

**THE *NAHDA* IN PARLIAMENT:  
TAHA HUSAYN'S CAREER BUILDING KNOWLEDGE  
PRODUCTION INSTITUTIONS, 1922-52**

By Hussam R. Ahmed

In December 1939, the Egyptian Ministry of Public Instruction created a new division to organize all cultural matters. As well as supervising education at its various stages, the ministry wanted to oversee “the dissemination of culture in the country.”<sup>1</sup> They named the new division the Directorate of General Culture (*Muraqabat al-Thaqafa al-‘Amma*) and made it officially responsible for

Organizing the ministry’s cultural efforts outside the walls of schools; finding the means of encouraging and supervising these [cultural] efforts; creating intellectual cooperation within the country and abroad; studying matters related to scientific, literary, and artistic conferences, as well as supervising the [cultural] efforts of private associations concerned with the propagation of culture in the country.<sup>2</sup>

The ministry stipulated that the person appointed to lead this division must possess “high academic qualifications and long practical experience in such matters.” They chose the famous writer and educator Taha Husayn

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(1889-1973) to head the new division, effectively appointing him Egypt's first minister of culture. At the time of his appointment, Husayn was one of Egypt's most influential intellectuals. He had written dozens of literary classics and hundreds of widely read articles and had served as the first Egyptian dean of arts at the Egyptian University for several terms between 1928 and 1939.<sup>3</sup> A year earlier, Husayn had published *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt), which presented a detailed report on the state of Egypt's education system and suggested improvements. The book confirmed Husayn's deep knowledge of the system and made clear that his reform project aligned with the ministry's objectives.<sup>4</sup>

Husayn led the Directorate of General Culture until May 1942, when the ministry promoted him to technical adviser to the minister of public instruction.<sup>5</sup> As adviser, he became responsible for the directorates of general culture, fine arts, and higher education. He advised committees and technical projects for education planning, curricula, school systems, textbooks, and educational missions abroad.<sup>6</sup> Among Husayn's important achievements in this role was his 1944 collaboration with the Wafdist minister Najib al-Hilali to make primary education free. When the Wafd won a parliamentary majority in January 1950, party leader Mustafa al-Nahas asked Husayn to become his minister of public instruction, though Husayn was not a party member. Husayn agreed on the condition that the government would immediately make secondary and technical education free. He then served as minister of public instruction until the January 1952 Cairo fire, when King Faruq dismissed the Wafd cabinet.

While the British declared Egypt an independent kingdom in 1922, they retained effective sovereignty over the country until 1952.<sup>7</sup> In these years, known as the "liberal" or "parliamentary" period, intense debates took place in Egypt about how women, the family, the peasantry, and education could contribute to creating a modern nation.<sup>8</sup> Husayn was central to these nationalist debates and reform efforts. A rich body of scholarship, including hundreds of works in Arabic, analyzes Husayn's intellectual contributions.<sup>9</sup> But the scholarly attention to Husayn's writings has obscured his work as a politician and civil servant. This article situates Husayn at the center of the battle for full national independence by exploring his efforts to build strong knowledge production institutions and educational councils. It explores how Husayn and his reformist colleagues created and restructured educational

institutions to face the colonial challenge and labored to ensure that these institutions operated efficiently within Egypt's new and unstable parliamentary system. I argue that we cannot fully understand Husayn's thought on educational and political reforms without situating it in his bureaucratic and institutional context. Beyond his undeniable intellectual stature, Husayn was a clever bureaucrat and astute politician who understood how to argue for his reform projects, convince the voting public of their feasibility, and increase the Wafd Party's popularity in a challenging political context.<sup>10</sup> Attending to this context helps us account for the government's achievements in the field of education during the parliamentary period, which scholars too often dismiss. Egyptian bureaucrats developed new knowledge production structures through intense social debates, fierce political battles, and serious scholarly engagement with both classical Arab-Islamic thought and contemporary European pedagogical and research methodologies. While some scholars allege that European culture "seduced" *nahdawis* like Husayn, I argue that Husayn's contributions to these political battles reveal a deep awareness of the unequal power structure undergirding Egypt's relation with Europe. Husayn argued that knowledge production was essential to overcome that inequality.

This article draws mainly on primary sources from the Egyptian National Archives (Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya), the archives of the Council of Ministers, and Husayn's political writings published between 1922 and 1952. I begin by linking the *nahda* to Husayn's institution building. I argue that Husayn saw Egypt's parliament as a means of furthering the *nahda* project by reforming the country's education system. He believed that British educational policies had reversed pre-occupation education reforms and denounced the colonial legacy of meager state school funding and lack of interest in building universities. He argued that the government must reverse British policies, make education free for all Egyptians, and focus on building state-funded knowledge production institutions such as the university's Faculty of Arts and the Arabic Language Academy. Husayn believed that these institutions would train the scholars necessary to realize one of the *nahda's* objectives: reviving classical Arab-Islamic thought and engaging critically with what he and his generation saw as new European ideas and research methodologies. I then turn to the sociopolitical context in which Husayn tried to implement his project. I show Husayn's efforts

to transform his vision into a coherent policy proposal and ensure these institutions' stable operation in a volatile political system, crippled by partisan politics and Britain's ongoing occupation. While Husayn wanted to give these institutions as much autonomy as possible, he understood that such a huge project demanded orderly state funding and regulation. My study of official state documents reveals that Husayn sought to resolve this tension between autonomy and regulation by creating technical councils run by knowledgeable technocrats elected by their respective institutions. He believed these councils would allow educational experts to focus on long-term planning by sheltering them from the rapid turnover at the ministerial level. Finally, I revisit the famous debate between Husayn and his adversaries on the feasibility of free education. In Parliament, instead of focusing solely on education's benefits, Husayn argued that it was the duty of any democratically elected government to respond to the people's needs. In public, he presented the Wafd as the only party the people could entrust with their demands. But I also demonstrate that universal education was only part of Husayn's *nahda* project. He believed that knowledge produced at Egypt's higher institutions would be circulated among all Egyptians and foster the growth of a modern, politically active citizenry.

### **The *Nahda*, Parliamentary Egypt, and Taha Husayn in the Civil Service**

Despite Taha Husayn's extensive government service, scholars have often focused narrowly on his published work and participation in literary debates. This focus is partly due to the available sources and to his reputation as "the dean of Arabic literature" who wrote dozens of classics, including his celebrated autobiography *al-Ayyam* (The Days). Many literary studies portray Husayn as a man of letters who idealized a pure form of art and culture. They cite his claims that culture should transcend politics and bring nations and peoples together. For example, in his 1938 classic *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr*, Husayn argued that Egypt's modern awakening had qualified the country to regain what he believed was its historical role as the link between East and West. He argued Egypt should lead the Arab-Islamic world in "the advancement of civilization and the consolidation of peace."<sup>11</sup>

Critical postcolonial readings of Husayn seldom consider the challenging sociopolitical context in which he wrote. These studies select passages from Husayn's writings to portray him and his generation as uncritical intellectuals "seduced" by European culture. Shaden Tageldin, for instance, argues that Husayn and other Egyptian intellectuals surrendered too easily to Western knowledge's charms. She analyzes the impact of Husayn's claim that culture should transcend politics upon translation by examining Husayn's published debate with 'Abbas al-'Aqqad. Husayn maintained that all nations translated texts from other languages out of social and intellectual necessity. He argued that at times the colonizer needed to translate the cultural output of the colonized more than the other way around, using the examples of Roman translations of Greek literature and Arab translations of works in Greek and Persian.<sup>12</sup> Tageldin challenges Husayn's belief in a "universal need" to translate, which in her view implies a natural willingness to exchange and presumes an "innate predisposition of all human beings to think and feel 'alike.'" <sup>13</sup> Tageldin asserts that Husayn's universalism depoliticizes translation, removes it from its imperial context, and masks the unequal power relations that undergird it.<sup>14</sup>

But Tageldin does not consider the bureaucratic and institutional constraints in which Husayn operated. As a result, in her analysis Husayn comes across as a naïve intellectual, enchanted by the culture of his colonizers and oblivious to the consequences of his actions. I argue that a different Taha Husayn emerges when we examine his larger project and how the sociopolitical context shaped not only his policies, but also his ideas, which he developed in dialogue with political events, social debates, and his mounting public responsibilities. Taking Husayn's bureaucratic career into account shows that far from being a man of letters disinterested in politics, he was a conscientious proponent of cultural and education reforms with deep political significance. He developed his ideas in tandem with concrete policy decisions to implement what he saw as an anti-colonial project to establish a knowledge production system in order to achieve intellectual parity with Europe. His conception and practice of translation was deeply embedded in this larger project, which responded to the unequal power relations of empire. Husayn's critical engagement with the Arab-Islamic tradition and ideas coming from Europe mutually informed his political struggle to hold governments accountable, scrutinize

budgets, assert academic institutions' independence, build schools, design textbooks, and train teachers.

Similarly, intellectual histories of this period rarely address Husayn's public service. Husayn's published writings expressed his wish for Egypt to follow in Europe's path and critiques of al-Azhar's educational methods.<sup>15</sup> As a result, many scholars label him an archetypal Westernizer, modernist, or secularist, as opposed to traditionalist or religious intellectuals. But I argue that Husayn's work at the university and the Arabic Language Academy reveals that these simplistic labels cannot account for his serious engagement with the Arab-Islamic tradition and dedication to preserving classical Arabic.<sup>16</sup> Historian Dyala Hamzah argues that scholars of the *nahda* too often measure *nahdawis'* work against European liberal intellectual output. Hamzah argues that this paradigm has dominated the field since Albert Hourani's 1962 *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, restricting understandings of the *nahda* to "the dialectics of impact and reaction."<sup>17</sup> In order to break with Hourani, Hamzah proposes to examine *nahdawis'* efforts and texts within their complex local contexts, particularly their work constructing a public sphere and promoting state accountability.<sup>18</sup>

I follow Hamzah by focusing on the complex details of Husayn's local context. Husayn and his colleagues' debates on education informed their efforts to build institutions that were rooted in Egypt's specificities and responded to Egyptians' needs. The public thus became involved in debating the humanities' role and the kind of influence the state should exercise over culture and education. But when considered in the context of Parliament, Husayn's attention to public needs goes beyond the trend of *nahdawis* assigning themselves the role of educator of the masses. Rather, Husayn and other educational experts worked within political parties to shape public opinion and win votes by convincing the public of their ideas' soundness. Debates on education thus became infused with ideas about democracy, proper governance, and accountability. This analysis supports Elizabeth Kassab's observation that the "centrality of political accountability, the rule of law, and the importance of political representation in *nahda* thought is not acknowledged enough, yet these principles are among its leitmotifs."<sup>19</sup> It also recalls the intellectual Luwis 'Awad's remark in the early 1970s that Egyptians had a much clearer understanding of the rule of law and the role of the state before 1952, as well as the difference between

duties and rights, be they public or private.<sup>20</sup> Rather than learning abstract European theories of democracy at school, Egyptians came to understand that their votes mattered through political debates on universal education and other issues directly relevant to their lives. Even if they were frustrated with the parliamentary system, they understood that political decisions had an immediate impact on their lives and their children's future and that governments must be held accountable.

As historian Omnia El Shakry shows in her study of the institutional and discursive establishment of the Arab social sciences between 1870 and the 1960s, Egyptian intellectuals did not simply copy foreign knowledge. El Shakry argues that while they internalized some Western premises, such as progressive temporality and the nation-state, Egyptian intellectuals relied on their society's historical specificity to push back against, and sometimes even reverse, colonial forms of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> This article builds on this intervention by insisting that Husayn's political battles shaped his conceptual work. Husayn understood that knowledge producers do not work in an institutional vacuum. He thus sought to ensure that knowledge institutions operate efficiently by regulating their relationship to the state while granting scholars academic freedom. El Shakry also convincingly proposes an uninterrupted periodization from the 1930s to the 1960s, crossing what is usually considered the 1952 rupture, arguing that Gamal Abdel Nasser built on the ideas, institutions, and modes of knowledge production that he inherited.<sup>22</sup> While Husayn's free education policies and the institutions he established continued under Nasser, I argue that a rupture occurred in the relationship between educational institutions and the state. Husayn implicitly expected the multiparty system and a free press to regulate the state's involvement in education by holding governments accountable and pushing for transparency in budgetary allocation and decision-making. In the transition to a more authoritarian state, the checks and balances Husayn envisaged became untenable.

More broadly, this article complicates scholars' tendency to focus on the triangular struggle among the monarchy, the British, and the political parties, which portrays Parliament's inability to end the occupation as leading ineluctably to the Free Officers' coup in 1952.<sup>23</sup> Husayn's political work demonstrates that despite its difficulties, Parliament succeeded in enacting enduring institutional reforms and policies, such as free pre-uni-

versity education. Although Husayn criticized partisan politics' detrimental impact on stability and policymaking, he never believed his reform project had failed. Nor did he express disillusionment with parliamentary rule as a viable political system.

### **Taha Husayn in the Footsteps of Early *Nahdawi*s**

In his reform efforts, Taha Husayn adhered to the *nahda's* commitment to the revival of the Arab-Islamic tradition while engaging modern European concepts and methods. But he differed from earlier *nahdawi*s by contending that only modern institutions, especially the Faculty of Arts, could produce the critical scholarship necessary to meet this objective. He also insisted that university scholars, with their knowledge of both the old the new, could design the various stages of a national education system that would address the present and future needs of the country. In his view, the education these scholars designed should be made freely available to all Egyptians. Only then could the country accumulate the political, economic, and cultural strength necessary to throw off the yoke of colonialism and achieve full independence.

Intellectual historian Abdulrazzak Patel makes the case that the *nahda* was primarily a humanist movement, in which al-Azhar scholars like Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Husayn al-Marsafi, and Muhammad 'Abduh advocated teaching classical *adab*, the Islamic sciences, and modern secular knowledge. Through humanist education, Patel argues these reformers sought to

reproduce the literary legacy and moral philosophy of the Arab classical period in an attempt to foster the virtues of characters suitable for an active life of public service among their subjects. They wanted to produce citizens who would not only be able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity, but also possess wisdom and learning and who would be endowed with a sense of duty to the community and state.<sup>24</sup>

Patel believes that to confront the West's ideas of "civilization and progress" and its colonial agenda, these scholars prescribed reforms based on "assimilating, through translation and adaptation, the great learning and achievements of Western civilization, while simultaneously reviving the classical Arab culture that preceded the so-called centuries of 'decadence' and foreign domination."<sup>25</sup> All three reformers worked to implement these



reforms in educational institutions, but these institutions resisted reforms or were closed.<sup>26</sup> For example, Muhammad ‘Abduh’s curricular reforms at al-Azhar met with fierce opposition from both al-Azhar scholars and Khedive ‘Abbas II, who accused ‘Abduh of “wanting to turn al-Azhar into an institution of philosophy and literary education (*adab*) bent on extinguishing the light of Islam.”<sup>27</sup> ‘Abduh resigned in response to the accusation in 1905 and supported the creation of a secular national university that would be more open to humanist education.<sup>28</sup> ‘Abduh died not long after his resignation. Three years later, in 1908, his former students Sa’d Zaghlul, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, and Qasim Amin founded Egypt’s first university devoted to studying the humanities, the Egyptian University.

Taha Husayn sought to strengthen Egypt’s humanist educational institutions. He centered his reform project on the Egyptian University’s Faculty of Arts, which he insisted was the only institution that could engage critically with the old and the new and lead Egypt to its “proper awakening.”<sup>29</sup> As the first elected Egyptian dean of arts, he invoked a familiar *nahdawi* reform mantra as the faculty’s mission:

What I hope and what I am working on is for the Faculty of Arts to accomplish three goals: First, the revival of our Egyptian and Arab past. Second, to strengthen a clear and strong connection between us and Western civilization. Third, to show Europe what it needs to know about our right predisposition for rich intellectual life, and to contribute to the advancement of human civilization.<sup>30</sup>

He often expressed frustration with those who did not take the faculty and its mission seriously. People, Husayn insisted, had to understand that the Faculty of Arts was as rigorous and methodical as any other faculty: “What is taught at the Faculty of Arts is not a common venture accessible to everyone. It is a science, like any other science, which has its proper methodology and doctrine.” And like other sciences, the arts required proper training: “If you were a poet or a writer, this would not make you a professor of literature, just like understanding a history book would not be enough to make you a historian.”<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the historian Shafiq Ghurbal was a good example of the credentialed and well-trained professional arts academic Husayn had in mind. Graduating from the Higher Teacher’s College in 1915, Ghurbal went

to England on a scholarship and studied under the supervision of Arnold Toynbee. He began teaching at the Egyptian University in 1928 and became the first Egyptian professor of modern history, before being promoted to dean of arts. The historian Anthony Gorman describes Ghurbal as “the key figure in putting modern Egyptian history on a firm academic footing.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Yoav Di-Capua shows how Ghurbal and his students were the first Egyptian researchers to explore Egyptian archives seriously. They showed their professionalism by cooperating with archivists, scrutinizing primary sources, and extensively footnoting their research. Their rigorous methods distinguished them from contemporaries such as the renowned nationalist historian ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi‘i, who did not cite sources or document how he arrived at his findings.<sup>33</sup> While Di-Capua rightly concludes that Ghurbal was the “doyen of Egyptian historiography,” Ghurbal’s efforts should not be dissociated from the institutional commitment at the Faculty of Arts to teaching modern methods.

Husayn credited the university and faculty members like Ghurbal with training the generation who, after the 1919 revolution, triggered an “intellectual awakening that Egypt had never experienced before.”<sup>34</sup> Husayn understood this awakening to mean a spirit of intellectual freedom that encouraged thinkers and writers to apply modern methods of critical scholarship unhindered either by “highly conservative restrictions or fear of the oppression of the powerful.”<sup>35</sup> For example, Husayn claimed that the university fostered the spirit of intellectual freedom that encouraged ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq to write *Islam and the Principles of Governing* (1925), in which he argued that Islam does not advocate the caliphate or any other particular form of government, and that Muslims are free to choose a form of government that suits their needs.<sup>36</sup> As is well known, ‘Abd al-Raziq’s colleagues at al-Azhar were so offended by the book that they stripped him of his position as scholar and jurist.

Husayn actively participated in knowledge production at the university. As dean, he created the Institute of Egyptian and Islamic Archaeology to train Egyptian students in a field monopolized by Western scholars.<sup>37</sup> More significantly, he also founded the Institute of Oriental Languages and Literatures, which focused on Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and Hebrew. Husayn believed studying these languages facilitated better comprehension of classical Arabic, which would allow scholars to find ways of making Arabic more

straightforward to teach and to learn.<sup>38</sup> Husayn's landmark contribution to this new and controversial body of scholarship, *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* (1926), famously sparked an outcry. The book began as a collection of Husayn's lectures at the Faculty of Arts in which he challenged the authenticity of the pre-Islamic cannon and subjected these works to more rigorous scrutiny than previous scholars. When he published these lectures in book form, al-Azhar responded by demanding Husayn's dismissal from the university. Parliament debated the affair, and although the university supported Husayn's academic freedom, the state ultimately banned the book. Husayn deleted the passages deemed offensive and republished the book a year later under a different title, *On Pre-Islamic Literature*.

Husayn believed the hostile reception that met both *Islam and the Principles of Governing* and *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* was not simply a reaction to the specific arguments of each work. In his view, this hostility was above all a condemnation of the Faculty of Arts, a rejection of its methodology, and a repudiation of this new scholarship and its circulation among the public. The writer Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i provided evidence for Husayn's perspective in his belligerent response to Husayn's work, in which he questioned the future of the entire university. Rafi'i published a long article accusing the university of providing a platform for Husayn and his ilk to attack the "constants of the tradition." He asked rhetorical questions of the University's president, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid:

Don't you know . . . that even after all the 'ulama' have complained and the public has been dismayed, that Taha Husayn has informed his students that literature classes the following year will focus on "studying the Qur'an as a literary text?" Could the likes of Taha Husayn [be allowed to] study the Qur'an except in this despicable university (*al-jami'a al-mamquta*)?<sup>39</sup>

But the Faculty of Arts held out against the attacks. Writing in 1937, Husayn expressed pride in his institution, which had so quickly established a place for itself in Egyptian society. Listing some of its intellectual achievements, Husayn confidently declared, "I am yet to see any other school in the entire East that has accomplished as much as we did in such a short period of time."<sup>40</sup> He cited Ahmad Amin's *Fajr al-Islam* (1928) and *Duha al-Islam* (1933–36) as outstanding examples of analytical scholarship and the best

histories ever written of Islamic intellectual life in the first and second *hijri* centuries. “Had Amin not worked in the Faculty of Arts,” Husayn continued, “he would not have produced such a masterpiece that the previous centuries were unable to achieve.”<sup>41</sup> He celebrated the faculty’s translations of Faust, Hermann, and Goethe from the original German, and the faculty’s revision and publication of *The Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi’s Persian epic “The Book of Kings.” He detailed the academic events and publications dedicated to the millennial celebration of the Abbasid poet al-Mutanabbi, and he credited the geography department with having produced the first works of scientific geography in Arabic. To these achievements he added all the lectures, public defenses, books, and articles produced by professors and students, and the school’s curricula, textbooks, and exams. These accomplishments, Husayn concluded, had a tremendous impact on intellectual life in Egypt.<sup>42</sup> In Husayn’s eyes, the *nahda* was alive and well.

### A Challenging Parliamentary Context

Taha Husayn believed these achievements fit within a larger education reform project. He believed that a successful democracy requires a sound educational system, and that the university linked the two. In a 1944 speech, Husayn argued that democracy enabled people to understand and articulate their need for justice, truth, and a better life. But for people to come to this awareness, education was essential.<sup>43</sup> He described the relation between the university and democracy as “the relation between mind and body, the relation between the mastermind and the material that needs to be managed.”<sup>44</sup> He criticized those who considered higher education a “luxury” that should be dispensed to the people cautiously. He warned against such thinking, arguing that democracy called for equal opportunities for all citizens including access to university education, which should be based on merit, not money or power.<sup>45</sup> “University education,” he stated, “provides [the country with] the thinking minds capable of organizing other types of education and raising its level.”<sup>46</sup>

Husayn was convinced that without reforming the educational system, Egypt’s democracy would fail, and Egypt would never gain full independence. When the first parliament began its deliberations in 1924, Husayn was aware that the assembly faced difficult circumstances. Not only was Egypt’s

independence incomplete, Husayn believed, but the nation also had to demonstrate to colonial powers that it deserved independence. He argued that Egypt was being watched, not only by “our friends” the English, he joked bitterly, but also by other European powers judging whether Egypt could handle the responsibilities of independence.<sup>47</sup> Writing in France in 1924, Husayn compared France’s parliamentary elections of that May to Egypt’s four months earlier. He argued that both election campaigns were full of “beautiful promises” and “shiny hopes,” but that the victorious parties in both countries had not considered the feasibility of those promises, setting themselves up for post-election confusion and disappointment.<sup>48</sup> If the winner in France had accomplished more than the winner in Egypt, the explanation was simple.

France is truly independent. It is not occupied by the English and does not worry about foreign control. . . . If the Egyptian parliament and government enjoyed the same independence and sovereignty enjoyed by the French parliament and government, then who knows what the Egyptian parliament and government would do with Egypt’s friends and foes.<sup>49</sup>

Inspired by the French opposition, which criticized the government and kept a watchful eye on its performance, Husayn considered it his duty to do the same in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

Husayn was also convinced that the Ministry of Public Instruction was in dire need of reform. In 1923, he wrote that the ministry could not rid itself of British influence because

The men of the [ministry of] public instruction have undertaken a specific line of work and thought, which they cannot see beyond. They are used to a special educational policy chartered by Dunlop, so it will not be easy or even possible for them, to replace this policy with another no matter how much the circumstances and the times have changed.<sup>51</sup>

Husayn was discussing the infamous educational policy ordered by the British Consul General in Egypt, Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), and his inspector of education, Douglas Dunlop. Their policy restricted access to education by imposing fees, limiting educational institutions’ mission to

producing administrators for government offices, and concentrating on elementary education at higher education's expense. Husayn criticized the ministry for not rethinking its educational philosophy after independence and not reforming the system according to the needs of the nation.<sup>52</sup>

From then on, Husayn advocated the creation of technical councils to serve as resources the ministry could consult on policy and procedure. "Technical matters should be referred to technical people, and those who supervise education should be knowledgeable about education," Husayn wrote.<sup>53</sup> In his view, these councils would also decentralize the executive power that had been concentrated in the minister's hands since the British administration. Husayn complained that the ministry refused to allow input in decision-making from anyone except the ministry's inspectors and high officials, who almost never had any direct engagement with teaching. He advocated committees composed of specialists, especially teachers, who were familiar with students' needs and could propose effective solutions. He insisted that officials abandon the thought that permitting teachers' involvement in policymaking would weaken the ministry.<sup>54</sup>

Husayn created a technical office for the Arabic Language Academy in 1940, staffed and run by academy members. He tasked this office with duties previously undertaken by the Ministry of Public Instruction, such as preparing the annual budget, appointments, promotions, and transfers, among other responsibilities.<sup>55</sup> In 1950, Husayn created the Supreme Council of the Universities to coordinate Egyptian universities, whose numbers had grown throughout the 1940s. He believed inter-university coordination would allow academics to determine the organization of university programs, examinations, and evaluations, the awarding of diplomas, the creation of various chairs, and the appointment of faculty.<sup>56</sup> As minister of public instruction in 1951, he reorganized the Supreme Council of Education to include ten teachers of various subjects and eight representatives of the universities. Husayn argued that teachers' classroom experience made them better qualified than anyone to speak for students and the needs of the educational system as a whole.<sup>57</sup>

Husayn also believed technical councils would ensure the educational system's stability and protect it from rapid government changeovers. He viewed partisan politics, particularly the tendency for the winning political party to reverse the outgoing party's policies, as a major obstacle to educa-

tional reform. In 1932, Husayn decried the way in which partisan politics pervaded the ministry in all “shapes and forms.”<sup>58</sup> He gave the example that the ministry stage-managed the minister’s visits to schools and institutes for the press in order to convince the public of the ruling party’s popularity, rather than meaningfully engaging those institutions’ needs. He warned that officials often intimidated and discriminated against employees based on their political affiliation.<sup>59</sup> He believed that technical councils could shield policymakers from political exigencies and permit them to focus on short- and long-term planning.

Likewise, after independence and the adoption of the 1923 constitution, Husayn called on the ministry to share its plans with the public in regular communiqués. He argued that transparent communications would allow the public to give feedback and evaluate the efficiency of various educational policies.<sup>60</sup> With the new parliament in place, he expected the government to depart from earlier decision-making processes, which took place behind closed doors. He believed government should prepare projects but not implement them until the Egyptian people had provided input via parliamentary debate. He insisted: “People have the right to know. . . . The constitution has returned this right to them. . . . It is their right to worry, demand an official statement from the government, and wait for Parliament [to decide].”<sup>61</sup>

After making primary education free in 1944, Husayn gave an optimistic speech. He claimed that the people’s enthusiasm for education indicated growing support for democracy because democracy had inspired the people to realize their need for education. Referring to the period between 1942 and 1944, when the Wafd was in power, he wrote:

I would like to point your attention to the last two years. As soon as Egyptian democracy returned to its normal life, the people’s conscience was revealed to them. They realized they needed an education, and they pushed their government to provide and expand this education, not infinitely, but to a great extent. I would have liked to say infinitely, for this is what we should aim for if we were to live a true democratic life.<sup>62</sup>

These calls could be read as populist propaganda for his policies. But Husayn was speaking out of professional experience. His career in the ministry granted him a bird’s-eye view of school admissions. He had read the applications

of children of poor parents who were turned away because of prohibitive tuition fees or lack of classrooms. In 1942, he wrote about “thousands” of rejected scholarship applications each year.<sup>63</sup> In the ministry, he used these figures to illustrate the need to grant more scholarships and to build a case for free primary education.<sup>64</sup> Considering the details of Husayn’s project reveals that, unlike earlier *nahdawis*, he was not simply saying the intellectual class must educate the people. He mobilized figures and statistics to argue that “the people want to be educated [*al-sha‘b yurid an yata‘allam*].”<sup>65</sup>

### A Democratic Debate on Education

Husayn saw the growing numbers of Egyptians seeking education as a healthy sign, and he sought to persuade the government that providing free education was an important basis for proper governance. In a 1944 speech at the Royal Geographical Society, he cited Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, and Arab philosophers such as Ibn Khaldun to argue that none of these thinkers could imagine any reform without adequate attention to education. Providing education to the people, Husayn insisted, was the duty of the state.<sup>66</sup> He further argued three years later that the state was created to grant people their rights. He warned that if the state failed to deliver those rights, then “the state has no rights over the people and they no longer have to obey it.”<sup>67</sup> He called on the Egyptian public to recognize, demand, and protect their rights: “Egyptians will not be qualified for freedom, independence, or dignity unless these priorities have become part of their hearts and minds.”<sup>68</sup> Husayn was effectively calling for a new contract between state and people by urging Egyptians to see the state’s *raison d’être* as attending to their needs.

Husayn’s calls for free education did not go unchallenged. His nemesis in this debate was the pedagogue Isma‘il al-Qabbani, who feared that this policy’s rapid implementation would diminish educational standards. Their conflict in the 1940s and early 1950s came to be known as the “quality vs. quantity” debate. Qabbani based his position on a detailed analysis of the Ministry of Public Instruction’s existing capacities in terms of schools and qualified teachers. He opposed flooding the existing institutions with new students by citing pedagogical studies that advocated limited classroom sizes. He also opposed the rushed construction of new, substandard schools



that did not meet the ministry's requirements in terms of buildings, playgrounds, and laboratories.<sup>69</sup> Qabbani published and lectured widely, and his positions won the support of non-Wafd officials, such as the Saadists. But Husayn refused to let the number of schools and instructors stall his project. To oppose Qabbani, Husayn expressed an idealistic grand vision and did not linger on its practical restrictions. In this debate, he composed his well-known analogy, which continues to circulate to this day: "education is an absolute necessity, like water and air." He advocated rejecting Qabbani's "elegant pedagogy," which demanded that everything proceed according to strict instructions, on the grounds that it contradicted what Husayn believed the "Egyptian life wanted."<sup>70</sup>

Several years later, in 1949 Husayn made a different case, drawing on his professional experience to resolve the funding problem. Rejecting elegant, expensive Western pedagogy, Husayn demanded that the Egyptian government adapt its budget to the people's needs and not the other way around. He even questioned how the Ministry of Finance understood the term "budget." If the problem was insufficient resources, Husayn proposed raising taxes. "The budget," he argued, "should not be about the Ministry of Finance balancing figures every year, but it should be about balancing taxes and the facilities that people need."<sup>71</sup> He insisted that the government had sufficient resources, and that the question was how to manage these resources. Referring to the 1948 war in Palestine, he warned against designating millions of pounds for the army at the expense of education and other vital services: "What concerns me here is that the military does not overshadow other facilities."<sup>72</sup> To make his point, he raised the Ministry of Public Instruction's request for a million pounds to address the needs of its teachers and schools. The government promised this funding to the ministry in installments over five years, while simultaneously promising tens of millions of pounds to the military. "Is this serious or a joke?" he exclaimed.<sup>73</sup> Husayn demanded nothing less than complete transparency in budget allocation.

Husayn predicted the Wafd's landslide victory in 1950, believing the people understood that the Wafd responded to their demands.<sup>74</sup> His first decision as minister of public instruction was to make secondary and technical education free. For four hours, Husayn defended his budget before Parliament, reciting detailed figures without aid or error.<sup>75</sup> At the beginning

of the 1950-51 school year, Husayn was happy to report to the Council of Ministers that not a single applicant was turned away from secondary or technical schools. The council recorded its appreciation of “the incredible effort that his Excellency [Taha Husayn] has made concerning the admission of students into schools and universities and facilitating education to all Egyptians.”<sup>76</sup>

In the summer of 1950, Husayn represented the Egyptian Ministry of Public Instruction before the Arab delegations to the second Arab Conference on Culture in Alexandria. Husayn was proud of the ministry’s accomplishments in democratizing education. Despite all the difficulties and frustrations, these accomplishments were produced by a democratic process that, he believed, responded to popular needs. Rejecting the notion that free education was a European innovation, he argued that it was a return to practices that existed for centuries in the *kuttab* system and at al-Azhar:

Free education is not something we have learned from Europe, but it is a return to our past in the early days of Islam, or even to the early days of modern Egypt. We did not come to know paid education (*al-ta’lim al-ma’jur*) until we came into contact with Europe.<sup>77</sup>

Free education was a triumphant “Egyptian experiment” that Husayn hoped would benefit other Arab countries in their fight for freedom and independence.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1954, Taha Husayn believed that the people’s embrace of the 1952 Free Officers’ coup indicated that his educational and cultural policies had succeeded. He wrote that knowledge produced in the decades preceding the coup informed the people of their rights. They supported the army because it promised to reinstate those rights. In his view, overwhelming popular support for the coup transformed it into a revolution.<sup>79</sup> Literature, he stressed, had paved the way for revolution by showing the people what their lives should be like and helping them understand that values of justice and equality should reign.<sup>80</sup> He stated,

We compared what we had revived from the old and the new we had taken from Europe to the life we were leading and the systems we were

following. We loathed what we were in, and we tried to exchange this life for one that was better.<sup>81</sup>

But as historian Hoda Yousef argues, in Egypt institutional education was always limited in its impact and implementation.<sup>82</sup> Husayn was aware of these limitations. He believed that the knowledge and culture produced since 1919 had found other means of reaching the people. Egyptians supported the coup, he argued, because they had read about freedom and equality in books written by philosophers and authors. Those who could not read learned about those values from people who could. And when they recognized that the realities of their lives lagged behind these ideals, Egyptians rebelled.<sup>83</sup>

Prior to 1952, Husayn had experienced state censorship. His critics in government repeatedly accused him of communism. The state forced him to shut down his periodical *al-Katib al-Misri* in 1948 and banned his book *al-Mu'adhabun fi al-Ard* in 1949 for its vivid depiction of poverty. Yet he saw these as problems of implementation. Husayn never lost faith in the parliamentary system nor suffered what some critics have referred to as his generation's "crisis of liberalism."<sup>84</sup> As he cheered the fall of the monarchy in 1953, Husayn served on the committee that drafted a new liberal constitution that made Parliament Egypt's most authoritative institution. In the months after the coup, he continued to push for general elections and a swift return to civilian rule. But to his disappointment, the new government never put the 1954 constitution to a referendum.

Despite Husayn's frustrations with the multiparty system, this article has demonstrated that it was an essential component of his vision for reform. Husayn implicitly expected Egypt's fledgling parliamentary democratic system to regulate the state's role in culture and education. He anticipated checks on power: an active and relatively free press through which policymakers engaged the public, formal commitment to transparency by government officials, electoral campaigns that diagnosed problems and offered solutions, regular turnovers of political power, a democratically elected parliament that genuinely represented the Egyptian people, and, most importantly, an Egyptian people who held the government accountable.

Narrowly reading Taha Husayn's published work has led many scholars to consider him an intellectual interested only in culture and seduced by a superior European culture. But Husayn was deeply conscious of culture's

politics and education's political potential. For Husayn culture was never an isolated social-artistic sphere, but rather the best means of ensuring the success of Egyptian democracy, achieving intellectual parity with Europe, and fighting the unequal power relations that held the country back from full independence. During the parliamentary period, Husayn was not only an intellectual, but a politician and statesman as well. It is therefore essential that we consider his career in the civil service and his political life in order to produce new, contextually rich readings of his published work.

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (The Egyptian National Archives, DWQ), Council of Ministers, file 0075-054705, the session of 9 December 1939, "Memorandum from the Ministry of Finance to the Council of Ministers regarding the appointment of Dr. Taha Husayn as supervisor of the Directorate of General Culture."
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-057763, minutes of the sessions of September–December 1940, minutes of the session of 25 November 1940.
- 5 DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-057771, minutes of the sessions of May–July 1942, the sessions of 12, 14, and 16 May 1942.
- 6 Cairo University, Archives of the Faculty of Arts, Taha Husayn file, "Ministerial Decree 5590," 26 May 1942.
- 7 Great Britain's famous "four reservations" maintained their sovereignty over defense, imperial communications, minorities, and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.
- 8 See Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis that Made Modern Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy Johnson, and Barak Salmoni, eds., *Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005).
- 9 There are surprisingly few English monographs on Husayn. Besides Pierre Cachia's *Taha Husayn, His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (London: Luzac, 1956), historian Donald Reid remarks, the main source on Husayn in English remains his autobiography, *The Days*. Donald Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 236. There are many Arabic-language monographs on Husayn, however. The literary scholar Munji al-Shimli argues that most of these works portray Husayn either as hero or villain. Shimli dismisses many of these studies for not attempting to read Husayn critically. Munji al-Shimli, "Introduction," in *Sultat al-Kalima: Masalik li-Dirasat Adab Taha Husayn wa Fikrihi*, ed. Munji al-Shimli, 'Umar al-Jumni, and Rashid al-Qarquri (Tunis: Markaz al-Nashr al-Jami'i, 2001), 6. Islamist scholars tend to accuse Husayn of having undermined Islam by serving the Western colonial project. See Jabir Rizq, ed., *Taha Husayn: al-Jarima wa-l-Idana* (Cairo: Dar al-I'tisam, 1985); Anwar al-

- Jindi, *Muhakamat Fikr Taha Husayn* (Cairo: Dar al-ʿItisam, 1984); and Mahmud al-Istanbuli, *Taha Husayn fi Mizan al-ʿUlamaʾ wa-l-Udabaʾ* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1983). Laudatory literature on Husayn hails him as a creative genius who overcame blindness and became a staunch defender of liberal values. See Kamal al-Mallakh, *Taha Husayn: Qahir al-Zalam* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1973); and Ahmad ʿUlabi, *Taha Husayn: Sirat Mukafih ʿAnid* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1990).
- 10 For more on the educational and cultural reforms during the parliamentary period and their sociopolitical context through the lens of Taha Husayn's life and work, see Hussam R. Ahmed, "Statecraft and Institution Building between Two Revolutions: Taha Hussein and Egypt's Road to Independence (1919-1952)" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2017).
  - 11 Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1973), 453 and 489.
  - 12 Shaden Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seduction of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 280.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 285.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, 273-88.
  - 15 Husayn claimed that for Egypt to become strong and achieve independence, Egyptians had no option but "to follow in the path of Europeans, to become their equals, and to be their partners in civilization, in its good and its bad, its sweetness and its bitterness. . . . And he who claims otherwise is deluding or deluded." Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr*, 54. For his critique of al-Azhar, see Taha Husayn, *The Days*, vol. 3, trans. Kenneth Cragg (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2001), 248.
  - 16 See, for example, Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʾ, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). For a recent critique of these binaries, see Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahdah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
  - 17 Dyala Hamzah, "Introduction," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere, and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, 8. Albert Hourani describes Husayn as "the most systematic thinker" of the writers active in the 1920s and 1930s. Hourani sees Husayn's ideas as the logical culmination of a system of liberal thought that inspired three generations of Arabs. Ironically, Hourani ends the *nahda* in 1939, the year Husayn joined the Ministry of Public Instruction as a civil servant. Because of this periodization, and due to his exclusive focus on published ideas, Hourani does not deal with Husayn's efforts as a public official. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 325-6.
  - 19 Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 24.
  - 20 Luwis ʿAwad, *Aqniʿat al-Nasiriyya al-Sabaʾ* (Cairo: Markaz al-Mahrusa, 2014), 120.
  - 21 El Shakry shows how local actors focused on proving the "uniqueness and educability of the collective national subject," to devise the social projects necessary to fix the ills of Egyptian society. El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 198-9.
  - 22 *Ibid.*, 5 and 19.
  - 23 For critiques of Egypt's liberal experiment, see Afaf Lutfi Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); and Yunan Labib Rizq, "Suqut al-Tajriba al-Libaliyya fi Misr," in *Arbaʿun ʿAman ʿala Thawrat Yuliyu*, ed. Raʿuf ʿAbbas Hamid (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyya, 1992): 40-51. See also Arthur Goldschmidt and Barak Salmoni, "Introduction," in *Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, 4.

- 24 Patel, *The Arab Nahdah*, 198.
- 25 Ibid., 229-30.
- 26 Ibid., 190.
- 27 Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Manar, 1906-31), vol. 2, 427-9, 503. Quoted in Patel, 193.
- 28 'Abd al-Mun'im Jumay'i, *al-Jami'a al-Misriyya al-Qadima: Nashatuha wa Dawruha fi al-Mujtama' (1908-1925)* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Jami'i, 1980), 14.
- 29 Taha Husayn, "Athar al-Jami'a al-Misriyya al-Qadima fi Hayat Misr al-Haditha," *Watani*, 25 January 1959, in *Turath Taha Husayn: al-Maqalat al-Sahafiyya min 1908 ila 1967* (Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya, 2010), vol. 1, 764.
- 30 Taha Husayn, "Hadith al-Duktur Taha Husayn Bey 'an Kulliyat al-Adab," *al-Muqtataf*, January 1937, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 431. Husayn was the first elected Egyptian dean of arts, briefly in 1928, then in 1930 and again in 1936.
- 31 Taha Husayn, "Kulliyat al-Adab," *al-Musawwar*, 4 March 1932, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 314.
- 32 Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 23.
- 33 For these infractions, Ghurbal and his students banned 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i from the Royal Historical Society. Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 159, 196-9.
- 34 Taha Husayn, "Athar al-Jami'a al-Misriyya al-Qadima fi Hayat Misr al-Haditha," 763-4.
- 35 Ibid., 764.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 DWQ, 'Abdin, file 0069-004610, Memorandum on the Egyptian University, "Note: Université Egyptienne 1933-34."
- 38 DWQ, 'Abdin, file 0069-004500, Egyptian University administration council: minutes of the session of 28 August 1938, "Faculty of Arts: Decree Project for the Creation of an Institute for Oriental Languages and Literatures."
- 39 Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, "al-Adab al-'Arabi fi al-Jami'a," *Kawkab al-Sharq*, 28 July 1926, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 278-9.
- 40 Husayn, "Hadith al-Duktur Taha Husayn Bey 'an Kulliyat al-Adab," 428.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid., 431.
- 43 Taha Husayn, "al-Dimuqratiyya Laysat illa al-'Ilm wa-l-Ma'rifa," *al-Wafd al-Misri*, 9 June 1944, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 535.
- 44 Ibid., 535.
- 45 Ibid., 535-40.
- 46 Ibid., 538.
- 47 Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr*, 12-4.
- 48 Taha Husayn, "Yawman," *al-Siyasa*, 25 August 1924, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 264.
- 49 Ibid., 266-7.
- 50 Ibid., 264.
- 51 Taha Husayn, "Fi Wizarat al-Ma'arif: al-'Abath bi-l-'Ilm wa-l-Mu'allimin," *al-Siyasa*, 31 July 1923, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 168.
- 52 Taha Husayn, "Thaqafa," *al-Siyasa*, 25 July 1932, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 326.
- 53 Husayn, "Fi Wizarat al-Ma'arif: al-'Abath bi-l-'Ilm wa-l-Mu'allimin," 169.
- 54 Ibid., 169-70.

- 55 “Marsum bi-Ta’dil al-Marsum al-Sadir bi-Insha’ Majma’ Fu’ad al-Awwal li-l-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya,” *Majallat Majma’ al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya* 5 (1948): 171-3.
- 56 DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-056819, minutes of the session of 25 June 1950, “Memorandum for the Creation of a Supreme Council of the Egyptian Universities.”
- 57 DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-057867, minutes of the session of 11 March 1951, “Memorandum for the Reorganisation of the Supreme Council of Education.”
- 58 Taha Husayn, “Hadith al-Yawm: Tahqiq,” *al-Siyasa*, 17 July 1932, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 319.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Taha Husayn, “Harakat al-Islah,” *al-Siyasa*, 10 October 1923, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 209.
- 61 Taha Husayn, “Hadith al-Yawm: Al-Azhar wa Madrasat al-Qada’ al-Shar’i,” *al-Siyasa*, 20 July 1923, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 164-6.
- 62 Husayn, “al-Dimuqratiyya Laysat illa al-‘Ilm wa-l-Ma’rifa,” 536.
- 63 Taha Husayn, “Tasrihat Hamma li-l-Duktur Taha Husayn,” *al-Masri*, 21 December 1942, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 493.
- 64 For example, in September 1942, the proportion of registered students receiving scholarships increased from one to three percent. In October 1942, the ministry raised this proportion to ten percent. DWQ, Council of Ministers, minutes of the session of 26 October 1942; and DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-057772, minutes of the sessions of August-September 1942, minutes of the session of 15 September 1942.
- 65 Taha Husayn, “Fi al-Ta’lim,” *al-Ahram*, 6 April 1953, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 717.
- 66 Taha Husayn, “Duktur Taha Husayn Yaqu: al-Ta’lim Haqq Iktasabahu al-Sha’b,” *al-Wafd al-Misri*, 14 January 1944, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 533.
- 67 Taha Husayn, “Ha’ula’ al-Mu’allimun al-Mudribun!” *al-Musawwar*, 11 April 1947, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 590.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 See Isma’il Mahmud al-Qabbani, *Dirasat fi Tanzim al-Ta’lim bi-Misr* (Cairo: Makatabat al-Nahda, 1958).
- 70 Taha Husayn, “al-Nush’ al-Da’i,” *al-Balagh*, 7 June 1945, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 556-7.
- 71 Taha Husayn, “Barnamaj,” *al-Ahram*, 7 November 1949, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 644.
- 72 Taha Husayn, Untitled, *al-Ahram*, 11 July 1949, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 626.
- 73 Ibid., 626-7.
- 74 Taha Husayn, “al-Haqq al-Murr,” *al-Ahram*, 28 October 1949, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 640.
- 75 Suzanne Taha Husayn, *Avec toi: de la France à l’Égypte, un extraordinaire amour, Suzanne et Taha Hussein (1915-1973)* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 192.
- 76 DWQ, Council of Ministers, file 0075-057863, minutes of the sessions of September and October 1950, minutes of the session of 15 October 1950.
- 77 Taha Husayn, “Ifitah Mu’tamar al-Thaqafa al-‘Arabi al-Thani, Kalimat al-Ifitah,” *al-Asas*, 23 August 1950, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 1, 653.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Taha Husayn, “Min Ba’id: Thawratuna,” *al-Jumhuriyya*, 17 July 1954, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 6, 128-9.
- 80 Taha Husayn, “Adab al-Thawra,” *al-Jumhuriyya*, 23 October 1954, in *Turath Taha Husayn*, vol. 2, 437.
- 81 Taha Husayn, “Min Ba’id: Thawratuna,” 129.



- 82 Yousef expands literacy to include a range of “literacies” based on daily interactions with texts, even by those who were officially illiterate but who participated in mediated communal acts of letter writing or discussing postal rates. Hoda Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation, 1870-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 7.
- 83 Taha Husayn, “Adab al-Thawra,” 129.
- 84 The Marxist critic Ghali Shukri, for example, considers that Husayn and Muhammad Husayn Haykal’s Islamic writings in the 1930s signaled the end of the “liberal bourgeois democracy”’s attempts to achieve the 1919 Revolution’s objectives. Ghali Shukri, *Madha Yabqa min Taha Husayn?* (Beirut: Dar al-Mutawassit, 1974), 24. See also Mahmud Amin al-‘Alim and ‘Abd al-‘Azim Anis, *Fi al-Thaqafa al-Misriyya*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1989), 109-10. Historian Israel Gershoni has recently written about the orientalist “crisis narrative” in which H. A. R. Gibb and others indulge. Orientalists were furious with Muhammad Husayn Haykal and Taha Husayn for writing on Islamic topics in the 1930s because they considered it as a serious relapse in Haykal and Husayn’s commitment to rational, objective, scientific, and liberal principles. Albert Hourani refused to accept that writing on Islamic topics was a setback, and supported Taha Husayn’s biographer Pierre Cachia in his interpretation that Husayn wished to rewrite aspects of the Islamic tradition in a way that appealed to the sensibility of modern readers. See Israel Gershoni, “The Theory of Crisis and the Crisis in a Theory: Intellectual History in Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Studies,” in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, ed. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006): 131-82.