

THE EGYPTIAN TRANSITION IN AL-KAWAKIBI'S WORDS

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Abstract

The paper aims at applying some of the points of the theory developed by the Syrian writer 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī in his main work, "The characteristics of despotism", to the events that unfolded in Egypt since the fall of Mubarak in 2011. The purpose of the paper is twofold. First, to enhance the role played by al-Kawākibī in the development of the discourse on democracy and human rights in the Arab-Islamic world. Secondly, to give an interpretation of the Egyptian transition, in order to try to understand the obstacles to the implementation of a democratization process. First of all, the paper gives a short description of the political and social environment in which al-Kawākibī lived. Moreover, it focuses on al-Kawākibī's biography, which is strictly related to the contents of his above-mentioned work, in order to prepare the ground for the following analysis. After that, the paper highlights some of the main passages of al-Kawākibī's book, especially those related with democratization and human rights. To begin with, an analysis of the author's opinion about the causes of despotism is carried out, with a special focus on the political, religious and social ones. Furthermore, this section shows the consequences of despotism as exposed by al-Kawākibī. Finally, the emphasis shifts to the remedies proposed by the author in order to leave behind an autocratic environment. The final section represents the core of the paper. First, a brief analysis of the main events that developed from January 2011 on – fall of Mubarak, SCAF government, election and fall of Morsi - is carried out. Then, these same events are examined on the base of al-Kawākibī's work. In particular, a comparison between the causes of despotism such as conceived by the author and the Egyptian situation is carried out. Furthermore, this section tries to apply al-Kawākibī's theory in order to analyze the performance of Morsi and the Islamist government, as well as the new intervention of the military in the Egyptian politics and the first times of al-Sisi presidency. Finally, the paper aims at using al-Kawākibī's work in order to understand the possible elements that might allow Egypt to come out of the autocratic environment that has permeated politics and the society in the last decades.

Keywords: Egypt, al-Kawakibi, Despotism, Human Rights