that Egyptian society is “cooperatively organized” (*ta ‘āwnī*

*munazzam*), “society does not know harmful and ugly bloody individualism (*fardīya*),” and “its personal interest (*maṣlaḥa*) and its existence are depending on reciprocity (*taḍāmun*) and social mutual responsibility (*takāful*)” that are caused by high population density and joint work in irrigation (known as *ʿawna*: forced labor, but its original meaning is “help”) (II-pp.543-544).

Therefore “the river system and the ecology of the Nile” are considered as the hidden element in the formation of “cooperative socialism,” and Egypt became one administrated unit controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture in the cooperative socialist framework of the Nasser regime (II-p.545). Here, we cannot find any critical opinion on the centralized agricultural policy which had started since Nasser’s era.<sup>53</sup>

After explaining the theory of a hydraulic society, Hamdan asserts that “tyranny or despotism, whether it is Oriental or non-Oriental, is not determined by a riverine environment, whether it is the Nile or not,” and “abuses of tyranny have no relation with irrigation agriculture and the geography of the river” (II-p.546). Therefore we should seek all causes of tyranny outside geography, outside the river, but in the history of Egypt itself (II-p.546). Then the author proceeds to examine the origins of tyranny in the history of Egypt in the following sections.

## (2) Historical Reconsideration of Pharaonic Tyranny

Hamdan examines the historical dimensions of the “social system” of Egypt: feudalism, slavery and the Asiatic system, and concludes that we can not apply any historical notion of monism or holism to understand the Egyptian social structure (II-p.550). He agrees with the conclusions of Egyptian Marxist historians such as Ibrahim ʿAmir and Ahmad Sadiq Saʿd and admits that the hegemonic pattern of this social formation could be called Asiatic or Oriental in all its historical dimensions.<sup>54</sup> But he also asserts that we can find slavery, quasi-slavery, feudalism, and quasi-feudalism in each dimension (II-p.550). Then he proceeds to describe the social system and class composition in each historical period in the following sections.

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<sup>53</sup> Since the late 1980’s, the Egyptian government reversed its socialist agricultural policy towards liberalization and a regime opposing reform. See Ray Bush ed., *Counterrevolution in Egypt’s Countryside: Land and Farmers in the Era of Economic Reform*, London: Zed Books, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Ibrāhīm ʿĀmir discussed “Oriental feudalism” and the transition to capitalism in agriculture in the classical study of the agrarian question of Egypt, *al-ard wa al-fallāḥ: al-masʿala al-zirāʿīya fī miṣr* (Land and Peasant: the Agrarian Question of Egypt), Cairo: Maṭabaʿa al-Dār al-Miṣrīya, 1958. I wrote an article analyzing the dispute of Egyptian capitalism with a focus on Ibrāhīm ʿĀmir’s work and its criticism: Eiji Nagasawa, “The Dispute on Agrarian Capitalism and the Development of Communist Movement in Egypt,” in Eiji Nagasawa ed., *Social Change and Revolutionary Movement in the Arab East*, Institute of Developing Economies, 1990 [in Japanese]. Aḥmad Ṣādiq Saʿd was the Arab Marxist researcher who studied most intensively on the theme of Asiatic mode of production. One of his main works is *fī dawʿ al-namaṭ al-asiyāwī li-l-intāḥ tārikh miṣr al-ijtimāʿī al-iqtisādī* (Socio-economic History of Egypt from the Viewpoint of Asiatic Mode of Production), Beirut: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1979. As for his personal history, see my article in English, Eiji Nagasawa, “A Jewish Egyptian Marxist Intellectual and His Inquiry into the Popular Heritage,” *The Memoir of the Toyo Bunko*, No.62, 2004.

At the beginning, Hamdan describes Egyptian society in the period of the ancient dynasties as follows: “Egypt is the first political unit, the first unified state in history, but also probably the world’s first tyranny, and the oldest and most deep-rooted centralized state to emerge on Earth.” This “Pharaonic tyranny emerged as the inevitable consequence of the centralized state, and the centralized state was the inevitable and necessary consequence of the inundational environment” (II-p.555). The history of the formation of a unified state in the Nile valley is based on the idea that the “distributor of water becomes the owner of water” (II- p.554), and that “Egypt is known as the oldest state that intervened in the organization of production” (II-p.552). “Actually water has its price, and this price is the freedom of the peasantry that is then totally handed over to the state.” The “so-called ‘slave of the Nile’ becomes the slave of the state, a slave of the Pharaoh” (II-p.553). “From the beginning, Egyptians paid the price of their country’s early political unity with their political freedoms, and exchanged social security with social freedom” (II-p.555).

After this theory of “The origin of Pharaonic tyranny,” Hamdan describes three structural components of the autocratic Pharaonic despotic regime: the bureaucracy, the clergy, and the military. He proceeded to examine the arguments of “Oriental feudalism” in the “medieval periods” after the Islamization of Egypt, and finally explains that in modern times Muhammad ‘Ali abolished this ancient feudalism and replaced it with a new kind of feudalism. The detailed review of these arguments is omitted here, but it is noted that he emphasizes the historical role of popular resistance movements against the tyrannical rule in each period.

### (3) The Social Personality of Egypt

The following is one of the most beautiful and impressive passages in *the Personality of Egypt*. This passage is written after he asks whether Egypt is a land of tyranny:

“Now Egyptian history does not know how to deny that tyranny or despotism, sometimes violent and always inhuman, as an objective actual phenomenon, exceeds any personal explanation or academic theorizing, has been a ‘*Leitmotif*,’ a sad and unfortunate tone in the history of Egyptian people. Egypt might not be the biggest prison in the world, but the oldest prison in history” (II-p.580).

Are these characteristics of the social personality of Egypt hereditary (*mawrūtha*) or acquired (*muktasiba*)? The author’s answer is that “tyranny and harmful autocracy are not *genius loci* (*rūḥ al-makān*), but unfortunately *Zeitgeist* (*rūḥ al-‘aṣr*)” (II-p.581). As he described above, the environment caused by the flooding of the Nile created a cooperative socialism that is free from exploitation and plunder. “The real personality of Egypt is free of abuse and oppression,” and rather it is characterized by “collective participation and joint work in the framework of cooperation, solidarity, and reciprocity. Briefly speaking, it is rightly guided socialism (*al-ishtirākīya al-rāshida*),” Therefore, “Egypt is never ‘a land of tyranny’” (II-p.582).

Hamdan disagrees with the idea of “the democratic Occident and despotic Orient,”

asserting that tyranny and despotism are actually known in most countries around the world (II-p.581). The geographic reductionism that relates political despotism with the inundational environment was spread by British colonialism in the nineteenth century (II-p.583). If we follow this theory, we must choose two alternatives: “without control of the Nile, Egypt would be a field of reeds (*ghāba*), but given control of it, Egypt would be a prison.” “However, is it impossible to get both civilization and dignity, stability and freedom, social antagonism and social justice at the same time?” (II-p.582).

In the latter half of his argument on the social personality of Egypt, Hamdan focuses his attention on the criticism of discourses of the national personality of Egyptians. He mainly addresses the arguments of foreign scholars and the self-criticism of the nation of Egypt. As mentioned above, he considers that “tyranny is a historical fact, but not a geographical fact” (II-p.582). However, “Even if the Nile, its calm environment, temperature, and artificial irrigation, are not responsible in any way for the of abuse of tyranny in the past, it is difficult for us to deny the existence of sediments, stains, and remnants that have continued to be hidden in the Egyptian personality” (II-p.589). And “whether the Nile was an objective cause of Pharaonic tyranny or its insignificant pretext, it cannot be doubted that historically Egypt had paid heavily for freedom, democracy and dignity for its early political unity and political stability” (II-p.584). On the relations between Egyptians and Pharaonic tyranny, western writers created a theory that Egyptians were submissive, “historically sick people” who had spent “centuries as slaves,” and that with “their sense of servility” they could easily bend to authority (II-pp.589-590). This is a typical example of colonialist discourse, attributing submissiveness and docility to Egyptian peasants (*fallāḥīn*). We can find this idea in numerous discourses, from those of the Earl of Cromer, a British high commissioner, to Gabriel Baer, an Israeli historian. But as even anti-imperialist ideologues such as al-Afghani and al-Kawakibi sympathised with the theory of Oriental despotism, it might be difficult for us to escape from this “repeated tone” (II-pp.589-590).

This discourse is created by overemphasizing the argument that “the life of Egypt depends on control of the Nile and control of the Nile is based on the rights of the ruler” (II-p.591). Another side of this discourse is an emphasis on the spiritual climate in which the people developed subservient attitudes toward the ruler. According to this discourse, Egypt is nothing but “a land of hypocrisy” (II-p.592). Hamdan criticizes this discourse as it neglects the revolutionary dynamism of Egyptian people throughout the history of Egypt (II-p.593).

After criticizing the distorted discourse on “the Egyptian personality” created by western scholars, he proceeds to a “national self-criticism” in the concluding part in this chapter. “Both tyranny inside and aggression from the outside – in other words, dictatorship inside and colonialism from the outside – are two elemental weak points of the personality of Egypt, but we do not say that they are two dark points in the Egyptian personality.” As the historical fact that “whenever we people were subordinate to the order of tyrannical rulers, our rulers easily bent over to foreign invaders” shows, both tyranny and colonialism have a direct relation of

causality (II-p.594). Al-Kawakibi rightly pointed out that “Tyranny does not make a tyrant, but it is people that cause both tyranny and a tyrant” (II-p.595).

Therefore the responsibility of these weak points in the personality of Egypt should be attributed “firstly to people as the basic cause, secondly to rulers as the direct cause, and finally to colonialism as the remaining of the three causes (*thālitha al-athāfi*)” (II-p.597). After describing this “ladder of responsibility” in the section “Democracy is Civilization,” Hamdan mentions that “the origin of despotism and dictatorship is no doubt backwardness — civilizational backwardness in general,” and “briefly speaking, tyranny and dictatorship in Egypt are a remnant of its long sad past on the one hand, and natural or lateral results of present [backwardness] on the other.” He concludes this argument with the following sentence: “The Egyptian might be a patriarch (*shaykh*) of history and a wise man (*hakīm*) of civilization, but is still a novice in the modern civilization, in contemporary politics” (II-p.598).

### *Concluding Remarks*

With this I finish my review of Chapter 22, whose theme is Pharaonic tyranny. But because my Arabic language ability does not match the elegant and complicated sentences of the author, I am not confident that I succeeded in explaining precisely what he intended to assert. In particular I cannot fully understand the author’s argument concerning his geographical explanation of the connection between Pharaonic tyranny and artificial irrigation of the Nile. I think that in this chapter the author attempts to deny the causality between centralism and Pharaonic tyranny, while, as mentioned above, in his discussion of “centralism of habitat” in Chapter 39 Section 3, he indicates a “functional relation between Pharaonic feudal tyranny and violent centralism” (IV-p.283). This is a problem concerning the distinction between “ecological relations and political and social phenomena.”

I know that it is beyond my abilities to interpret critically the author’s geographical methodology as a whole. But in these concluding remarks of this review, I will try to examine the mutual relation between elemental features constituting the personality of Egypt: “homogeneity,” “unity,” “centralism,” and “Pharaonic tyranny.”

When I started to review *The Personality of Egypt*, I expected that I would be able to find detailed descriptions about the mutual relations between these elemental features, “homogeneity” and “centralism” in particular. I supposed that in this book the author would show us, in proper logical order, the causal relations between these features. For example, “homogeneity” of society might well be an important basis for the formation of “centralism.” However “homogeneity” itself can be artificially induced by centralized power: in this case homogenization would be a socio-political process executed by a strong centralized state from the top down. But as I mentioned above, I could not find a direct and positive causality between these two features. Of course the author indicates some logical relations between these features: For example, between “human homogeneity” and “national unity,” or between

“functional and habitat centralism” and “Pharaonic tyranny.” However it seems that the relations between “natural centralism” and “homogeneity” needed a fuller explanation. Rather, the author seems to have paid more attention to the development of each feature independently on the basis of “site” and “situation” of Egypt, including the feature’s role in the formation of the personality of Egypt as a whole. And in cases of “homogeneity,” “unity,” and “centralism,” the Nile has a fundamental influence in generating these elemental features of the personality of Egypt. In the author’s estimation, these features are more strongly connected to the Nile than to each other. Generally speaking, these features are jointly responsible for the formation of the regional personality in the dimension of “ecological relations,” but not in the dimension of “social and political phenomena,” nor of “historical fact” (as in the case of “Pharaonic tyranny”) which is the subject for scientific sociological research. If we might use the analytical methodology of such research, we would treat the relation between “homogeneity” and “centralism” clearly as a topic of historical studies.

As I mentioned above, I cannot compare the author’s methodology with theoretical trends in the modern science of geography, but also I have no idea how to evaluate it within the classic tradition of medieval Arab geography. However I would like to point out his unique view of history, or the flow of historical time. He mentions “backwardness” as a reason for contemporary “Pharaonic tyranny,” but he does not follow a simple-minded evolutionary modernization theory. Rather it seems that he assumes the cyclical flow of history that gives continuity to the regional personality beyond different epochs, not the straight line flow of time in evolutionary theory. This is typically shown in his description of the dimension of “homogeneity,” in this flow of time, where elemental features of this regional personality have been reorganized and continued, and in some cases even been strengthened in technological and social changes in the modernization process. In this unique description, Hamdan tries to exclude “Pharaonic tyranny” from the dimension of geographical fact, and treat it as a subject of historical studies. When we consider the relation between this attitude and his personal experiences in the actual world, mentioned in Chapter I in this article, we might be able to observe some of his passion and anguish in writing this book.

*The Personality of Egypt* is a masterful and critical work that refers to a huge amount of discourses by Western scholars describing Egypt. Gamal Hamdan, as a geographer of *waṭanīya* (Egyptian Nationalism) or a nationalist geographic ideologue, transformed this encyclopedic accumulation of discourses into a systematic nationalist discourse on a vast scale. “Pharaonic tyranny,” or the “historically diseased” social personality of Egypt, might be the most serious theme for him in conducting this troubling and individualistic research. He refuses to consider it as *genius loci*, a geographical fact, and criticizes Western scholars’ discourses as tainted with prejudice against “Oriental society.”

But as we learned from his personal history described in Chapter I, it is this contemporary “tyranny” and “diseased” social relations filled with hypocrisy and compliance that compelled him to isolate himself. He argues for the bright prospects of cooperative socialism, but in fact

he actually faced the oppression of the “tyrant” of the socialist regime of Nasser, and spent long days in seclusion without losing his passionate and critical outlook on contemporary society and politics. Therefore when we examine carefully the contents of his work, *The Personality of Egypt*, by overlapping it with his personal history, we may be able to find a paradoxical and warped relation between the written text and actual his life.

The subtitle of *The Personality of Egypt* is “A Study of the Genius of Place (*dirāsa fī ‘abqarīya al-makān*).” As many of his contemporaries mentioned, Gamal Hamdan was a true genius (*‘abqarī*). It is possible that his genius and his puritanistic personality made him choose a life of seclusion. Egyptian intellectuals regretted the early death of this brilliant thinker, a shining symbol of their era, the era of “rightly guided socialism” and national liberation. At the present age when these dreams are fading, they can learn from this huge intellectual masterpiece of “the genius of place,” left by this genius intellectual, and find ways to a new vision of the future of Egypt.