

Knowledge in the Era of Despotism

A Reading of

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī’s

Ṭabā’i’ al-Istibdād wa Maṣūri’ al-Isti’bād

Hazel Lian Zimeri



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Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages

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1. Introduction

Studying literature of the Arabic *nahḍa*¹ while doing a course at Institut Français du Proche-Orient in Damascus I set my eyes on a text written by the Syrian thinker ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī. I was first fascinated with the colorful language of the text, and in the process of reading I was intrigued as I felt the issues the author brought up had direct relevance to the society in which I was living. Al-Kawākibī’s book is entitled *Ṭabā’ī‘ al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri‘ al-Isti‘bād*, *The Characteristics of Despotism and the Destructions of Enslavement*, (from now on I will refer to it as *Ṭabā’ī‘ al-Istibdād*) and seeks to analyze the characteristics of despotism.

Once despotism takes hold in a society, al-Kawākibī says, it begins to infiltrate the entire country and pervade all social classes. But most importantly, according to the writer, despotism creates a society in which knowledge is restricted and ignorance promoted. As a result, ignorance further entrenches despotism in society and leads to the destruction of the social body. Ignorance causes the individual to go through life in misery and fear, for without knowledge the nation can neither progress nor prosper. Only when a state’s citizens come to possess knowledge can they both progress and live a fulfilled life; despotism, in contrast, prevents people from attaining knowledge.

Working with *Ṭabā’ī‘ al-Istibdād* gave me not only the opportunity to study the relation between knowledge and the despotic society as seen by al-Kawākibī, but also to promote a pioneer of the Arabic *nahḍa* who is relatively little known to a Western audience. Scarcity of information in Western sources suggests that a presentation of him and his work is needed before a more critical study is undertaken.

The aim of this thesis is therefore primarily to introduce the author and his book in order to clarify some of his ideas, and hopefully open up avenues for further research. Even though brute force might be an element of keeping people submitted in an authoritarian state, which al-Kawākibī also acknowledges, I have chosen to focus on al-Kawākibī’s concept of ‘ilm’, ‘knowledge’ and I will present *Ṭabā’ī‘ al-Istibdād* along the following main questions:

- 1) What is the status of knowledge in what al-Kawākibī called the “era² of despotism”?
- 2) What are the mechanisms that prevent knowledge from spreading and in which levels of society are these mechanisms to be found?

¹ A period referring to the rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the 19th century.

² Al-Kawakibi employs the words: ‘*zaman*’, ‘*dawr*’ and ‘*‘ahd*’ when referring to ‘era’ in the context of despotism.

These are my main questions and will be followed by other questions, among them are: Which elements in society sustain and reproduce despotism? What sort of knowledge is prevented under despotism?

This is an attempt to shed light on a text written over 100 years ago in a culture foreign to me, and perhaps, in a historical sense, also foreign to the people inhabiting the areas of the previous Ottoman Empire today, although they are of course closer to the culture the text rose from. A text conveys information about the time and culture it was conceived in, and will to a larger or lesser degree reflect contemporary society and its values. A text does not rise from a vacuum, but is a part of a tradition with a place in history embedded in a particular context. Influenced by external circumstances, the author's reflections on these circumstances give the reader information about the author, his concerns and point of view. I will throughout my reading of al-Kawākibī's book also compare him to thinkers of the French Enlightenment to detect possible influences and to help clarify some of his ideas.

ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī has not previously been presented on a large scale in Western studies. His grandson, Hayṭam al-Kawākibī, thinks that his early death and his few published works may perhaps be the reason why he is left more or less un-researched by Western scholars.

Al-Kawākibī's text is my first attempt in reading a complete original text from the Arabic *nahḍa*. In order to do al-Kawākibī justice I should have consulted and read the main authors among his contemporaries. The scope and time limit of this thesis did not allow that. Well aware of that I would have been better able to compare and contrast him to other thinkers and better place him within a historical context, I still chose to read him, thinking that in order to enter upon future studies of the *nahḍa* I would have to start somewhere. I started with ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī.

1.1 Structure

Chapter 2 provides background information on the author, the historical context the text rose from, and al-Kawākibī's literary production. The text *Ṭabāʾīʿ al-Istibdād* will then be presented. A brief outline of principles for hermeneutical and philological readings of a text will be given and for this I have relied primarily on Helge Jordheim's (2001) *Lesningens Vitenskap: Et Utkast til En Ny Filologi*. Al-Kawākibī was influenced by ideas from the European Enlightenment which has consequences as to how the text is read and this will be dealt with

before al-Kawākibī's concept of *istibdād* is discussed and placed within a historical and intellectual context.

Chapters 3 and 4 represent my reading of the text. First the particular society despotism creates will be portrayed. Understanding the relation between the various social groups is important in order to understand how despotism is produced, sustained and reproduced. Chapter 4 deals with al-Kawākibī concept of *ilm*, 'knowledge', the relation between knowledge and ignorance and on the matter of education Al-Kawākibī makes a connection between knowledge and maturity, ignorance and immaturity. Kant made the same connections in his article *Was ist Aufklärung* 100 years prior to al-Kawākibī and this article will help shed light on his concept of 'knowledge'.

Al-Kawākibī's message is conveyed through a particular vocabulary and a rich use of metaphors. Chapter 5 will attempt to enhance his message and looks into the rhetorical tools the author employs and the elements that characterize his language.

1.2 Arabic Sources

My main source is al-Kawākibī's book *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri' al-Isti'bād*, from, *al-'Aḥmāl al-Kāmila lil-Kawākibī, The Collected Works of al-Kawākibī*, published in 1995 and edited by Muḥammad Jamāl Ṭaḥḥān. Ṭaḥḥān, a native of Aleppo, has collected al-Kawākibī's texts in one volume, which also provides some biographical data on the thinker.

In order to understand and better explain the concept of *mutamajjidūn*, the 'self-glorifiers', a group important to understand al-Kawākibī's society, I have made use of a lecture given by 'Aḥmad Barqāwī (2002) in Aleppo: "Maḥūm al-Mutamajjid fī Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād"

For further biographical data, I have consulted two books written by the Lebanese author Jān Dāyih [دایح] on al-Kawākibī's newspapers, *Ṣaḥāfat al-Kawākibī*, (1984) and *Ṣaḥāfat al-Kawākibī: al-Juz' at-Ṭānī, Jarīdat al-'Arab* (2000). He is, along with Jamāl Ṭaḥḥān, the most important contributor on al-Kawākibī's works and writing. Al-Kawākibī's grandson, Sa'īd Zaḡlūl al-Kawākibī (1998) has written his biography, *Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī; as-Sīra aḍ-Ḍātiyya*, from which I have also collected biographical details. I have also made use of Ṭaḥḥān's *al-Istibdād wa Baḍā'iluhu fī Fikr al-Kawākibī*, published in 1992. The author analyses in this book the concept of despotism according to al-Kawākibī.

1.2.1 Other Sources

To help place al-Kawākibī within a wider intellectual context I have primarily relied on Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, from 1962 and Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, published in 1970. I have also drawn on many other contributions which are listed in the bibliography.

I have mentioned above the possible influence of the French Enlightenment and will make use of elements from Montesquieu's (1748) *The Spirits of Laws*, Rousseau's (1762) *Emile; or on Education* and Kant's (1784) *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung*. See bibliography for the edition used. I have found Karl Popper's books from 1945 on *The Open Society and its Enemies*, volume I and II, useful, as he deals with the subjects of philosophical and historical philosophy, giving an insight to the working of non-democratic societies.

1.3 Transliteration

ا	ā	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ʿ
ث	ṯ	غ	ġ
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	x	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	ḏ	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w, ū
ش	š	ي	y, ī
ص	ṣ	ء	ʾ
ض	ḏ		

Long vowels are rendered *ā, ū, ī*

Diphthongs are rendered *ay, aw*

Articles with 'sun-letters' are assimilated

Hamzatu l-waṣl is not marked

Hamzatu l-qaṭʿ is marked

Tāʿ marbūṭa is rendered *-a* in pausal forms and *-at* in *ʾiḏāfas*

2. Tracing ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī

2.1 His Life

Coming from the Citadel in Aleppo and passing through the city’s old bazaars, one might happen to walk through al-Kawakibi-street. An anonymous street, just as the name is likely to be for a passing tourist. More or less unnoticed by Western scholars, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī’s thoughts are still widely circulated amongst Arab and Syrian intellectuals. Born in the flourishing trade centre of Aleppo in 1854, at the time under Ottoman rule, into a notable old Arab family³, he is perhaps best known to the Arabs for being the one who made the ideological transition from pan-Islamism to pan-Arabism as a pioneer of the Arabic *Nahḍa*.

At the age of five, al-Kawākibī’s mother died and he moved to Antakya, where he was raised by his aunt, although he was later to return to Aleppo to continue his studies. He studied law, political and social sciences, history, philosophy and literature, and was also fluent in Persian, Turkish and Arabic. He had no knowledge of any European languages (Haim, “Al-Kawākibī”,EI), and thus his knowledge of the European Enlightenment and its literature came through various translated sources. He is described as a mild, gentle and compassionate man.⁴ At the age of 22 he started his career as an editor for the Ottoman official newspaper *Furāt*.⁵ Due to strict censorship he was dissatisfied with the limited possibilities for informing his readers about the misgovernment of political affairs, and so he left his position and founded two newspapers, *aš-Šahbā’*⁶ (1877) and *al-ʿIṭidāl*⁷ (1879). Both newspapers were short lived, closed on the order of the governor of Aleppo after criticising governmental affairs. Both newspapers were identical in layout and content and differed only in name and they both wrote on the local governmental affairs (Dāyih, 2000, p. 8). *Aš-Šahbā’* at least seems to have been of some importance and had a fairly wide circulation (Dāyih, 1984, p. 74). In order to publish newspapers in Syria and Lebanon the editor needed a licence from the official authorities. Unable to obtain licences himself, al-Kawākibī instead obtained them for both newspapers in the name of friends, but the licences were cancelled upon the

³ It has been suggested (cf. Hourani, 1970, p. 271 and Tauber, 1994, p. 190) that al-Kawākibī was of Kurdish origin. His grandson Sa’d Zaḡlūl al-Kawākibī refuted this information in a conversation, Aleppo, 24. February, 2007.

⁴ Personal communication with Hayṭam al-Kawākibī, Damascus, 7. October, 2006.

⁵ The name means ‘sweet’ (water) and connotes the river Euphrates, *al-Furāt*.

⁶ The newspaper issued 16 publications on a weekly basis before it was closed. The name means ‘epithet of Aleppo’ and was the first privately owned newspaper in Aleppo, (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 43).

⁷ The word means ‘moderation’. The second attempt on publishing, also on a weekly basis, was stopped after two and a half months and made it to 10 publications. The newspaper was published both in Arabic and Turkish (Dāyih, 1984, p. 80–87).

closure of the newspapers. In 1998 it was discovered that al-Kawākibī, after his arrival in Egypt, also started publishing a third newspaper, *al-ʿArab*. This newspaper only made it to three publications. It differed from the two others in content, as it dealt with the key concepts of Arab nationalism (Dāyih, 2000, p. 7–10).

In an attempt by the authorities to silence him and to control his activities, Al-Kawākibī was offered several memberships and honorary positions in different councils in Aleppo. Ṭaḥḥān (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 40) lists 8 different positions in different city-councils, among them the councils of trade and education.⁸ He responded by opening a legal office in Aleppo for the ‘unjustly treated’, *al-maẓlūmūn*, and thus became known as the ‘father of the weak’, *ʿabū aḍ-ḍuʿafā*. In an effort to challenge the injustice suffered by his fellow citizens, the office filed complaints of various kinds, in which al-Kawākabī represented people from all layers of society, free of charge. At times, he would take his cases even further up the political hierarchy: some were even telegraphed to French and British diplomats (Zaġlūl al-Kawākibī, 1998, p. 46). This apparently caused much anger among politicians and a convenient pretext was found to attack him by accusing him of the attempted murder of the governor of Aleppo. Put on trial, he was acquitted and the governor was forced to resign from office. He was later imprisoned, once again on accusations of treason. This time, his trial was held in Beirut, where he presented his own defence. He was again acquitted and this led to yet another governor’s resignation (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 40).

Due to his personal experiences and the heavy censorship exercised by the Ottoman Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (1876–1909), al-Kawākabī was, as so many contemporary Syrian intellectuals, driven into exile. He arrived in Cairo in the winter of 1899 and upon his arrival was welcomed by several of his contemporary writers and thinkers (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 41). In Cairo he frequented the circle of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and wrote for several periodicals (Hourani, 1970, p. 271). In 1901, on the request of the Khedive of Egypt, he undertook a journey to several Islamic Arabic countries in order to study social conditions in them. His early death meant that he never finished writing up his observations. Apart from his writings which give us information of his intellectual activities, there seems to be few sources which deal with his life in Egypt. He died in exile in Cairo in 1902 at the age of 48, allegedly killed at the order of the Sultan himself, the story goes that he was poisoned drinking a cup of coffee. Upon his death his library was seized by the police and his writings confiscated (Al-

⁸ Al-Kawākibī accepted the various titles and memberships; however, it did not stop him from offering services to the poor and needy (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 40).

Kawākibī, 1995, p. 41). The rest of his belongings and properties were also later confiscated, sending his family into poverty (Zağlūl al-Kawākibī, 1998, pp. 187–192).

2.1.1 The Arabic *Nahḍa* and the Reign of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II

As al-Kawākabī began his career, the Ottoman Empire was under the rule of the Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd was born in 1842 and entered into office in 1876, a position he held until he was deposed in 1909, three years before his death. His handling of governmental affairs was characterized by absolutism and pan-Islamism (Deny, “ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II”, EI) and journalists at the time referred to his government as *ḥukūma istibdādiyya* (Rebhan, 1986, p. 57). Insurrection in Ottoman provinces, wars against Russia and Greece, an empty treasury – which led to foreign control over national debts – as well as emerging national sentiments among the Ottoman citizens, were some of the elements which confronted the Empire and made it ill-adapted for reform and political liberties (Deny, “ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II”, EI). ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd answered to the challenges by imposing restrictions on political and intellectual activities among the Ottoman subjects (Cleveland, 1994, p. 114) and many Syrian intellectuals were driven into exile.

Not trusting his ministers and reducing them to state secretaries, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd took governmental affairs into his own hands and created an instrument of domination for closer control of the state. When he suffered an assassination attempt at the hands of an Armenian bomb in 1905, he further developed his network of informing and espionage into a complicated network and arrests became widespread. Prior to this, he took control over the media and printed press, which had previously been flourishing and had been an important tool in propagating ideas from Europe, among them the concepts of liberty and respect for the individual (Deny, “ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II”, EI). Barqāwī (1999, p. 110) writes that the press was turned into a tool for “planting backwards ideas,” and that the newspapers were encouraged to speak of national safety and the happiness enjoyed by the ordinary Ottoman citizen. It was under these circumstances that al-Kawākibi entered upon his critique of the despotic regime of the Ottoman Sultan which resulted in the book *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-Istibdād wa Maṣāriʿ al-Istiʿbād*.

It is questionable to what extent censorship affected the spread of new notions. There is no doubt that the press played an important role in developing the new ideas by bringing novel approaches to life and thought to the attention of their readership, but the written word reached only the literate, those who could afford education, in reality a very small portion of

the Empire's citizens (Cioeta, 1979, p. 180). Yet the media can prove a powerful critic of the existing regime and is an important tool in informing its readers of the actual handling of government, as ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd was well aware. The clearest example of his censorship was the prohibition of certain words. Words like 'fatherland', *waṭan*, 'constitution', 'despotism', 'council of representatives', 'liberty', 'explosion', 'bomb', 'murder' and 'plot' (Deny, "ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II", EI; Cioeta, 1979, p. 176), were among those forbidden, and newspapers making use of these words were often abolished. EI and Cioeta do not quote the Arabic equivalents of these words, but Barqāwī (1999, p. 110) quotes some of the forbidden words among them; *al-istibdād* and *ad-dustūr*. By prohibiting these words it was thought that the connotations they evoked would also disappear. In theory, abolishing the word 'fatherland' would make it difficult to stir up nationalist sentiments; in the same way, dissidents would be much less likely to attempt to assassinate the Sultan after the prohibition of words like 'murder' and 'plot'.

Despite harsher censorship in Syria and Lebanon after the accession of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, Cioeta (1979, pp. 173–175) notes that it was not carried out systematically due to lack of knowledge amongst proofreaders as to which words were forbidden at any given time. Consequently, daring journalists and editors would sometimes avoid the forbidden words and insert synonyms instead. Cioeta lists al-Kawākibī's newspapers among those abolished due to censorship.

In an answer to al-Kawākibī's attack on the despotism of the Ottoman Sultan, his contemporary, the Syrian journalist Faraḥ Anṭūn (Reid, 1975, p. 106) put forward a contrasting view on the rule of the Ottoman Sultan. In this, he argued that ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd had no other choice but to rule despotically in order to keep the different religious groups and ethnic minorities stable.

Al-Kawākibī's writings are also connected to ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's doctrine of pan-Islamism. The Ottoman state with their Sultans had traditionally claimed the caliphate, a claim ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd emphasised during his reign. When al-Kawākibī called for a transfer of the caliphate to Mecca (cf. p. 9), it was based on the idea that the Arabs were the true protectors of the caliphate and that he considered the Turkish Ottomans to be responsible for the decay of Islam. This was a nationalist argument which "provided the Arabs with an ideological opening to oppose Ottoman rule" (Cleveland, 1994, p. 121). By focusing on tyranny al-Kawākibī could provide an argument for stepping out of the Ottoman Empire and establish an Arab state (Moaddel, 2005, p. 160).

2.2 His Works

As al-Kawākibī's papers were confiscated on his death, only two books, some copies of his newspapers, and a few private letters remain of his writings. The existence of his lost works is known from mentions of them made in other contemporary sources, both in his own works and those of other writers (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 52–55). Among his lost works are extended studies and additions he made to *Ṭabā'īc al-Istibdād* and *'Umm al-Qurā*.

Al-Kawākibī's most famous book, *'Umm al-Qurā (The Mother of Cities)*⁹, marks the ideological transition from pan-Islamism to pan-Arabism in that he calls for a transfer of the Caliphate from Istanbul to Mecca. He holds that the Caliph should be released from political duties and responsibilities and concentrate on religious matters, and suggests that he should serve as a symbol of Islamic unity. These ideas, later collated in the book *'Umm al-Qurā*, were first published in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad*¹⁰ of ʿAlī Yūsuf. The book was later serialized in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Manār*¹¹ of Rašīd Riḍā in 1899, but only after censorship of some of its more outspoken criticism of the Ottoman Empire (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 44). The book was published under the pseudonym as-Sayyid al-Furātī.

The work I am about to present, *Ṭabā'īc al-Istibdād wa Maṣāriʿ al-Istiʿbād*, was first serialized in *al-Mu'ayyad* between 1900 and 1902, each article left anonymous or given a different signature (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, pp. 43–44).¹² Al-Kawākibī made changes to the manuscript and furthered his studies after the first publication. The book was then published under the pseudonym ar-Raḥḥāla K. The original manuscript escaped confiscation, as his son managed to hide it when the police seized his library.

In the first half of the 20th century there were various publications of *Ṭabā'īc al-Istibdād*, some dated but others left undated. Ṭaḥḥān has stumbled over various publications of the book; most of them are published in Cairo. The first book dated is from 1931 and the same year the book was again published a second time in Cairo together with *'Umm al-Qurā* in one volume. Later there was published a revised edition, also undated, in Aleppo. An extended version of the book was published in Cairo in 1935, and al-Kawākibī's son, ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān

⁹ The title refers to Mecca.

¹⁰ The newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad* was the leading Islamic newspaper in Egypt at the end of the 19th century.

¹¹ The Egyptian newspaper *al-Manār* was founded by Rašīd Riḍā in order to promote the thoughts of Muḥammad ʿAbduh.

¹² Ṭaḥḥān lists the various articles with dates and under which signature al-Kawākibī published them, some of the articles he wrote were even left unsigned.

al-Kawākibī, used this copy when he published a revised version in 1957. He revised the book again in 1973 and the book was published in Beirut. There have been various recent publications of the book, but the earliest publication in Syria, according to Ṭaḥḥān's listings, seems to be in Aleppo in 1991. The book has also been published together with other books in book serials (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, pp. 49–52). It is worth noting that, at some point in the first half of the 20th century, the book was placed at number 15 of the 45 best Arabic books in a list compiled by Egyptian professors and public figures (Haim, 1954, p. 321).

2.3 The Book *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād*

Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād is a criticism of the despotic regime of Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Lewis, 2005, p. 199). The secret police, the Sultan's spies, spread throughout the Empire, a sad legacy still present in today's Syria. Al-Kawākibī's aim is to dissect despotism, by investigating it from different perspectives: he shows throughout his writing how despotism is the cause of social decay and regression and how it makes human beings utterly miserable. He begins his analysis in the first chapter entitled "What is Despotism?"; in the following chapters he then goes on to discuss, "Despotism and Religion (*dīn*)", "Despotism and Knowledge (*ʿilm*)", "Despotism and Glory (*majd*)", "Despotism and Wealth (*māl*)", "Despotism and Morals (*ʿaxlāq*)", "Despotism and Education (*tarbiya*)", "Despotism and Advancement (*taraqqin*)", he finally concludes with a chapter entitled, "Despotism and How to End It (*wa at-taxalluṣ minhu*)".

Al-Kawākibī portrays despotism like a virus –with the same devastating effect as that with which a virus takes hold over the body despotism takes hold over society and spreads from the despot to all layers of society, destroying the ability of cooperation and eventually the social body. Despotism thus creates conditions where certain values are prevented and certain traits are promoted. In the despotic society, freedom gives place to chains, progress to regression, honour to shame, justice to injustice, safety to fear and knowledge to ignorance. As a consequence of this, the despotic state neither prospers nor gives happiness to its citizens; instead, the citizens live broken in spirit, with no self-confidence or self-awareness. Despotism corrupts religion, morality, the mind, the honour; in other words, despotism deprives Man of the elements that make him human, and his life is reduced to that of an animal driven by greed and desire.

Knowledge of one's rights and knowledge of what constitutes good and bad government is needed in order to force the despot to act in the public interest and not in his own selfish interest. But knowledge is prevented and ignorance promoted in the despotic state and so its citizens live in blind obedience of the despot's demands. Under a good government, people live in justice and without fear, whereas under despotism they live fearful and ignorant and give in to the despot like frightened sheep surrender to a wolf.

Through strong use of language where the stupid are called 'imbeciles', 'ahmaq, the despot a 'beast', wahš, and the ignorant 'wretched', 'aşqā, he manages to convey a deep concern for the individual's condition and what it means to be human under despotic rule. He was a writer born of his time and, troubled by his personal experiences of imprisonment and exile, he set out and launched his attack on the despotic rule represented by the figure of the Ottoman Sultan.

It has been suggested (Lewis, 2005, p. 199; Haim "Al-Kawākibī", EI) that the book to a large extent is a rendering of Vittorio Alfieri's¹³ *Della Tirannide*, a claim refuted by several Arab scholars. Alfieri's book was translated into Ottoman Turkish from Italian in 1898 and al-Kawākibī may have read this translation. Sylvia Haim (1954) discusses how al-Kawākibī could have become familiar with Alfieri's ideas, seemingly unaware of that Alfieri's book was translated into Ottoman Turkish. In my copy of *Ṭabā'ir al-Istibdād* al-Kawākibī refers to Alfieri (p. 529, line 13) a clear indication that he was familiar with the Italian author. Haim lists several elements where the structure and arguments of al-Kawākibī's and Alfieri's book coincide and she concludes that he may have had the book read out loud to him and translated. In *al-'Aḥmāl al-Kāmila lil-Kawākibī* (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, pp. 57–60), the editor discusses various studies on al-Kawākibī where the accusations that he copied the book are refuted. Among the points raised are comments on the way in which al-Kawākibī's language and ideas resemble the language and ideas of al-'Afgānī, Riḍā and 'Abduh. In a study from 1980, an Indonesian student at the University of Cairo translated parts of Alfieri's text and concluded that al-Kawākibī did not copy the book, but is more likely to have borrowed some of his ideas (Al-Kawākibī, 1995, p. 59). Riḍā commented on this claim many years earlier and said that al-Kawākibī's descriptions of the Eastern society were "too exact to have been taken from a Western author" (Hourani, 1970, p. 271). Hourani (ibid.) thinks there to be originality to al-Kawākibī's writings due to his strong political interest and personal convictions. Anyone reading *Ṭabā'ir al-Istibdād* should bear in mind that, as a result of visits to Europe and

¹³ Italian dramatist, lyric poet and political theorist (1749–1803).

translations of books, ideas migrated from Europe to the Arab-speaking world, and the key concepts of the European Enlightenment flourished among Arab intellectuals. The book clearly has the Arab Muslims in mind in the way in which al-Kawākibī addresses his readers, makes both direct and indirect references to the Holy Koran and Arabic poetry, civilization and past writers, and uses his own labels to refer to the differences between the ‘Easterners’, *aš-šarqīyyūn*, and the ‘Westerners’, *al-ġarbiyyūn*.

2.3.1 The Genre of the Text

If political philosophy can be defined as “an investigation into the nature, causes and effects of good and bad government” (Miller, 2003, p. 2), then *Ṭabā’ī al-Istibdād* can be classified within this genre. Good or bad government affects the quality of human life, since good government allows freedom and bad government or tyranny breeds poverty and death (Miller, 2003, p. 2), something al-Kawākibī recognizes when portraying the suffering and malady of Man living under despotism. The idea that politics directly affects the life of the individual is made clear in the introduction to the text when he says that:

وقلما يوجد إنسان يحيط بهذا العلم, كما أنه قلما يوجد إنسان لا يحتك فيه.

“rarely does there exist a man who is thoroughly acquainted with this [political] knowledge just like there rarely exist a man who is not affected by it” (p. 433, § 1).¹⁴

He further states that the despotic government has made Man “the most miserable living creature”, *ašqā dawī al-ḥayāt* (p. 437, § 2) and “despotism is a cause of every [sort of] decay”, *al-istibdād ašlun li-kulli fasād* (p. 463, § 1).

The distinction between good and bad government is a prevalent idea in political philosophy (Miller, 2003, p. 3), and although al-Kawākibī’s main concern is the critique of bad government and its harmful effects upon the individual and society, he also contrasts despotism to good and democratic government. He thus educates the reader on the importance and the duty of keeping a watchful eye on their representatives.

¹⁴ References are made after English translations due to formatting-problems. References from al-Kawākibī’s book are in general quoted with page and paragraph to locate the reference with ease. I have also in some places, referred to which line the reference can be found in case of ambiguities.

2.3.2 The Text as a Critique

The text is a critique of the despotic regime of Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (cf. p. 10). It is an open and severe attack, which he chose to publish by using various pseudonyms when it was serialized in *al-Muʿayyad*. In a society where criticism of the regime is prohibited and the threat of punishment ever present, the author has two ways of conveying his message: he may openly criticize it by using a pseudonym, or he may hide the message in the text itself and sign in his own name.

Rasāʾil Ixwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*), is an early example of the former (Marquet, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ”, EI). Their letters spread in the 9th century and throughout 51 epistles or letters the brotherhood’s aim was to educate their readers in various topics like music, geography and intellectual sciences. They called for knowledge and action, educating their readers by means of anecdotes. Letter number 50 is on the subject of government and it openly criticizes the tyrant and his behaviour. Ixwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ are thought to have been a group of Ismāʿīlī’s from the mountains of Western Syria, but historians still do not know their identity with any certainty (Marquet, “Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ”, EI).

The moral political stories of *Kalīla wa Dimna*, (al-Muqaffaʿ, 1969) is an even earlier example of the latter. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (born 720) who worked in the service of the official authorities in Basra and Kufa, translated Indian fables from Pahlavi into Arabic. They are moral anecdotes about animals living in the forest where the animals assume moral characters. In his translation, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ emphasised the characters of the weak and the strong, the strong animals serving as symbols of tyranny and injustice, whilst the weak symbolized the citizens, resorting to their intelligence in order to combat their oppressors. In this manner the author could criticize the very people he served.

Al-Kawākibī chose to openly criticize while concealing his identity. This meant that he could express his concern in an open and unambiguous manner, not leaving any doubt as to the causes of Man’s malady. It is an effective way of informing the reader, instructing him, not only of the causes of his suffering, but also of how to rid himself of his malady.

2.3.3 The Literary Quality of the Text

A particular feature of this text, especially given the fact that it deals with political philosophy (cf. p.12) is that it has certain literary qualities. Although there is no plot as in conventional story writing, where a story is generally told from beginning to end, the manner in which the

author portrays the various groups within the society, have parallels to novel and story writing.

There is no single individual character as such, as we would expect to find in a novel, but al-Kawākibī does describe the various groups and fractions within society by means of their psychological traits, their behaviour, motivation, relationships to other groups, moral constitution, weaknesses and strengths. He also compares and contrasts the different groups. Given that a character can be defined as “a complicated term that includes the idea of the moral constitution of the human personality” (Hamilton, 2006)¹⁵, it is perhaps possible to analyse the various groups as one would a character in a novel. In order to explain the qualities of these groups, their actions and the consequences upon society, one has to read the whole book, as these elements are spread throughout the text and their characteristics appear gradually. This resembles the characters of novels, whose qualities are not revealed in one given chapter, but are spread throughout the story. An example of this in al-Kawākibī’s book are the characters of ‘the citizens’ who are first described as the most miserable, later given the qualities of children and animals and the characteristics of prisoners. Though the citizens, for example, choose their behaviour and can be described in moral terms, I have not detected any development or change in the various groups as the text progresses, as one might expect to find in a novel or a story. Their qualities are set and defined: al-Kawākibī does this by using adjectives, describing their act and he makes an explicit presentation of the various groups. Therefore, in explaining the society according to al-Kawākibī and describing the characteristics of the various groups, I have extracted their various characteristics in order to present a full picture of their moral constitution and how they affect each other and the society.

2.3.4 A Note on the Translation of the Title

Al-Kawākibī’s book has not been translated into any European languages, it is in English referred to as *The Characteristics of Tyranny* (Lewis, 2005, p. 199). Discussing the title with my philosophy and literature tutors at the French institute in Damascus, I received different suggestions for the best translation of the word ‘ṭabā’i’. Given the context, there are two possible translations which assume two different ideas. ‘Ṭabā’i’ translates into English as ‘essence’ (in the singular) and ‘characteristics’ (in the plural). In a philosophical sense, the

¹⁵ <<http://www.gpc.edu/~lawowl/handouts/character-analysis.pdf>>.

‘essence’ of a phenomenon is independent of its characteristics or features, as you can strip the phenomenon of its attributes and it still exists. On the other hand a phenomenon, made up of ‘characteristics’, does not exist without its attributes, and if you give it different attributes it will be a different phenomenon. I have tried out both variations throughout my reading and have come to the conclusion that the title should be translated as *The Characteristics of Despotism*. I have employed the word ‘characteristics’ as a result of the way that al-Kawākibī portrays despotism as a phenomenon dependent of its characteristics, but I will discuss this below (cf. p. 77) as this is a point of ambiguity in the text. I have also translated ‘*istibdād*’ into English as ‘despotism’ in reference to the European Enlightenment and how Montesquieu defined despotism and separated it from tyranny (cf. pp. 22–23).

2.4 Some Thoughts on Reading

It can be difficult, and sometimes impossible to understand an old text or a text produced in a foreign culture, because the reader will always bring in her or his knowledge, experiences and values and add these to the reading. Reading a historical text means that the reader and the author are situated in different historical contexts which may lead to the author’s intent becoming obscured (Jordheim, 2001, p. 242).

One problem I confronted when reading al-Kawākibī’s book while living in Syria, was trying to understand al-Kawākibī’s concept of despotism and how despotism was perceived under the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, because as I perceived the book, it also portrayed and explained the society in which I was living. It is crucial to the understanding of his book to know that there are over 100 years between the text’s origin and today, where technology has changed, education has spread and contact with the world is of a different kind. Al-Kawākibī’s despotism is not that of present day Syria, although it might bear resemblance to it at times, and there may be a legacy of despotism that has been handed down from the despotic regime of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd. Even though the text I am about to present should be seen in the light of its own time, I still think it provides an insight into the conditions and social pressure of the individuals living in places where little freedom is granted and injustice prevails.

2.4.1 Reading a Text

Philology as a science is about the reading and interpretation of texts and is built on the idea that the object of study is the text itself, where the process of reading demands thoughtfulness, objectivity and sobriety (Jordheim, 2001, p. 20). According to Umberto Eco a philological reading of a text will emphasise the rights of texts rather than the right of their interpreter (Jordheim, p. 20). The tasks of philology are to interpret the context of language and history on the one hand, and to interpret the author's personality and intentions for the text on the other (Jordheim, 2001, pp. 45–46). The text is interwoven into a historical setting and so when reading a historical text, we expose ourselves to the historicity of the language and comprehend that the text we are dealing with speaks to us from a time and place in history that may be completely different from our own time (Jordheim, 2001, p. 17). According to a philological reading, by reading a text as a text we gain access to the history or context in which it is embedded. By describing the language we can explain the text and its relation to the context (Jordheim, 2001, p. 124). Philology focuses on the language in history, as the text in some way or another is interwoven into a historical reality, and each text has a place in a context (Jordheim, 2001, p. 8).

Philology as it has traditionally been understood can be described as the field where history, literary science and linguistics overlap, the place these sciences meet in their mutual object, namely the language. Philology also serves to shed light on the relation between language and history and how the historical reality is present in the text when reading it in another time and place (Jordheim, 2001, pp. 19–22).

According to Brockhaus, philology can be broadly understood as the “scientific investigation of the spiritual development and authenticity of a people or a culture based on their language and literature” (Jordheim, p. 29). Philology in this sense does not only deal with texts and language, but also the development of people's cultural, political and religious identity as it appears in the language (Jordheim, p. 29).

A hermeneutical reading of a text departs from the philological reading to the extent that hermeneutics in a philosophical sense does not primarily deal with the text, which is to be interpreted, but with the interpretation (Jordheim, 2001 p. 59). According to hermeneutics, the past cannot be reconstructed as such, but must be understood through the context of which the interpreter is a part (Jordheim, 2001, p. 51). “All understanding is conditioned by the context or situation something is understood within”¹⁶, which means that the interpreter brings in his or her own experiences when interpreting a text. The reader enters into a dialogical

¹⁶ <<http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/ariadne/Idehistorie/framesettogm.htm>>.

relationship with the past, and there is a fusion of the horizon between the past and the present, between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. We get a better and more profound understanding not only of the text but also of ourselves (Ramberg, B; Gjesdal, K, 2005).¹⁷ Thus the reconstruction of a text's horizon happens within the reader's own horizon of understanding and the understanding of a text is conditioned by his or her inclinations and prejudices. All understanding is dependent on the context a given subject is understood within and this context or horizon is neither objective nor subjective.¹⁸ This means that one reader will bring in and highlight different elements of the text than another reader would. Hermeneutics further presupposes that in order to understand something with meaning we must always interpret the parts from a previous understanding of the whole to which the parts belong. When al-Kawākibī refers to despotism, he refers to the despotism of the Ottoman Sultan. Consequently, having knowledge of the context from which the text originated is important when approaching a text, a context which I have briefly provided above, and which will unfold further below.

2.5 Possible Influences on al-Kawākibī's Writings

Ṭaḥḥān (1992, p. 101–104) mentions the ordeals al-Kawākibī went through as a reason for his writings, but his ideas on the subject of despotism also sprang out from his studies of Islamic sciences, studies on Ibn Khaldoun and in addition to “his acquaintance of the French revolutionary ideas and especially what they wrote (Montesquieu and Rousseau)” (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 104). He was further influenced by his contemporary writers on the subjects of despotism, freedom and progress (ibid.). Ṭaḥḥān does not mention what al-Kawākibī read of literature pertaining to the French Enlightenment, and it is difficult to know how he understood the ideas of this period.

We may assume from this that al-Kawākibī, as were the other pioneers of the Arabic *Nahḍa*, was influenced by the ideas of European Enlightenment (Tomiche, “Nahḍa”, EI) and when analysing the book I have found it useful to bring in elements from Rousseau, Montesquieu and Kant. His book has references to the system of checks and balance, which may have come from Montesquieu, but we do not know from which sources. Al-Kawākibī does not employ the words “checks and balance”, but states that the legislative power, *quwwat*

¹⁷ <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/#Bib>>.

¹⁸ <<http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/ariadne/Idehistorie/framesettogm.htm>>.

at-tašrīf, must be separated from the executive power, *quwwat at-tanfīd*, which again must be separated from the judicial power, *quwwat al-murāqiba* (p. 438, § 1).

When referring to religion as opium (p. 507, § 5), we must assume that it is an idea inherited from Marx. My reading is concerned with al-Kawākibī's text and not those of the Enlightenment thinkers, and I have primarily referred to these thinkers in order to understand his text, shed light on his ideas, emphasise his concerns and in order to place the text in a wider intellectual context. Yet, exploring possible influences has also been part of the process. Rousseau wrote on education, of which al-Kawākibī stresses the importance, whereas Montesquieu wrote on despotism and has been useful in order to clarify what al-Kawākibī intends when he explains despotism. Kant wrote an essay; *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung*, and I have found this essay useful references when trying to interpret al-Kawākibī's concept of knowledge.

2.6 Understanding *Istibdād*

The term '*istibdād*' is not found in the Koran, and arabiCorpus¹⁹ quotes only one entry among its pre- modern Islamic sources. Lewis (1991, p. 156) says that the term has changed from classical times where it had "connotations to arbitrary and capricious, rather than illegitimate or tyrannical rule". Looking up '*istibdād*' in *the Encyclopaedia of Islam* the reader is referred to '*ẓulm*', which the dictionary translates as; 'injustice', 'unfairness', 'inequity', 'wrong', 'tyranny', 'oppression', 'despotism' and 'arbitrariness'. '*Ẓulm*' is the Arabic term most often used for 'tyranny' (Lewis, 1991, p. 155) and *Encyclopaedia of Islam* gives the following definition: "In the moral sphere, it denotes acting in such a way as to transgress the proper limit and encroach upon the right of some other person" (Lewis, "Ẓulm", EI). The concept '*ẓulm*' is connected to political life, where it means the absence of justice (Tyan, "Adl", EI).

Al-Kawākibī relies to a large extent on the Koran in his criticism towards despotism. In the chapter "Despotism and Religion", I have counted 40 references to the Holy Book. In addition other references to the Koran are spread throughout the book. He also refers to the *ḥadīth*²⁰ both directly and indirectly, and quotes the following;

الظالم سيف الله ينتقم به ثم ينتقم منه.

¹⁹ <<http://arabicorpus.byu.edu/>>

²⁰ The recorded sayings and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad, which were collected after his death. They are taught as a part of Islamic theology.

“the tyrant is God’s sword, he takes revenge with it, thereafter he takes revenge upon it” (p. 441, § 2).

I will place *ẓulm* in a historical and religious context before I proceed with explaining *istibdād*, as these two terms are closely related and because the concept of *ẓulm* is an important part of the Islamic intellectual heritage which al-Kawākibī was exposed to.

In his treatment of *istibdād* he is not only continuing a long tradition within Islamic discourse, but is also touching upon an issue which is at the core of the Islamic faith.

2.6.1 The concept of ‘Ẓulm’ in Islamic Discourse

The Koran lays down a system of law and morality in the Islamic *’umma*²¹ and it is the duty of Man to observe the implementations of these laws. To accomplish this, it has traditionally been thought that a leader with authority was needed in the Islamic community and the Islamic community would not be complete unless it was also a state (Hourani, 1962, p. 4). The purpose of the state and the duty of a good leader, according to Muslim sources, are to provide justice and enable the individual to live a good Muslim life; in return, the individual is expected to obey his ruler. The concept of limited government is important to Islamic political thought: rulers are reminded of their limited worldly power and are warned against transgressing the will of God. According to Islamic law the duty of obedience to a ruler who acts contrary to the divine law is suspended. The duty of the ruler is to apply, maintain and enforce the law, which is created by God and not by the state, and therefore he may neither amend nor abrogate the law (Lewis, 1991, p. 31).

The Koran refers to *ẓulm* and its derivatives more than 280 times and warns against oppression and injustice: *ẓulm* is seen to have very negative connotations in the Holy Book (Lewis, “Ẓulm”, EI). According to *ḥadīth* not only is the unjust or the tyrant, *ẓālim*, damned, but so are his helpers and supporters. Injustice is seen as a social evil and its negative content is further emphasized by the praise of its opposite, namely justice. According to one of the *ḥadīth*: “an hour of justice is better than sixty years of worship” (Lewis, 1991, p. 143). The connection between justice and injustice can also be seen in the following *ḥadīth*: “the most beloved of God’s creatures and the nearest to Him is a just imam; the most hateful and the

²¹ The Islamic community.

most severely punished on the Day of Judgement is an oppressive imam” (Lewis, 1991, p. 143).

The concept of injustice led to early theological debates of whether God can commit injustice or if individual responsibility exists for unjust acts. The school of *Muʿtazila*²² claimed that God, by His very nature, can commit no injustice due to his divine justice and reason (Gimaret, “Muʿtazila”, EI), while the *Ašʿariyya*²³ held that God in his unlimited omnipotence is the creator of both good and evil (Watt, “Asharī”, EI). The Koran confirms that God disapproves of injustice in several places, among them the following two verses: “Thy Lord wrongs (*ẓallām*) not his servants” (Koran 41:46)²⁴; “Surely God wrongs not men anything, but themselves men wrong (*ẓalama*)” (Koran 10:44). This last verse appoints Man himself as the cause of injustice.

The question of authority has frequently been raised throughout Islamic history. Al-Ġazālī (1058–1111) meant that any rule is better than chaos (Hourani, 1962, p. 14) and Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) later said that religion and state are linked and so religion is in danger without the coercive power of the state. Without the discipline of the revealed law the state will turn into a tyrannical organization. Consequently, the essential function of the state is to see that justice prevails and to ordain good and forbid evil and Ibn Taymiyya considered the coercive power of the state to be preferable to anarchy (Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya”, EI). Apostates came to be seen as worse than tyrants (Lewis, 1991, p. 90), and this gave rise to the idea that an unjust and oppressive leader was better than no leaders and anarchy. The various Muslim groups throughout history have often been encouraged to endure an oppressive ruler, as they will be rewarded for their patience and the ruler punished for his actions in the hereafter (Lewis, 1991, p. 70). According to *ḥadīth* prayers against an unjust ruler will be heard, and victory over the *ẓālim* will be granted in the hereafter (Lewis, “Zulm”, EI).

The Tunisian historian, sociologist and philosopher Ibn Xaldūn (Ibn Khaldoun, 1332–82) stated that injustice, *ẓulm*, (Ibn Xaldūn, 1997, p. 262)²⁵ brings about the ruin of a country, and that justice will lead to prosperity. In fact, Ibn Xaldūn dedicates a whole chapter in *al-Muqaddima* to the serious nature of injustice, explaining how it brings about the ruin of a civilization. He connected injustice to attacks on people’s properties which destroyed the

²² Religious movement founded in Basra, Iraq, first half of the 8th century which was to become one of the most important theological schools of Islam.

²³ The theological school of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ašʿarī (born 873 in Basra), was the dominant school of the Arabic-speaking parts of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate. The school differed from other schools in its use of rational arguments.

²⁴ Translation taken from Arberry. Verse 41:46 quotes in Arabic وما ربك بظلام للعبيد

²⁵ The Arabic original is used in this reference.

incentive to gain property: “When the incentive to acquire and obtain property is gone, people no longer make efforts to acquire any” (Ibn Khaldūn, 1958, Vol. II, p. 103). Since civilizations are founded on people’s productivity and they see no point in business under tyranny, injustice leads not only to the ruin of civilization, but also to the eradication of the human species. On the nature of injustice, he also stated that it can be committed only “by persons who cannot be touched, only by persons who have power and authority” (Ibn Khaldūn, 1958, Vol. II, p. 107).

2.6.2 The Lexical Meaning and Definitions of *Istibdād*

Al-Kawākibī’s term *istibdād* is a form X *maṣḍar* (verbal noun) formed from the root /b-d-d/, and the verb is translated as ‘to proceed independently (in one’s opinions)’, ‘to monopolize’, ‘to take possession’ and ‘to rule despotically or tyrannically’. The *Wehr* Dictionary translates the *maṣḍar* as ‘arbitrariness’, ‘highhandedness’, ‘despotism’, ‘autocracy’ and ‘absolutism’. The dictionary *al-Mawrid* adds ‘totalitarianism’, ‘dictatorship’ and ‘tyranny’.

Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon* defines the verb *istabadda*: “he was or became alone; independent of others; without any to share, or participate, with him”. Lane’s lexicon also quotes the verb with the prepositional phrases: *bi-ra’yihī* and *bi-amrihi*, where the political meaning or connotation of the term becomes clearer. The former is rendered as, “he followed his own opinion only, with none to agree with him” and the latter as, “he obtained [absolute] predominance, or control over his affairs, so that people would not hear [or obey] any other”.

Under the entry ‘despotism’, *The Oxford Dictionary of English-Arabic* quotes ‘*ṭuġyān*’, ‘*istibdād*’ and ‘*ẓulm*’ and the word ‘tyranny’ translates ‘*ṭuġyān*’, ‘*istibdād*’ and ‘*jawr*’.

Etymologically the word ‘tyrant’ comes from the Greek word ‘*tyrannos*’ translating into German ‘*Gewaltherrscher*’. ‘Despot’ comes from Greek ‘*dems-potes*’ translating into German ‘*Gewaltherr*’ or ‘*Hausherr*’ (Kluge, 1975). The same dictionary notes that the word despot was used as title for kings of Serbia and Bulgaria and the word was made general at the time of the French revolution. ‘*Gewaltherr*’ is translated into English, ‘tyrant’ and ‘despot’ (*Oxford Duden* 2005) which does not give a satisfactory answer as to which one of these two words to chose when translating Arabic *istibdād*, or in this case its participle *mustabidd*. ‘*Gewaltherr*’ connotes someone who is proceeding independently and corresponds to Norwegian ‘*enevoldsherre*’ which the dictionary translates into English ‘absolute ruler’, ‘autocrat’, ‘despot’, and ‘dictator’ (Kirkeby, 1986). The word is used in Persian, ‘*estebdād*’ and translated into German ‘*Absolutismus*’, ‘*Despotismus*’ and ‘*Selbstherrschaft*’ (Junker;

Alavi, 1968) and in Turkish the word ‘istibdat’ is translated into Norwegian ‘despotisme’ ‘absolutisme’ (Brendemoen; Tanrıkut, 1980).

Istibdād became employed as an equivalent to the German ‘Absolutismus’ and ‘Despotie’ in Arabic at the end of the 1860ies, brought back to use by Xayr ad-Dīn at-Tūnisī (Rebhan, 1986, pp. 55–56). We may even assume that the term *istibdād* was deliberately coined by the thinkers of the Arabic *nahḍa*, to represent specifically the Western concept of ‘despotism’. Therefore, to understand al-Kawākibī’s concept of despotism, I will go on and explain how thinkers of the French Enlightenment separated between despotism and tyranny.

2.6.3 ‘Despotism’ according to Montesquieu and Rousseau

Despotism has, within a European intellectual context since Montesquieu, been used to characterize a system of total domination, distinguished from arbitrary abuse of power by a ruler, and seen in opposition to political freedom (Richter, 2003).²⁶ It was when Louis XIV in 1661 concentrated power in his hands, that the concept of despotism gained interest among French writers and thinkers. His absolutism, perhaps best described in his declaration, “l’État, c’est moi”, became connected to the concept of ‘oriental despotism’ in China and the Ottoman Empire. This concept was based on a European perception that Asian governments and practices were servile in nature and had no concept of ownership, as the despot owned everything including the citizens. The Europeans, in comparison to the ‘Orientals’, were considered to be free.

Montesquieu separated between tyranny and despotism and gave new meaning to the concept of despotism. While tyrannical regimes came to be seen as the deviation of an individual ruler, despotic regimes were considered to encompass a whole system of political governance. Despotism came to be seen as a system of total submission stemming from fear. Whereas civic virtue was attributed to republics, fear was attributed to despotic governments (Richter, 2003).²⁷ Montesquieu stated that the, “general uncertainty created by the caprice of the despot and his viziers impoverishes the mass of men, commerce is unrewarding, the products of labour, incalculable” (Richter, 2003).²⁸ Montesquieu defined despotic government as “that in which a single person directs everything by his own will and caprice” (Montesquieu, p. 8).

²⁶ *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, “Despotism”, University of Virginia: <<http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv2-01>>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Rousseau differentiated between the tyrant and the despot, defining them as: “The tyrant is he, who contrary to law assumes the power to govern, and then follows the law; the despot puts himself above the laws themselves. Thus the tyrant may not be a despot, but a despot is always a tyrant” (Richter, 2003).²⁹ According to Montesquieu, the distinction between monarchy and despotism lays in whether the sovereign governs by fixed and established laws or not. As previously mentioned, the principle of despotism is fear and people are kept in a state of fear by the threat of punishment. The citizens of the despotic state are characterized by their passive obedience and blind submission to the sovereign and the fact that they live under fear, violence, isolation and general poverty: Man’s status is thus reduced to that of beasts in his compliance to the sovereign. The goal of the despotic government is to produce order and tranquillity, but because of the fear it generates, its citizens experience little peace. Rich or poor, all citizens are equal in the despotic state according to Montesquieu, equal in their misery and servitude (Boesche, 1990, p. 743–744).

Istibdād according to al-Kawākibī’s understanding cannot be seen as deviation of a single ruler. *Istibdād*, as will be seen in the following chapters, infiltrates and shapes the whole of society in all its layers, it is a social phenomenon. Therefore, due to Montesquieu’s understanding of ‘despotism’ as a social system penetrating the whole of society I have chosen to translate *istibdād* into English ‘despotism’. Considering that the term *istibdād* came into active use in the Arabic language at the time of the pioneers of the Arabic *nahḍa*, we may also see it as an attempt of translating a European concept in order to suit one’s own political reality.

2.6.4 ‘Despotism’ and the Contemporaries of al-Kawākibī

The idea of *istibdād*, ‘despotism’ gained interest among al-Kawākibī’s contemporaries. It was the backwardness and regression of society that the pioneers of the Arabic *nahḍa* set out to explain and improve with the borrowing of European ideas and the help of their Islamic past. Some of them were sponsored by various sovereigns and sent to study in Europe, where they became acquainted with European philosophy. Arabs became acquainted with the thoughts of the European Enlightenment after Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798. Arab intellectuals visited Europe and brought back the concepts of human rights, the individual’s participation in national elected assemblies, gender equality and equality to the law. In Arabic rhetoric, the encountering of the European world with the Arab world is called the shock, *aṣ-ṣadma*,

²⁹ Ibid.

(Ṭarabīṣī, 2005, p. 15). Such a meeting was of course not new, but this particular one brought about the Arabic *nahḍa*: Arabs were woken up from their long slumber by the European encounter and, as a result of this, their “minds and eyes were opened up” (Ṭarabīṣī, 2005, p. 16–17). Ṭaḥḥān (1992, pp. 47–53) has a chapter on the contemporary thinkers of al-Kawākibī and their use of *istibdād*. Looking briefly at how these various writers used the term will help place Ṭabā’ī’s *al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri’ al-Isti’bād* into its historical context; ‘despotism’ was a political reality and this reality was dealt with in political and religious writings of his time.

The Egyptian author and educationist Rifā’a Bay aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801–73) came to be a symbol of the Arabic renaissance. He was one of the first to visit Europe in order to study its culture when sent to France by the Egyptian ruler Muḥammad ‘Alī. He brought back with him a new understanding of politics, and introduced concepts like freedom, fatherland, *waṭan*, political instruction, political administration and the functions of the ruler and the ruled (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 47). He became acquainted with the ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu (Hourani, 1962, p. 69), and came to see the necessity of the latter’s idea of a system of checks and balance in government, namely to separate legislative from executive and judicial power (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 47). He held that man becomes a full member of the society when society is directed by the principle of justice and the purpose of the government is the welfare of the ruled. These were notions which fitted well within the framework of Islam. The traditional Islamic view of the state is that the ruler possesses absolute executive power, but that his use of power should be tempered by respect for the law and those who preserve it (Hourani, 1962, p. 70). Among the new ideas that aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī emphasised were the concept that people should share and participate in the process of government and the idea that people should be educated for this purpose. He further held that laws must change according to circumstances (Hourani, 1962, p. 70). Despite bringing to attention the idea of the general populace’s participation in government, he concluded that this solution was not relevant to the problems of Egypt (Hourani, 1962, p. 73) and his writings say little of the people and their role in government (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 47).

The Tunisian statesman and theorist Xayr ad-Dīn at-Tūnisī (1822/23–89) held that the ruler should be limited by the means of law and consultation. Limitation of the ruler would serve to prevent him committing evil acts (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 49), whilst the ‘*ulamā*’ and the notables would have to be able to speak freely to him in order to advise him (Hourani, 1962, p. 90). Despotism, *istibdād*, according to at-Tūnisī, was the complete absence of considering

the community's opinion, ruling under the influence of personal desire and conduct, motivated by greed (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 49).

The view that the general populace were not fit to rule and that participation in government would require an educated public was also present in the writings of the philosopher and journalist, Jamāl ad-Dīn al-'Afgānī (1838/39–1897)³⁰ and his student, the Egyptian Muslim theologian Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). Al-'Afgānī linked, despotism, *istibdād*, to justice, saying that justice could only be brought about through 'restricted power', *al-quwwa al-muqayyada* (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 50). He viewed despotism, *istibdād*, as the rule of the individual, in a form of sovereignty not including the nation and not based on laws. Al-'Afgānī warned against elected assemblies which functioned as mere puppets in governmental affairs, as such assemblies would be merely formal and of no value (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 50). 'Abduh came to separate between 'despotism' and 'absolute despotism', *al-istibdād al-muṭlaq*, permitting the former but prohibiting the latter. He held that in order to manage governmental administration the nation needed instruction, but that whilst the nation was being educated in political administration it should be ruled by a form of restricted government, or a "just despotism" *al-istibdād al-'ādil*, whose aim was to make room for justice (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 50).

The Syrian scholar and journalist 'Adīb Iṣḥāq (1856–85), also a student of al-'Afgānī, held that justice could only be realized through the cooperation of the nation. He defined despotism as "the conduct of one in the group, by their blood, their fortune and their beliefs, by what his desires impose on him and his opinion requires from him" (Ṭaḥḥān, 1992, p. 52).

In short, the concept 'despotism', '*istibdād*', among Arab scholars was defined as a lack of consultation and the absence of fixed laws. They were inclined to view the uneducated population as not yet ready to participate in governmental affairs, and leant heavily on the Islamic idea that sovereigns should rule through the consultation of specialists. These were ideas in circulation in the time and milieu of al-Kawākibī.

2.6.5 Al-Kawakibi's Definitions of Despotism

At the beginning of the book al-Kawākibī connects *istibdād* to the body of politics, but he later locates *istibdād* in all layers of society. As for the relation to politics al-Kawākibī refers to *istibdād* as;

³⁰ His place of birth is disputed: he was either born in Afghanistan or in Persia.

“acting with capriciousness in common affairs,” (p. 435, § 3) and:

غرور المرء برأيه والأنفة عن قبول النصيحة أو الاستقلال في الرأي وفي الحقوق
المشتركة.

“man’s self-conceit in opinion and disdain of accepting (sincere) advice or independence in opinion and in common shared rights” (p. 437, § 1).

ويراد بالاستبداد عند إطلاقه استبداد الحكومة خاصة, لأنها أعظم مظاهر أضراره التي جعل الإنسان
أشقى ذوي الحياة.

“By despotism one particularly means despotism of the government, as [the government] is the major manifestation of its harm [and that] which made Man the most miserable of all living creatures (p. 431, § 2). Consequently;

الاستبداد في اصطلاح السياسيين هو تصرف فرد أو جمع في حقوق قوم بالمشيئة وبلا خوف تبعه.

“Despotism, in the terminology of the politicians, is capricious behaviour of an individual or a group in [dealing with] people’s rights, with arbitrary will, without fear of responsibility” (p. 431, § 3).

A despotic government also includes;

حكومة الحاكم الفرد المطلق الذي تولى الحكم بالغلبة أو بالوراثة, تشمل أيضا الحاكم الفرد المقيد المنتخب
متى كان غير مسؤول.

“the government of the sovereign individual autocrat, who has taken possession over the regime by means of seizure or inheritance. It also includes the limited, elected, individual, sovereign whenever he is not responsible” (p. 438, § 1).

From these initial statements about despotism al-Kawākibī proceeds with his description of the despotic society, how it comes to shape and mould the society, its individuals and their behaviour towards one another.

A man who wishes to profess goodness at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not to be good.

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 51

3. Infiltration of Despotism into Society

3.1 The Landscape of Despotism

Montesquieu's idea that despotism, in opposition to tyranny, contains a whole system of domination means that despotism creates a particular society; perhaps it is possible to say that it forms a particular landscape. He wrote that despotism is characterized by fear, violence, isolation and general poverty:³¹ its goal is to create tranquillity, but it cannot create any peace (Montesquieu, p. 59). People live under fear, physical and psychological isolation, and this isolation prevents the communication necessary for organized political opposition and increases people's suspicion towards one another (Boesche, 1990, pp. 745–746). As will be shown, al-Kawākibī notes that people are deprived of cooperation in a despotic state, but contrary to Montesquieu, he does not think despotism to create stability. Instead, fear, ignorance and chaos are the traits that characterise his despotic society. Looking at society and the landscape despotism creates is important as it produces certain conditions, promoting some characteristics and restricting others. In the despotic society of al-Kawākibī, knowledge cannot grow, and so the despotism creates conditions where ignorance becomes a prevalent feature.

3.1.1 Society and the Individual

Al-Kawākibī compares the tribe, *qawm*, to a jungle, *'ajama*; if left unattended or neglected it will become overgrown with trees. Eventually most of the trees will become sick; the strong will overcome the weak and destroy them. Whereas a just government functions like a gardener and keeps the jungle ordered, being concerned with its blooming, despotic

³¹ Montesquieu also offered a second theory of despotism. He described a despotism of pleasure and avarice with possibilities of commerce (Boesche, 1990). Florence under the despotic regime of the Medici, the family for whom Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, is an example of a flourishing despotic state in Medieval Italy, (Greer, 1968, p. 263–267) and France under the control of Louis XIV, which Montesquieu came to call despotic, increased production and exports (Greer, 1968, p. 358–359). As al-Kawākibī is dealing with the sort of despotism that leads to the misery of the citizen and the decay of the society, it is not the place here to further comment on Montesquieu's second theory.

government will ruin and demolish it. While the fruits of the just government become strong, ripe and beautiful, the fruits of the despotic government will rot (p. 486, § 2).

Al-Kawākabī sees the nation as a group of individuals who are tied together by bonds of kinship, *nasab*, fatherland, *waṭan*, language, or religion. The nation in relation to its individuals is like the construction of a building, and:

كما أن البناء مجموع أنقاض, فحسبما تكون الأنقاض جنسا وجمالا و قوة يكون البناء.

“just like the structure is a totality [consisting] of parts; and as the parts will be in kind, beauty and strength so will the structure be” (p. 505, § 4).

He goes on to portray society and its individuals as a house in which each room has its prescribed function (p. 521, line 21–23). The condition of society, he holds, depends on the condition of the individuals, to the extent that the condition of one person can affect the whole nation. Like a defective wall, even when one does not notice the defect, can make the whole structure of a fort fragile and come to ruin the whole building, one person might affect the whole of society (p. 505, § 4).

A despotic society is ruled by what al-Kawākibī calls the “laws of the prisoner’s life”, *qawānīn ḥayāt al-’asīr* (p. 502, § 5). He refers here to the citizen as a ‘prisoner’, *’asīr*, an attribute I will explain below (cf. 41). These are the laws that the prisoner organizes himself by, determined by the conditions around him and he faces the tyranny, *tajabbur*, over himself:

بتذلل التصاغر, وتعديل الشدة عليه بالتلاين و المطاوعة.

“with grovelling self-abasement and the settling of power over him by means of leniency and compliance” (p. 502, § 5).

Al-Kawākabī describes despotism as a ‘violent cold wind with a tornado’, *rīḥ ṣarṣar fīhi i’ṣār* (p. 496 § 4) which does not allow for stability, but instead creates chaos, *fawḍā*. Determined by chaos, there is no system to the prisoner’s life and morality:

قد يصبح غنيا فيضحى شجاعا كريما, وقد يسمي فقيرا فيبيت جبانا خسيسا.

“he may become rich and appears noble [and] gentle, he may be called poor and become mean [and] cowardly” (p. 486, § 5).

He cannot be in control of his morality as long as he remains like a bridled animal: he does not make any choices, but instead they are made for him, and he:

ويعيش كالريش يهب حيث يهب الريح ... فالأسير إذا دون الحيوان لأنه يتحرك بإرادة غيره لا بإرادة نفسه.

“lives like a feather, it blows where the wind blows... the prisoner then is lower than the animal because he moves by the will of others, not by his own will” (p. 486, § 4).

Everything is confused under despotism - intellectual life, practical life, family life, social life and political life (p. 514, § 1):

وهكذا يعيش كما تقتضيه الصدفة أن يعيش.

“and thus he lives like mere chance call him to live” (p. 486, § 5).

The pressure of living in a despotic society produces certain effects on individuals. Due to the chaotic circumstances of their lives, al-Kawākibī notes that the prisoners of despotism:

يعيشون منحطين في الإدراك, منحطين في الإحساس, منحطين في الأخلاق.

“live low in awareness, low in perceptions, low in morals” (p. 507 § 3).

They are deprived of self-confidence and the will to act, and possess no determination. The prisoners are not able to move: ‘they possess no movement’, *lā ḥarāk fihim* he says, comparing the pressure under which they live to that of worms under a rock, striving to lift it even though it means to rub off particle by particle [of the stone] (p. 507, § 3) and:

و هكذا يعيش الأسير من حين يكون نسمة في ضيق وضغط يهرول ما بين عتبة هم ووادي الغم.

“thus lives the prisoner from the moment of being a living creature in anguish and stress, hurrying from between the lintel of anxieties and the valley of grief” (p. 501, § 4).

The prisoners of the despotic government are in a vegetative state, which resembles sleep in that they are neither alive and nor dead, but inhabit a state between life and death. They do not feel, (*šā'ara*), he says, and as they do not feel they are like the dead (p. 509, § 5). In this drowsy condition, the citizen loses his determination and self-confidence – he lets others turn his will and assets against him (p. 516, § 5). It is as if the individuals in al-Kawātibī's society are frozen: they neither feel nor move, and the wind rages, buffeting them.

3.1.2 The Advancement of Man and Society

In the chapter on “Despotism and Advancement”, al-Kawātibī discusses the concept of movement or advancement in creation. He says that:

الحركة سنة عاملة في الخليقة دائبة بين شخوص و هبوط

“movement is an active law in the creation, alternating between rising and falling” (p. 505, § 1).

The upward movement is a sign of life, whereas falling indicates movement towards death. But despotism prevents Man's natural quest for advancement. It turns the movement from advancement, *taraqin*, to decline, *inhiṭāṭ*, from progress, *taqaddum*, to backwardness, *ta'axxur*, from growth to extinction. The nation's natural disposition to search for advancement is turned into a demand to fall, *tasafful* (p. 506, § 2–3). Man, by his very nature, strives to advance as long as he is not prevented from doing so (p. 506, § 5–6). His advancement is not only connected to himself, his intellectual capacity and selfish concerns, but it is a will to advance on behalf of the whole of humanity. This advancement goes through various stages: the first stage begins with him and later becomes linked to the people around him and his society:

التراقي الحيوي الذي يتدرج فيه الإنسان بفطرته وهمته هو أولاً: التراقي في الجسم صحة تلذذاً ثانياً: التراقي في القوة بالعلم والمال، ثالثاً: التراقي في النفس بالخصال والمفاخر، رابعاً: التراقي بالعائلة استئناساً وتعاوناً، خامساً: التراقي بالعشيرة تناصراً عند الطوارئ، سادساً: التراقي بالإنسانية وهذا منتهى التراقي.

And the vital advancement which Man gradually proceeds in by means of his innate character and ardour is firstly: The advancement in the body in health and delight, secondly: The advancement in strength by means of knowledge and wealth, thirdly: The advancement in the self by means of natural disposition and glorious deeds, fourthly: The advancement with the family; cooperating and socializing, fifthly: The advancement with the kinsfolk, helping in emergencies and sixthly: The advancement with humanity and this is the utmost advancement (p. 505, § 5).

Man's moral laws specify that his duty is firstly to himself, secondly towards his family, then towards his people and lastly towards humanity (p. 486, § 3):

ويرى اللذة في التجديد والاختراع ... كأن له وظيفة في ترقى مجموعة البشر.

“and he sees delight in renewal and invention ... as if he has a function in the advancement of the whole of mankind” (p. 522, § 5).

Man's natural disposition then, according to al-Kawātibī, is to demand progress on his own behalf and that of the whole of humanity, but he is forced to act against his nature by the circumstances created by the despotic climate. As despotism turns progress into regression and these are both concepts of movement, it can be said that despotism steals one's ability to move. Man wants progress, but despotism turns this into decline and regression. Despotism thus has the property to make Man act against his nature.

3.1.3 Inversion of the Rights

A feature of despotism, according to al-Kawātibī, is that despotism inverts the rights, for it:

... يقوم على قلب الحقائق ... الاستبداد يقلب الحقائق في الأذهان.

“turns upside down the rights...despotism turns the rights in the [people's] minds”.

One example of this can be seen in the fact that the people are made the servants of the government instead of the government serving the people. The government therefore serves its own interests and not those of the public (p. 485, § 2). Despotism further destroys religion, using it as a tool in order to serve its own ends (p. 485, § 2) and morality is consequently corrupted. Religion becomes a mere symbol of worship and so loses its power to purify the

soul, *taḥhīr an-nufūs* (p. 496, § 4): instead, it is like opium for the senses, *al-'afyūn fī al-ḥiss* (p. 507, § 5), and it becomes consolation in the hereafter (p. 498, § 2). Thus Man's concern for his worldly life is removed, and he confuses worship of God with that of the tyrant (p. 515, § 1). George Orwell's descriptions in his book *1984* of how the citizens of Oceania are led to believe something one day and the opposite next day, according to what suits the ruling party or "Big Brother", are similar to al-Kawākibī's idea of how despotism plays with people's minds:

الاستبداد يضطر الناس إلى استباحة الكذب والتحيل والخداع والنفاق والتذلل. وإلى مراغمة الحس وإماتة النفس ونبذ الجد وترك العمل.

"Despotism forces people to deem permissible lie, trickery, betrayal and self-abasement and [forces them] to coerce the perception, to kill the self, to discard the effort and to neglect the work" (p. 499, § 4).

Despotism compels even the best people to befriend hypocrisy (p. 486, § 6) and:

والاستبداد قلب الموضوع. فجعل الرعية خادمة للرعاة... وقد اتبع الناس في تسميته النصح فضولاً، الغيرة عداوة، والشهامة عتوا، والحمية حماقة، والرحمة مرضاً، كما جاروه على اعتبار أن النفاق سياسية، والتحيل كياسة، والدناءة لطف، والندالة دماثة.

despotism inverted the matter and then made the citizens servants to the ruler ... and the people followed in his designation: good advice as curiosity, jealousy as hostility, audacity as arrogance, to defend is folly and compassion is sickness, as they agreed with him with regard to the fact that hypocrisy is politics, trickery is courtesy, meanness is friendliness and depravity is gentleness (p. 485, § 2).

The difference between the East and the West, al-Kawākibī suggests, is that the Westerners make their sovereigns swear to serve the people and commit to the law, whereas the sovereign of the East makes his subjects swear to submit and obey. The Westerner considers himself owner of public property – in contrast, the Easterner considers himself a child of the despot and regards whatever is in front of him as the despot's property (p. 492, § 3).

3.1.4 Cooperation Lost

Another feature of a despotic society is the lack of cooperation between its members. The landscape of despotism creates a situation of every man for himself and so the individual

makes no effort on behalf of society. The result of this unstable despotic society is that its citizens are deprived of the fruits of cooperation, and they live poor, wretched, indifferent, weak, negligent and failing (p. 489, § 2). Cooperation is the greatest secret in existence, al-Kawākibī reveals, and through cooperation everything except God is accomplished:

الاشتراك هو أعظم سر في الكائنات، به قيام كل شيء ما عدا الله وحده، به قيام الأجرام السماوية، به قيام كل حياة، به قيام الموالي، به قيام الأجناس والأنواع، به قيام الأمم والقبائل، به قيام العائلات، به تعاون الأعضاء. نعم، الاشتراك فيه سر تضاعف القوة بنسبة ناموس التربيع، فيه سر الاستمرار على الأعمال... نعم، الاشتراك هو السر كل السر في نجاح الأمم المتمدنة.

Cooperation is the greatest secret in the universe. Everything except God alone is accomplished through it. Through [cooperation] is the accomplishment of the celestial bodies, the accomplishment of all life, the accomplishment of the creations, the accomplishment of varieties and kinds, the accomplishment of nations and tribes, the accomplishment of families, the cooperation [among] members. Yes, cooperation contains the secret of doubling the strength as to the quadrupling of moral laws. It contains the secret of continuity in works... Yes, cooperation is the secret of all secrets in the successful outcome of the civilized nations (p. 489, § 3).

Only by cooperation can the people restrict the powers of their government and build a continuous society, as cooperation leads to unity, mutual love and agreement (p. 490, § 1) Cooperation in public affairs also leads to love of the fatherland (p. 491, § 3) and so encourages the citizen to work for the community and allows the nation to make progress and flourish.

Thus society and individuals are closely linked, where society forms the structure and the individuals represent the various parts of this structure. Under despotism, society is to a large part destroyed, as individuals are deprived the possibility of cooperation and the social system vanishes (p. 487, § 2), and:

... يصير الاستبداد كالعلق يطيب له المقام على امتصاص دم الأمة، فلا ينفك عنها حتى تموت ويموت هو بموتها.

“despotism becomes like the leech, it likes the place where it sucks the blood of the nation, and it does not separate from the nation until the nation dies and it dies as the nation dies” (p. 516, § 3).

This is how al-Kawākibī perceives the despotic society. I will in the following proceed with my reading where I will show the relation between the various groups of society and their relations to each other. These relations are important in al-Kawākibī's view how

despotism spreads throughout all layers of society and as a result restricts and limits the spread of knowledge.

3.2 Despotism as a Disease

A special feature of despotic administration is that the despotic nature of the individual does not confine itself to the rulers, but infiltrates the whole of society and spreads into every home. The Arab writer Qāsim 'Amīn mentions this particular feature in his book *Tahrīr al-Mar'a* (1899):

If despotism, *istibdād*, takes hold of a nation, its influence does not stop in the inclinations as it is the inclination of the great sovereign. It connects him to whoever is around him and from them to those who are under them...The nature of this condition is that Man does not respect anything but power and he is not deterred, except by means of fear. And since the woman is weak the man suppressed her rights and started to treat her with contempt and degradation, stepping with his feet on her personality, the woman lived in deep inferiority, whatever her status in the family: a wife, or a mother, or a daughter, she has no value or opinion or honour, submitted to the man because he is man and she is woman...he has freedom and she has slavery, he has knowledge and she has ignorance, he has intellect and she has stupidity, he has light and vast space and she has darkness and prison (pp. 15–16).

While Qāsim 'Amīn in these lines describes how woman is suppressed by man due to the spread of despotism, al-Kawākibī does not portray women and her suppression under men in particular, but holds that all individuals living under the despotic state are suppressed by the surroundings in which they live, rich and poor, women and men, they all suffer under despotism.

Al-Kawākibī compares despotism to a disease, *dā'*, in need of treatment, *dawā'*:

يقول المادي: الداء القوة والدواء المقاومة، ويقول السياسي: الداء استعباد البرية والدواء استرداد الحرية، ويقول الحكيم: الداء القدرة على الاعتساف والدواء الاقتدار على الاستنصاف ... ويقول المثين: الداء وجود الرؤساء بلا زمام والدواء ربطهم بالقيود الثقيل.

The materialist says: The disease is the power and the remedy is the resistance. The politician says: The disease is the enslavement of the creature and the remedy is the recovery of freedom. The philosopher says: The disease is the power to coerce and the remedy is the power to demand justice... The strong says: The disease is the existence of leaders without bridle and the remedy is binding them (their binding) with heavy chains (p. 435, line 21–23, p. 436, line 5).

Looking at the various parts of society as a body has a long tradition in human thought. Plato is perhaps the most prominent philosopher to have used such metaphors of disease and remedy when he depicted society as the patient and the statesman as the healer (Popper,

1945a, p. 40). While the ultimate aim of any remedy, according to al-Kawāḳibī, is the spread of knowledge, so that the citizens will come to control the sovereign, Plato's remedy is propaganda, so that the ruled majority can be controlled (Popper, 1945a, p. 139). Plato considered the well-being of society as the most important factor needed to achieve progress (Popper, 1945a, p. 108), al-Kawāḳibī considered the well-being of the individual as more important. Machiavelli also used metaphors of illness and remedies when he instructed the prince to be aware of any danger: "Once evils are recognized ahead of time they may be easily cured: but if you wait for them to come upon you, the medicine will be too late, because the disease will have become incurable" (Machiavelli, p. 12). He applied the image of disease to political crises, which could deprive the prince of his power. Al-Kawāḳibī also relates disease to political crises, but uses the metaphor differently. He applies the image to the despotic administration, on the grounds that it causes its citizens to suffer and fall ill:

نعم، الاستبداد أعظم بلاء لأنه وباء دائم بالفتن وجذب مستمر بتعطيل الأعمال، وحريق متواصل بالسلب و الغضب، وسيل جارف للعمران، وخوف يقطع القلوب، وظلام يعمي الأبصار، وألم لا يفتر، وصائل لا يرحم، وقصة السوء لا تنتهي.

Yes! Despotism is the greatest misfortune because it is an infectious chronic disease with intrigues, it is a lasting draught with obstructing the actions and it is a constant fire with plundering and usurpation, a torrential stream to civilisation. And fear that consumes the hearts, darkness that blinds the sights, pain that does not abate, a tyrant that has no mercy and a story of evil that does not end/a never-ending story of evil (p. 441, § 4).

While Machiavelli wrote a manual on how the prince could best stay in power by using of abuse and deception to support his evil nature, al-Kawāḳibī's project is in stark contrast: to help the citizens rid themselves of the tyrant.

The thinkers of the French Enlightenment came to differentiate between 'despotism' and 'tyranny' (cf. pp. 22–23), a distinction al-Kawāḳibī does not make. He does not separate between the various types of governments, whether 'despotic', 'authoritarian' or 'tyrannical'. This means that he does not separate between 'tyranny', on the one hand, as the deviation of a single ruler with limited consequences on the society, and 'despotism', on the other hand, as containing a whole social system. Though he does acknowledge differences in the arbitrary behaviour of governments, his purpose is to describe the characteristics of despotism, not the various forms of government. Therefore he also ascribes 'despotism' to an "elected individual

ruler who does not behave responsibly” (p. 438, § 1).³² Yet, by explaining despotism as a virus, which takes hold over the body, the despotism al-Kawākibī has in mind is closer to the despotism Montesquieu explained: he does not describe the arbitrariness of a single ruler, but instead sets out to explain how despotism spreads throughout society and destroys the social body and to show how despotism creates a social system with its own social logic:

وقد سبق أن الاستبداد يضغط على العقل فيفسده ويلعب بالدين فيفسده ويحارب العلم فيفسده.

”it has been stated above that despotism presses the intellect and corrupts it, plays with the religion and corrupts it and fights science and corrupts it” (p. 463, § 1).

3.2.1 Al-Kawākibī’s Despotic Society

Despotism creates a particular kind of society, with damaging effects on the individuals within it. The structure of such a society allows despotism to infiltrate the whole society, from those in positions of authority and into the homes of the citizens. How and why does despotism gain such a tight grip on society, and what are the consequences of this upon society and the individuals living it?

Al-Kawākibī portrays throughout the book how despotism spreads: it is not an unconscious process, but a well-calculated one. This mechanism can be best demonstrated by depicting how al-Kawākibī divides society. He does not divide society into upper and lower classes, but explains it by showing the relations of different people and various groups to the despot. This does not mean that he does not recognize the existence of lower and upper classes, the poor and the rich; class affiliation however does not explain the spread of despotism into society, since the despot takes his helpers from all layers of society, from the lowest of the common people to the nobles. Whether rich or poor, everybody living under the despotic state is wretched (p. 507, § 3) and the low moral standards spread like a virus to the extent that the upper classes become like the lower ones (p. 490, § 4). Montesquieu also noted the equality of suffering regardless of class affiliation when he wrote that every despotic government reduces its population to uniformity and mediocrity: its subjects are all on the same level, and so they are all slaves (Montesquieu, p. 74).

³² Cf. p. 26 for citation in Arabic.

3.2.2 The Various Groups

The main groups in al-Kawākibī's society besides the despot, *al-mustabidd*, himself are the, *al-ʿulamā* the religious scholars³³, and *ar-raʿīya*, the citizens or *al-ʿawāmm*, the common people. The despot is not alone, for he has helpers, *al-ʿawān*, whom he employs for various reasons and purposes. Al-Kawākibī also briefly mentions the nobility and specialists, and separates them from the general populace, but I will not deal with these separately for now. First I will depict what characterizes the despot, the *ʿulamā* and citizens. I will then look at the function of his helpers, as their particular function is important for the consequences of despotism upon the society and the individual. Their roles are important in understanding how despotism is created, reproduced and sustained in al-Kawākibī's model of the society.

3.2.3 The Despot

The main character in the text is the despot, and his different traits are described throughout the book. None of these traits are positive, and are described through the use of metaphors and similes. An interesting feature of the text is that al-Kawākabī defines the term 'despot' through the use of 'synonyms' and 'antonyms' (cf. pp. 63–65). By citing the antonyms, he explains what the despot is not, while at the same time, he implies what the good ruler or government is or ought to be. The synonyms he employs in order to define 'despot' are; *jabbār*, 'tyrant', *ṭāǧīya*, 'oppressor', *ḥākim bi-ʿamrihi*, 'dictator' and *ḥākim muṭlaq*, 'absolute ruler'. The antonyms are *ʿādila*, 'just', *masʿūliyya*, 'responsibility', *muqayyada*, 'restricted' and *dustūriyya*, 'constitutional', (p. 437, § 3). The antonyms he quotes in this passage are traits associated with government more than the despot himself, but they are used in order to clarify the characteristics the ruler and his administration ought to have. He further portrays the despot as he who:

يتحكم في شؤون الناس بإرادته لا بإرادتهم ويحكمهم بهواه لا بشريعتهم ... فيضع كعب رجله على أفواه
الملايين من الناس يسدها عن النطق بالحق والتداعي لمطالبته.

“proceeds in the affairs of people by his own will, not by their will and governs them with his caprice not by their law... He puts the heel of his foot over the mouths of millions of people to prevent them (the mouths) from expressing the right and issuing a common demand for it” (p. 440, § 4).

³³ Al-Kawākibī employs the term *ʿulamā* with various meanings, cf. p. 40–41.

المستبد عدو الحق, عدو الحرية وقاتلها.

“The despot is the enemy of right, the enemy of freedom and the killer both of them” (p. 440, § 5) and:

المستبد إنسان مستعد بالطبع للشر.

“the despot is a human who is inclined by nature to evil” (p. 440, § 7).

He is further portrayed as a wolf that attacks the sheep (p. 440, § 2) and a traitorous tutor who exploits the weak, defenceless orphan’s wealth (p. 457, § 1) and is compared to a bat hunting vermin and a jackal stealing poultry (p. 457, § 2). These are the various personae of the despot: he is a person, or a group, who takes possession of the regime by seizure or inheritance (p. 438, § 1), he is the heir of the throne, leader of the army or the holder of religious authority (p. 438, § 2). While the despot is the one in charge for the suppression and misery of others he is also described as the most miserable of all of them. Al-Kawākibī tells an anecdote about Nero asking one of the poets:

من أشقى الناس؟ من إذا ذكر الناس الاستبداد كان مثالا له في الخيال

“who is the most miserable of people? The one who if people mention despotism, is an example of it in their imagination” (p. 464, § 3).

3.2.4 The Common People

The major group in al-Kawākibī’s society is formed by the common people, *al-^ḥawāmm*. He does not distinguish them by religious adherence or, in general, whether they are rich or poor. They are the ones who are not specialised, who are neither scholars nor nobles (Barqāwī, 2003, p. 34). In line with al-Kawākabī’s language, they could probably be described with the rather stigmatizing expression, ‘the masses’, as he does not make any distinction between their various traits. When he asks in the text who are the common people, he replies:

هم أولئك الذين إذا جهلوا خافوا, و إذا خافوا استسلموا, كما أنهم هم الذين متى علموا قالوا ومتى قالوا فعلوا.

“Those are the ones, when they are ignorant, they fear and when they fear, they surrender. Just as they are those who when they learn, they speak and when they speak, they act” (p. 459, § 1).

This definition suggests that the common people is a group of people easily led by the information they receive. It also suggests a potential traits of the citizens in terms of the fact that they can surrender or act: either way, they shape society. In the age of despotism, the common people are:

صبيبة أيتام نيام لا يعلمون شيئا.

“young orphans who sleep and do not know anything” (p. 440, § 5).

From this we must assume that they passively surrender, in the same way as one neither feels nor acts whilst asleep. He also defines the term ‘citizens’, ‘*ar-raʿīya*’, by means of synonyms: they are ‘*asrā*’, ‘prisoners’, ‘*mustaṣḡirūn*’, ‘inferior’, ‘*buʿasā*’, ‘miserable’, and ‘*mustanbitūn*’, ‘vegetative’.³⁴ Al-Kawākibī then quotes antonyms to this: ‘*aḥrār*’, ‘free’, ‘*ubāh*’, ‘mighty’, ‘*aḥyā*’, ‘vital’, and ‘*aʿizzā*’, ‘powerful’ (p. 437, § 3). Defining the citizens in this manner, he makes their harsh living conditions clearer, while at the same time, he describes the conditions and qualities the citizens ought to have. The citizens are important to the despot, since they are his force and nutrition (p. 459, § 2; p. 485, § 2) and because without any citizens to rule over, he has no power.

When referring to the subjects living under despotism, he employs several words. Among them are ‘*al-ʿawāmm*’, ‘the common people’, ‘*raʿīya*’, which translates as ‘herd’, ‘flock’, ‘subjects’ and ‘citizens’, and ‘*asīr*’, ‘prisoner’. By using the term ‘*raʿīya*’, al-Kawākibī makes a point about the citizens and their relation to the despot. As the term also has the connotation of ‘herd’, the reader easily understands that the sheep being attacked by the wolf, as described above, are in fact the citizens living under the despotic rule being attacked by the despot. They are subjects to the assault of vermin and jackals, and they are the orphans subjected to bad treatment from the traitorous tutor. They are the ones acted upon by the despot.

³⁴ The word is difficult to translate into proper English, but is supposed to denote a life similar to that of plants.

The word al-Kawākibī employs most widely when referring to the citizen is ‘prisoner’. Man is created free and then taken prisoner, he says (p. 488, § 6), which seems to suggest that he is taken prisoner for doing nothing more than staying in the land in which he was born. It is an interesting description as he, by using this term, gives a clear picture of both the individual and society, because if the citizens are in chains, then society in which they live must therefore be a prison.

What are then the characteristics of a prisoner? He is tormented, *mu‘addab*, and he lives as if troubled by nightmares. His life is spiritless: his body exists, but it has no soul. He is like the living dead. He does not own himself (p. 487, § 2; p. 521, line 13–14), but he is steered by bridles, meaning that he is deprived of the ability to move of his own accord. As his will is taken from him, he cannot make choices, as others make them for him. Consequently, he cannot be held responsible for his moral decay; because he can only be moral when he is able to make a moral choice and he is in need of a will to make moral choices. “What is will? That is the mother of morals”, al-Kawākibī says: “*mā hiya al-‘irāda? Hiya ‘umm al-‘axlāq*”, (p. 486, § 4). The difference between Man and animals is that the human being is able to make moral choices, but the position of Man under despotism is below that of animals. Steered by bridles, he cannot move by his own will nor can he make moral choices (p. 486, § 4). As animals can move by their own will and Man cannot, his status becomes closer to that of a plant, hence al-Kawākibī suggests vegetative, *mustanbitūn*, as a synonym to the citizen living under the despotic state. As a result, Man living under despotism is deprived of the elements that make him human.

3.2.5 ‘Ulamā’

Who exactly the ‘*ulamā’*, the scientists, are, is not clear from the text. The term most often refers to Islamic scholars, but it may also refer to any intellectual who is able enlighten others with knowledge. He also refers to philosophers, *al-‘ulamā’ al-ḥukamā’*, and men of knowledge, *rijāl al-‘ilm* (both p. 461, § 4), but does not seem to make a sharp distinction between these groups of intellectuals, and the different words are sometimes employed within the same paragraph as synonyms. Whether al-Kawākibī deals with different groups of intellectuals or not, their duty is the same, namely to educate the people and make them aware of their rights, in the hope that they will come to know and demand these rights and so the cloud of despotism will finally be lifted. The ‘*ulamā’* are the people’s:

إخوتهم الراشدون, إن أيقظهم هبوا وإن دعوهم لبوا وإلا فيتصل نومهم بالموت.

“rightly guided brothers: if they wake them up, they wake up, if they invite them, they follow, and if not they remain asleep until they die” (p. 440, § 5).

The relation between the despotism and knowledge is:

...حربا دائما وطرادا مستمرا: يسعى العلماء في تنوير العقول ويجتهد المستبد في إطفاء نورها, والطرفان يتجاذبان العوام.

“a lasting and a continuous war. The ‘*ulamā*’ strive to enlighten the minds and the despot makes an effort to shut off their light, and the two sides pull the common people in [each] direction” (p. 458, § 5) and:

الاستبداد و العلم ضدان متغالبان فكل إدارة مستبدة تسعى جهدها في إطفاء نور العلم, وحصر الرعية في حالك الجهل.

“despotism and knowledge are two opponents in combat, and all despotic administration, in its effort, seeks to turn off the light of knowledge and to confine the citizens in the pitch-black of ignorance” (p. 461, § 4).

The ‘*ulamā*’s attempts to enlighten the people are likened to trying to sow in a rocky landscape. Men of knowledge are pursued and punished by the despot, and it might be that al-Kawākibī had his own situation in exile in mind when he continues:

وهذا سبب أن كل الأنبياء العظام عليهم الصلاة وسلام وأكثر العلماء الأعلام والأدباء النبلاء تقبلوا في البلاد وماتوا غرباء.

“this is the reason that all great Prophets, blessing and peace upon them, and the most eminent scholars and noble authors suffered in the country and died as strangers” (p. 461, § 4).

3.2.6 The Despot’s Helpers

The role of the *mutamajjidūn*, ‘the self-glorifiers’, a group particular to despotic administration (p. 465, § 3), is crucial in order to understand the impact of despotism on society and how despotism is sustained and reproduced and as a result create a lasting impact.

Looking at their role, the spread of despotism throughout the society can be traced. The self-glorifiers are the despot's servants or helpers and it is through them that he stays in power. In order to understand this term and the role they fill in al-Kawākibī's society I will first look at the word and its meaning.

The word stems from the root /m-j-d/; 'to be glorious' and the noun *majd* translates as 'glory', 'splendour', 'magnificence', 'grandeur', 'nobility', 'honour' and 'distinction'. It has a wider meaning than our concept of 'honour' and al-Kawākibī defines it as follows:

المجد هو إحراز المرء مقام حب واحترام في القلوب, وهو مطلب طبيعي شريف لكل إنسان, لا يرتفع عنه نبي أو زاهد ولا ينحط عنه دني أو حامل. للمجد لذة روحية تقارب لذة العبادة عند الفانين في الله وتعادل لذة العلم عند الحكماء وتربو على لذة امتلاك الأرض مع قمرها عند الأمراء, وتزيد على لذة مفاجأة الإثراء عند الفقراء.

Glory is someone's acquisition of a place of love and respect in [people's] hearts, and it is an honest, natural quest of each human being. Neither a prophet nor an ascetic rise above it, nor depraved nor porter³⁵ descend below it. Glory has a spiritual delight which is almost the same as the delight of worship extinct in God³⁶, it equals the philosophers delight in knowledge, exceeds the princes' delights in possession of the earth with its moon, and is greater than the poor people's delight in sudden wealth (p. 463, § 2).

Glory thus has a positive connotation, for it is something delightful. In his definition of glory he also brings in a Sufi dimension when he writes that glory is as delightful as being extinct in God. It is a quest of all mankind, from king to vagabond and it is a feature of Man that brings love and respect. He considers 'glory' to be so important that he further discusses whether it is more important than life. He says that the noble free prefer death to a life in humiliation, and compares them to the nightingale which, if captured as an adult, resists food until it dies (p. 463, § 3). We must therefore understand glory as an important quality for which the individual strives. As glory is the "acquisition of a place of love and respect in [people's] hearts", one can only achieve glory through other people by participating in society and one cannot glorify oneself. Achieving glory can thus be seen as a common project, building the society and forming the individual's relations with others.

³⁵ This can also translate 'pregnant'.

³⁶ A Sufi expression which means that the person has reached a stage where he has become immersed in God.

3.2.6.1 The Self-Glorifiers

How does the concept of glory lead us to the *mutamajjidūn*, ‘the self-glorifiers’, or the despot’s helpers? The word *mutamajjidūn* is formed from form V of the root /m-j-d/. Form V of the verb can take the meaning of what in Arabic grammar is called *takalluf*, which means to ‘feign’, ‘simulate’, ‘assume’, ‘fake’, ‘sham’, ‘pretend’, ‘dissemble’ or ‘to show oneself’. Form V, in this sense, means that a person takes on a characteristic which is not natural to him, fakes a quality he does not have, or pretends to be something he is not by showing himself off. It is a quality he assumes for himself. Explaining the concept of *mutamajjidūn* by means of grammar, we can see that the self-glorifiers do not possess glory, but instead pretend to possess it.³⁷

When al-Kawākibī sets out to define them, he makes it clear to what extent they have a severely damaging effect on society. He seems to have almost lost his ability to speak:

التمجد لفظ هائل المعنى ولهذا أراني أتعثر بالكلام و أتلعثم في الخطاب.

“Self-glorification is a word dreadful in meaning and therefore I see myself stumble in words and stutter in speech” (p. 465, § 2). He defines it as follows:

التمجد هو أن ينال المرء جذوة نار من جهنم كبرياء المستبد ليحرق بها شرف المساواة في الإنسانية.

“Self-glorification is that somebody gets a burning firebrand from the hell of the despot’s arrogance to burn the honour of equality in humanity” (p. 465, § 3).

The self-glorifiers are the despot’s helpers, those he honours with titles or gives favourable positions over others³⁸, they serve to promote inequality between the members of the nation. The self-glorifiers are the despot’s servants, described as malicious, *xubaṭā’*, and it is through their help that he is able to hold on to his power. They are those who volunteer to be the country’s executioners (p. 465, § 4) – in their desire to mislead the public (p. 466, § 2), they become small despots at the side of the great despot (p. 465, § 4). Al-Kawākibī describes them as the enemies of justice and the helpers of injustice (p. 466, § 3).

³⁷ Cf. form V of the roots /k-b-r/ and /ʿ-z-m/ which mean to act with an appearance of haughtiness and pride, but where these characteristics are not natural to the person feigning them.

³⁸ It might be that al-Kawākibī had himself in mind when writing this. As mentioned above, he was offered positions in the administration in Aleppo, as he was too important a man and too famous to be ignored.

According to Montesquieu honour is a driving force in the monarchical government and he says that:

it is the nature of honour to aspire to preferment and titles...Honour sets all the parts of the politics into motion, and by its very action connects them; thus each individual advances the public good, while he only thinks of promoting his own interest. True it is, that philosophically speaking it is a false honour which moves all the parts of government; but even this false honour is as useful to the public as true honour could possibly be to private persons (Montesquieu, p. 25).

“With glory and applause men will perform the most difficult actions,” Montesquieu continues (p. 25).

The concepts of ‘glory’ and ‘honour’ do not completely coincide, but to the extent that they both imply that a person prefers himself over others it is worth noting that al-Kawākibī and Montesquieu come to different conclusions on whether honour or glory exist in a despotic society. Montesquieu writes that: “honour is a thing unknown in arbitrary government,” and argues that no man can afford to prefer himself to others (Montesquieu, pp. 25–26). Al-Kawākibī draws the opposite conclusion and finds that glory is a natural quest for any human being and Man still seeks preference in the despotic state. Due to the confined situation the quest for glory is turned into self-glorification, which has devastating effects on the social body.

’Aḥmad Barqāwī defines *mutamajjidūn* as *intihāziyyūn*, ‘opportunists’ (Barqāwī, 2003, p. 28) because they aspire to positions in the despotic administration. In modern terms, he sees them as the ideological mouthpiece of the despot (Barqāwī, 2003, p. 30). Seeking honour, in Montesquieu’s sense and glory in Al-Kawākibī’s sense can both be seen as the driving force of the government and whereas Montesquieu finds ‘false honour’ to be useful to the public, Al-Kawākibī finds ‘self-glorification’ to be devastating to the society.

3.2.6.2 Recruitment of Self-Glorifiers

The despot chooses the self-glorifiers from all layers of society - from the rich and the poor, from the intellectuals and the lowly (pp. 466–468) - and uses them as middlemen in order to deceive the nation whilst pretending to benefit it (p. 466, § 4). To serve him, he first chooses the ones of lowest morality, and then makes an effort to increase them in number and spread them throughout the nation. Selecting those of low morality, *safā’il/raḍā’il*, to fill official positions their low morals spread throughout society, turning it into hell (Barqāwī, 2003, p. 31). He gives them various positions to see if they let themselves be seduced by him, even

though they are often insignificant and of no real power (p. 466, § 6). The self-glorifiers may be considered slaves of the despot (Barqāwī, 2003, p. 30). He removes those who are not seduced by him from office, with the result that those that remain in power are the ignorant ones. Consequently:

دولة الاستبداد دولة بله لأوغاد.

“the despotic state is a stupid state of the wretched [people]” (p. 466, § 5).

Having picked those of low morals, the despot turns to the upper layers of society, those descended from nobility, *’aṣāla*, in order to look for servants, as he needs firmer justification for his rule. Al-Kawāḱibī divides this part of the society into three groups: the houses of science and moral excellence, the houses of money and generosity and the houses of tyranny, *ẓulm*, and authority (p. 467, § 4). From this last group, the group greatest in number, the despot chooses his servants³⁹, as they are the easiest to call into service. The result is that:

الحكومة المستبدة طبعا مستبدة في كل فروعها من المستبد الأعمى إلى الشرطي, إلى الفراش, إلى كناس الشوارع, ولا يكون كل صنف إلا من أسفل أهل طبقتة أخلاقا, لأن الأسافل لا يهتمهم طبعا الكرامة وحسن السمعة.

the despotic government is certainly despotic in all its branches, from the great despot to the police, to the servants, to the street-cleaner, and all these groups are but of the lowest of their [societies] stratum morally, because the lowest [of moral] are naturally not concerned with the honour and the respectable (p. 470, § 2).

3.2.6.3 Glory and Self-Glorification

While glory pertains to the realm of society as a common project shared by its members, self-glorification is an individual project. The commonest motive of the self-glorifiers is to attain positions in the administration – not in order to serve the nation, but to serve their own interests. The despot actively picks them and they actively seek positions in his administration. Their self-interests and neglect of the nation’s interest damage the bonds

³⁹ Despotism originally developed from this group as the tribes were becoming civilized. Al-Kawāḱibī claims that, in all societies, this group is the root of misfortune. Before the civilization of society all men were equal; “until chance differentiated some members over the other members of the tribe, where the strongest preserved their newly gained advantage and ruled despotically over the remaining population” (p. 468, § 2).

between the members of society and subsequently destroy the structure of society. Glory and self-glorification are both moral characteristics, the former positive, the latter negative. They are moral in the sense that they involve certain behaviour towards others. When al-Kawākibī describes these two concepts in the same chapter, he does it with the aim of contrasting the two, because:

يغالب الاستبداد المجد فيفسده ويقيم مقامه التمجيد.

“despotism combats glory and corrupts it, and erects self-glorification in its place” (p. 463, § 1).

Viewing the achievement of glory, according to al-Kawākibī, as a natural quest for all of mankind, means that Man will still seek glory in the despotic state. Because the social body is destroyed under despotism and glory is achieved by the means of the group, dependent on a certain group-solidarity, glory is hard to achieve or as al-Kawākibī puts it:

وهو ميسر في عهد العدل لكل إنسان على حسب استعداده وهمته, ينحصر تحصيله في زمن الاستبداد بمقاومة الظلم على حسب الإمكان.

it (glory) is facilitated in the era of justice to each human being according to his inclination and concern, and its achievement is confined in the era of despotism by resisting injustice depending on ability (p. 465, § 1).

If it is the case that achieving glory is a quest of all mankind and that Man’s natural drive and his possibilities are limited under the despotic sovereign, then under despotism the majority of people set out to seek glory by means of titles and positions at the expense of the nation’s welfare and interests.

The *mutamajjidūn* is a moral category and a category which involves all social groups. The concept of *mutamajjidūn* is interesting as even some members of the *al-‘ulamā’*, who are traditionally thought to be the rightly guided, are part of this group according to the author. According to this, being a part of a social group does not in al-Kawākibī’s view, automatically give honour, but the individual’s contribution on behalf of the community gives honour, regardless of social adherence.

I find it interesting as a final point to ask whether the whole of society is affected by despotism. Is there anyone who avoids the grasp of despotic administration? Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd certainly spread his informers to all parts of the empire, but the technology available

was of a more primitive kind than that of authoritarian regimes of today, so we must assume that the bureaucracy was slower and less able to handle as much information as it can in our time and thus the control over the individual was less efficient. Al-Kawākibī, by virtue of his work and writings, is himself evidence that despotism did not reach all members of society. But did any others remain? He does not give elaborated answers to this question, but provides a few examples of those trying to avoid the influence of despotism. As mentioned, the despot tries out various people in official positions, as if to test their loyalty to him and to see if they will become his helpers; those he fails to corrupt are removed from office (p. 466, § 6). These serve as examples of the fact that some do refuse to let themselves be corrupted by despotism. Al-Kawākibī also comments that the intellectuals, ‘*uqalā*’, are some of those who are not blinded by the despot’s boasting (p. 471, § 3):

الذين يذوقون عسيلة مجد الحكومة ينشطون لخدمة الأمة ونيل مجد النبالة، ثم يضرب على يدهم لمجرد أن
بين أضلعهم قبسة من الإيمان وفي أعينهم بارقة من الإنسانية، هي الفئة التي تتكهرب بعداوة الاستبداد
وينادي أفرادها بالإصلاح.

those who taste the sweetness of the government’s glory are eager to serve the nation and achieve the glory of nobles, then they are slapped on their hand for the mere reason that there is a firebrand of faith between their ribs and a hope for the humanity in their eyes. This is the group that electrifies due to the hostility of despotism and whose members call for reform (p. 467, § 1).

He also notes that some of the nobles are protected as they come from deep-rooted families from which they inherit traces of decency and compassion (p. 468, § 3). Those not affected by despotism, or rather who avoid being corrupted, seem to be too limited in numbers to make up for the destroyed structure of society.

4. Knowledge in the Era of Despotism

The precondition for blind faith, *muqallad*, is that one does not know that it is blind faith, and if one knows that, the glass of one's blind faith will break. This breakage cannot be mended, and cannot be restored by invention or by union, unless you melt it by fire and a new start should be made with new manufacture.

Al-Ġazālī, *al-Munqid min aḍ-Ḍalāl*, p. 89–90

Among the most prominent concerns in *Ṭabā'ir al-Istibdād* is the status of knowledge under despotic rule. Throughout the book, al-Kawākibī pays attention to the importance of knowledge, *ilm*, because without knowledge society cannot progress and prosper, the nation cannot rise to happiness and Man lives a miserable life. The army is also an important tool for keeping the citizen submitted (p. 438, § 4), but the worst form of despotism is when ignorance overcomes the mind (p. 441, § 1). The particular landscape created by despotism, where nothing is stable, gives little room for growth. As a result, knowledge is suppressed and ignorance, *jahl*, is promoted, causing Man to live in fear. It is not only the living conditions that suppress knowledge; the spread of knowledge is also actively prevented by the despot, although this does not extend to all sorts of knowledge. According to al-Kawākibī, the despot does not forbid certain types of sciences, as he does not think that they lift the nation's ignorance:

نعم لا يخاف علم اللغة إذا لم يكن وراء اللسان حكمة حماس.

“Yes, the despot does not fear the science of language as long as there is not a wise enthusiasm behind the tongue” (p. 457, § 4) and:

وكذلك لا يخاف المستبد من العلوم الدينية المتعلقة بالمعاد المختصة ما بين الإنسان وربه, لا اعتقاده أنها لا ترفع غباوة ولا تزيل غشاوة.

“thus the despot does not fear from the religious sciences pertaining to the hereafter of what is between Man and his Lord, believing that they do not lift foolishness and do not lift any veil” (p. 457, § 5).

He is safe from the kind of knowledge that these sciences represent, as long as none of their representatives gain too much respect among the common people, in which case he will try to buy the *‘ulamā* and use them in order to serve his own ends as:

لا يعدم المستبد وسيلة لاستخدامهم في تأييد أمره ... ويسد أوفاهم بلقيمات من فتات مائدة الاستبداد.

“the despot does not lack means in order to use them in supporting his order...and he fills their mouths with crumbs from the table of despotism” (p. 458 § 1).

What sort of knowledge is it important to spread according to al-Kawāḳibī? What are the sciences forbidden or restricted in the despotic state? Knowledge can have many meanings and be defined in various ways; it can be philosophical knowledge or knowledge connected to practical life. I will below attempt to define what al-Kawāḳibī intends when he refers to *‘ilm*, ‘knowledge’.

4.1 What is Knowledge?

When referring to ‘knowledge’ and ‘sciences’, al-Kawāḳibī employs the word *‘ilm*. Wehr translates *‘ilm* as follows: ‘knowledge’, ‘learning’, ‘lore’, ‘cognizance’, ‘acquaintance’, ‘information’, ‘cognition’, ‘intellection’, ‘perception’, and ‘science’. In addition *al-Mawrid* quotes, ‘scholarship’, ‘education’, ‘awareness’ and ‘familiarity’. *‘ilm* is antonym to *jahl*, ‘ignorance’ and synonym of *maʿrifa*, ‘knowledge’ (Lewis, Menage, Pellat, “‘ilm”, EI). I have in general chosen to translate *‘ilm* as ‘knowledge’ and not ‘science’, as this is closer to al-Kawāḳibī’s intention, a choice which will become clearer to the reader in what follows.

According to al-Kawāḳibī knowledge is:

قبسة من نور الله وقد خلق الله النور كشافا مبصرا, ولادا للحرارة والقوة, وجعل العلم مثله وضاحا للخير
فضاحا للشر, يولد في النفوس الحرارة وفي الرؤوس شهامة, العلم نور والظلم ظلام ومن طبيعة النور
تبديد الظلام.

a firebrand of God’s light. God has created light, revealing and possessing knowledge, fertile with enthusiasm and power. He made science like himself, making manifest good and revealing evil. It generates passion in the souls and cleverness in the heads. Knowledge is light and darkness is tyranny and it is in the nature of light to eliminate darkness (p. 457, § 3).

According to this definition, knowledge or science is like God himself. It is the tool for separating between good and evil and leads to enthusiasm and delights. Al-Kawākibī again employs synonyms and antonyms when stating that the opposite of light is darkness, which is equal to tyranny. Thus tyranny, seen as darkness, can by natural consequence be removed by light. In other words, like darkness gives way to light, despotism can be lifted by the means and spread of knowledge:

... للعلم سلطانا أقوى من كل سلطان, فلا بد للمستبد أن يستحقر نفسه كلما وقعت عينه على من هو أرقى منه علما. ولذلك لا يحب المستبد أن يرى وجه عالم عاقل يفوق عليه فكرا.

knowledge possesses a power stronger than any power and it is inevitable that the despot despises himself every time his eye falls upon the one who rises above him in knowledge. And therefore the despot does not like to see a wise learned face that rises above him intellectually (p. 458, § 4).

Knowledge is brought about through God al-Kawākibī continues, and explains his statement by pointing to the fact that the first word revealed in the Koran was “the command to read”⁴⁰ and that God, “taught man by the pen and taught him what he did not know”⁴¹ (p. 461, § 5). Knowledge spread with Islam, he continues, and not only is knowledge permissible and free to all, but it is a duty for all Muslims to learn to read and write. Knowledge thus is not restricted to Islamic scholars or specialists, as God created Man with a mind to lead him (p. 441, § 1) so that he can understand (p. 510, § 5). According to al-Kawākibī, each individual has the potential of acquiring knowledge and a right and duty to exercise his intellectual capacity, in religious as well as worldly matters. He denounces blind following, urging each individual to read and understand the divine message for himself (p. 508, § 4–5).

4.2 Knowledge, Ignorance and Fear

One of the despot’s most important tools for staying in power is to keep the nation ignorant (p. 438, § 4), so that the citizens remain unaware of their rights and unaware of the despot’s misconduct in their affairs. Al-Kawākibī states that one of the most harmful things for man is

⁴⁰ Al-Kawākibī is here referring to Koran verses from “Sūrat al-Baqara”, “The Cow”. These verses relate the story when the Prophet first met the archangel Gabriel, and the Koran was revealed. Gabriel commanded Muḥammad to read or recite, whereupon Muḥammad refused, saying that he was not able to read. Gabriel commanded him three times until he read.

⁴¹ He further cites 2 verses from “Sūrat al-‘Alaq” “The Cloth”.

ignorance, and the most harmful consequences of ignorance is fear (p. 460, § 3), as Man tends to fear what he does not know and:

فإذا ارتفع الجهل وتنور العقل زال الخوف.

“if ignorance is eliminated and the mind is enlightened, then fear disappears” (p. 459, § 3).

It is the fear stemming from ignorance and the threat of punishment that keeps the citizens obedient. By keeping them in a state of ignorance and fear, the despot can hold on to his power, feeding on his subjects; therefore:

المستبد يود أن تكون رعيته كالغنم درا وطاعة وكالكلاب تذللا و تملقا.

“the despot prefers the citizens to be like sheep, producing and obedient, and like the dog, degraded and bootlicking” (p. 440, § 8).

Not only are the citizens afraid, but the despot himself is also afraid.⁴² He is afraid of his servants whom he cannot trust, but what he fears most is knowledge. Al-Kawākibī notes that the fear of the despot and the fear of the citizens are of different kinds. While the people’s fear stems from ignorance and an imagined weakness on their own part, the despot is afraid of the incapacity of ignorance (p. 459, § 4) because he knows that ignorance is nothing but a weak weapon and is only efficient as long he can keep the entire nation ignorant. Thus, whilst the citizens are afraid of what they do not know, the despot is afraid of what he knows, namely that once ignorance is lifted, he will lose his power. As a result, the sciences which the despot trembles with fear from are:

علوم الحياة مثل الحكمة النظرية، والفلسفة العقلية، و حقوق الأمة وطبائع الاجتماع، والسياسة المدنية، والتاريخ المفصل، والخطابة الأدبية، و نحو ذلك من العلوم التي تكبر النفوس وتوسع العقول وتعرف الإنسان ما هي حقوقه وكم هو مغبون فيها، وكيف الطلب، وكيف النوال، وكيف الحفظ. وأخوف ما يخاف المستبد من أصحاب هذه العلوم المندفعين منهم لتعليم الناس بالخطابة أو الكتابة.

the sciences of life, like theoretical knowledge and philosophy, the rights of the nation, the nature of human society, civil politics, elaborate history and literary discourse. And the likes of the sciences that

⁴² Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd is said to have been dominated with fear throughout his life. (Rightfully) distrusting his ministers, he took government affairs into his own hands as a result, and encouraged espionage and informing by means of the secret police <<http://www.armenica.org/cgi-bin/history/en/getHistory.cgi?4=1=info=4=Hamid%20II,%20Abdul=1=3=H>>. As mentioned above, he also tried to control the reading public through harsh censorship (EI: Deny, 1960).

expand the minds, extend the intellects, teach man his rights and to what extent he is cheated on them (the rights), how to request, how to benefit and how to preserve. What the despot is most afraid of are the followers of these sciences, those among them pushing forward to teach people by speech and writing (p. 458, § 2).

Equipped with knowledge, Man will be able to question the actions of the sovereign, and he will learn that the government is supposed to serve him and not the opposite. The result of knowledge is that man comes to know that freedom is the best thing in life (p. 461, § 6), and by means of this knowledge he can force the despot to do good. The spread of knowledge means that the despot will loose his power as:

ما انتشر نور العلم في أمة قط إلا وتكسرت فيها قيود الأسر, وساء مصير المستبدين من رؤساء سياسة أو رؤساء دين.

“whenever light of knowledge spreads in a nation it shatters prisoners’ chains and the fate of leaders of politics or religion deteriorates” (p. 462, § 2) and:

و هكذا إذا زاد علم أفراد الرعية بأن المستبد امرؤ عاجز مثلهم زال خوفهم منه وتفاضوه حقوقهم.

“thus, if the knowledge of the citizens’ members increases [to the extent] that the despot is an incapable person just like them, their fear of him decreases and they demand their rights” (p. 461, § 1).

The nation will force the despot to do good because:

العاقل لا يخدم غير نفسه, وعند ذلك لا بد للمستبد من الاعتزال أو الاعتدال. وكم أجبرت الأمم بترقيها المستبد اللئيم على الترقى معها والانقلاب رغم طبعه إلى وكيل أمين يهاب الحساب, ورئيس عادل يخشى الانتقام, وأب حلیم يتلذذ بالتحابب. وحينئذ تنال الأمة حياة رضية هنية, حياة رخاء ونماء, حياة عزة وسعادة, ويكون حظ الرئيس من ذلك رأس الحظوظ, بعد أن كان في دور الاستبداد أشقى العباد, لأنه كان على الدوام ملحوظا بالبغضاء ومحاطا بالأخطار, غير أمين على رياسته, بل وعلى حياته طرفة عين, ولأنه لا يرى قط أمامه من يسترشده فيما يجهل.

the intelligent man does not serve anyone except himself, and in front of that the despot inevitably withdraws and [becomes] moderate. How often have the nations with their progress forced the evil despot to rise with them, and transform him, despite his nature, to an honest sovereign who fears the consequences, to a just leader who fears revenge and to a gentle father who takes pleasure in mutual love. At that moment the nation attains a pleasant satisfied life, a life of comfort and growth, a life of power and happiness and the president will be the luckiest of them all after he in the era of despotism was the most miserable among servants, because he was permanently observed with hatred and surrounded by dangers, not safe in his president-ship, nay, even in his life for a second, because he does not see anyone in front of him whom he can ask for direction when he does not know (p. 459, § 3).

4.3 Knowledge and Education

Knowledge is connected to education, *tarbiya*, which al-Kawākibī defines as “knowledge and work”, *‘ilm wa ‘amal* (p. 499, § 2). Whereas knowledge pertains to the intellect, *‘aql*, the faculties linked to education also include the mind, *nafs* and the body, *jism*. Education is achieved through “instruction, practice, model and adoption”, *ta‘līm, tamrīn, qudwa wa iqtibās*, with the help of an instructor and one’s religion (p. 496, § 2).

Education, as I understand it from the text, is dependent on two factors, namely the individual who receives the education, and the conditions in which it is given. Man, according to al-Kawākibī, is created by God with a disposition for uprightness, *istī‘dād liṣ-ṣalāḥ*, and disposition for corruption, *istī‘dād lil-fasād*, and it is education that steers him towards good, *xayr*, or towards evil, *šarr* (p. 495, § 1). In fact, he adds, there is no limit to his rising or falling in levels of good and evil: Man can rise above the level of the angels in goodness or to below the level of the devil in evilness (p. 495, § 2).⁴³ He is like a moist branch, which at a young age can be formed, then he stiffens and will remain in the form he was shaped in, throughout his life, either living a life in fulfilment or a life in remorse, depending on how his young years were formed (p. 495, § 3; p. 496, § 1). His body is formed until he is two years of age, which is the duty of the nursemaid; his mind is then formed until he is seven years old, which is the job of both his parents. His intellect is formed until he reaches puberty, a duty undertaken by his teachers and schools. He is then formed by his family and relatives through example, *qudwa*, and marriage will later educate him or her through comparison, *muqārana*⁴⁴ (p. 496, § 5). This idea echoes Rousseau in his book *Emile; Or on Education*, where he divided man’s development into five stages. Childhood is the rearing of a civilized stage, according to Rousseau, where Emile is independent and self-sufficient. He is, in the later stages - when he reaches adulthood - brought into human society, where he learns moral responsibility. This also corresponds to Montesquieu (p. 29), who wrote that education prepares us for civil life. Whereas Rousseau dedicates one book to each of the five stages the child passes through⁴⁵, al-Kawākibī does not give further elaboration on the different stages.

⁴³ The idea of that Man can sink and rise to the levels to the devil or the angels is taken from “Sūrat aṭ-Ṭīn”, “The Fig” and is an example of how he indirectly refers to ideas found in the Koran.

⁴⁴ The individual is formed by his or her spouse through comparison between the two.

⁴⁵ According to Rousseau, the first stage of development is the stage of infancy, from birth until two years of age, the next stage, “the age of nature”, lasts until the child has reached twelve. The next three years are the “pre-adolescence years”, and the stage of “puberty” is from fifteen to twenty. Emile is introduced to his partner

The idea is that Man is educated and formed by his surroundings and by the society in which he lives. His characteristics are inherited and reproduced, or in the words of al-Kawākibī:

وكما يكون الآباء يكون الأبناء, وكما تكون الأفراد تكون الأمة.

“like the fathers are, the sons become, and like the individuals are, the nation becomes” (p. 504, § 2).

As a result, education is not only important to the individual, but also has consequences on the whole of society, as society cannot prosper if the individuals in it do not progress upwards.

Also according to Rousseau education had the purpose of enable the person to live both independently and with others, to make him a competent individual as well as a competent member of society and to enable him to use his creative powers for himself and the society (Dent, 1992, pp. 105–108). Through education he would become “equipped, self-possessed and self-determined member of adult society and a citizen of a state, through his own virtue and the conduct of the welfare of society were now sustained” (Dent, 1992, p. 104). The purpose of education according to Rousseau, was not only for Man to learn, but also to shape the heart, judgement and spirit, education should enable him to be happy and in order for Man to understand the world around him, education needed to be conducted in predictable and orderly environment (Dent, p. 103).

4.3.1 The Results of Education

So what does education teach Man according to al-Kawākibī? It teaches him to separate between good and evil (p. 457, § 3), but he stresses another more pertinent aspect of education; education teaches Man to see the results of his works before he can obtain them, and it teaches him delight in success (p. 498, § 5). Achieving progress is time-consuming and takes effort and planning, for its results are not immediate. The difference between Easterners and Westerners, al-Kawākibī says, pointing to the latter’s success in making progress, is that “the Easterner is the son of the past and imagination and the Westerner is the son of the future and effort” (p. 492, § 3). The ability to see the result of his efforts gives the individual

Sophie through his years of “adulthood”, which Rousseau sets to be from twenty to twenty-five years (Rousseau, 1762).

determination and confidence to soldier on and delight in his work, even if he should fail, because he will come to know from experience that his efforts eventually bear fruit.

Whereas organized governments provide the institutions necessary for education (p. 497, § 4), despotic states provides no education. Education under despotism serves to provide the despot with livestock (p. 500, § 1) and:

يعيش الإنسان في ظل العدالة والحرية نشيطا على العمل بياض نهاره وعلى الفكر سواد ليله.

“the human being under the shadow of justice and freedom lives eager for work all day and for thought all night” (p.497, § 4) and:

أما أسير الاستبداد, فيعيش خاملا خامدا ضائع القصد, حائرا لا يدري كيف يميت ساعته وأوقاته.

“as for the prisoner of despotism he lives sleepy and passive with lost purpose, helplessly straying, not knowing how to kill time” (kill his hour and time) (p. 498, § 1).

Al-Kawākibī also notes that the submission taught by despotism stems from fear and compliance and not from choice and obedience (p. 485, § 4). Despotism affects the body with sickness, corrupts the mind with bad morals, and prevents the intellect from gaining knowledge (p. 495, § 1). The education of despotism further makes Man see himself as incapable (p. 501, § 1). The prisoner’s experience is that:

فيرى أحدهم نفسه منقبضا عن العمل, لأنه غير أمين على اختصاصه بالثمرة ... ثم يعمل تارة ولكن بدون نشاط ولا إتقان فيفشل ضرورة, ولا يدري أيضا ما السبب فيغضب على ما يسميه سعدا أو حظا ... والمسكين من أين له أن يعرف أن النشاط و الإتقان لا يتأتيان إلا مع لذة انتظار النجاح في العمل.

One of them sees himself dispirited from work because he is not sure of his specialization in relation to the result ... then he works sometimes, but without ardor and no certainty and then he necessarily fails, in addition he does not know the reason, then he becomes angry at what he calls good fortune or fate ... and the poor one, from where will he know that ardor and certainty does not arrive except with the delight of waiting for the successful outcome in work (p. 498, § 1).

And:

أما العمل فكيف يتصور وجوده بلا سبق عزم, وهو بلا سبق يقين, وهو بلا سبق علم؟

“as for the work how can he imagine its existence without previous determination, when he [himself] is without prior certainty and he is without previous knowledge [?] (p. 499, § 2).

To see the results of education takes time, a lesson of which the prisoner of the despotic state, according to al-Kawākibī, is deprived. While the goal of education is to learn to preserve one’s honour, rights, religion and morality: the prisoner of despotism is not only uneducated, but he even refuses education, as he is not able to contemplate its results (p. 499, § 3). He only learns those delights that are immediate and unreal like greed and how to fill his stomach, but he never learns the true delights of knowledge, instruction and other spiritual delights (p. 500, § 3–4).

But education also awakens the senses, a painful experience for the prisoner, as he starts to feel his misery now that his drugged senses begin to perceive his surroundings. As a result, he may easily reject education:

ما أبعد الأسراء عن النشاط للتربية, ثم لماذا يتحملون مشاق التربية وهم إن نوروا أولادهم بالعلم جنوا عليهم بتقوية إحساسهم, فيزيدونهم شقاء, ويزيدونهم بلاء, ولهذا لا غرو أن يختار الأسراء الذين فيهم بقية من الإدراك, ترك أولادهم هملا.

How far are the prisoners from eagerness towards education! Then why endure the toil of education, if they enlighten their children with knowledge they bring about the strengthening of their feelings, and then they increase their misery and increase their distress. Because of this, no wonder that the prisoners, those who still have some awareness, leave their children negligent (p. 501, § 2).

The instability of despotism gives no room to wait for the fruits and results of education; instead Man is taught, or not taught, by his surroundings and he passes what he has learned of misery to his children:

هم سلاسل من الحديد يرتبط بها الآباء على أوتاد الظلم والهوان والخوف والتضييق.

“they are chains of iron with which fathers are bound to the stakes of tyranny, shame, fear and oppression” (p. 500, § 1).

Thus the chaotic society of despotism is formed, reproduced and sustained with no hope for change in sight

Although al-Kawākibī employs the word ‘education’, *tarbiya*, when talking about ‘education’ under despotism (p. 503, § 4), it is not likely that he intended the same meaning of the word when he refers to ‘education’ under the just government. He starts his chapter “Despotism and Education” saying:

التربية والاستبداد عاملين متعاكسين في النتائج.

“education and despotism are two contradicting factors in the results [that they produce]” (p. 495, § 1).

His definition of education is a faculty of instruction, practice, example and adoption, the forming of body, mind and intellect so that the individual can live a life in fulfilment. As for despotism; its education is unintended and accidental (p. 503, § 4) and can strictly speaking not be referred to as ‘education’.

4.4 Knowledge and Maturity, Ignorance and Immaturity

To further promote understanding of al-Kawākibī’s concept of knowledge I will now quote the first two paragraphs from the chapter “Despotism and Knowledge”. The relationship between the despot and the citizens may provide a clearer idea as to what al-Kawākibī intends when referring to *‘ilm*. I have made use of some of the definitions from these paragraphs above; nevertheless, quoting them in full will give an idea of the tension of the text and help me answer the questions I raised earlier.

ما أشبه المستبد في نسبته إلى رعيته بالوصي الخائن القوي، يتصرف في أموال الأيتام وأنفسهم كما يهوى ما داموا ضعافا قاصرين، فكما أنه ليس من صالح الوصي أن يبلغ الأيتام رشدهم، كذلك ليس من غرض المستبد أن تنتور الرعية بالعلم، لا يخفى على المستبد مهما كان غيبا أن لا استعباد ولا اعتساف إلا ما دامت الرعية حمقاء تخبط في ظلامه جهل وتبه عماء، فلو كان المستبد طيرا لكان خفاشا يصطاد هوام العوام في ظلال الجهل، ولو كان وحشا لكان ابن آوى يتلقف دواجن الحواضر في غشاء الليل، ولكنه هو الإنسان يصيد عالمه جاهله.

So similar is the despot in relation to his citizens to the powerful traitorous tutor, who acts in the orphans' wealth and among them as he pleases as long as they are weak and unable. And just as it is not in the interest of the tutor that the orphans reach maturity with sensible conduct, thus it is not the aim of the despot that his citizens be enlightened with knowledge. The despot knows, however stupid he is, that there is neither enslavement nor compulsion unless his citizens are imbeciles, stamping in a darkness of ignorance and a labyrinth of blindness. If the despot were a bird, he would be a bat hunting the vermin of people in the gloom of ignorance, and if he were a beast, he would be a jackal robbing the poultry of the cities under the cover of night. But he is a man of ignorance hunting the man of knowledge (p. 457, § 1–2).

The citizens are here given the traits of orphans, or children, whereas the despot is portrayed as the tutor, or the adult. In a relationship between children and adults, the adult gives directions and the child obeys. The adult in this metaphor wishes the children harm, the tutor exploits them, in what must be seen to be a conscious process. The child on the other hand, can perhaps be seen as less conscious, as he does not yet possess the necessary knowledge of how to behave in a proper manner, and thus can be manipulated and led by others. The child has not yet reached adulthood, and so he is not yet mature. We know that the citizens are not really children, so why are they portrayed as such?

It is not the intention of the despot that his citizens be enlightened with knowledge, al-Kawākibī says, and thus he portrays science or knowledge as something that belongs to the adult who has reached the age of 'sensible conduct', in which he is able to act responsibly without guidance from another person. Montesquieu noted that the despot cannot compel his citizens to carry out his orders unless they are ignorant, as excessive obedience presupposes ignorance (p. 32). Al-Kawākibī goes on to portray the citizens as animals, which implies an even lower degree of self-perception, as it suggests that they stamp around without direction or awareness. Al-Kawakibi links knowledge here to the leap from immaturity to maturity, a leap to sensible conduct and awareness.

In his 1784 essay, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was Ist Aufklärung*, Immanuel Kant linked 'enlightenment' to maturity:

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.⁴⁶

Kant uses the word 'Aufklärung' which translates as 'enlightenment', and in the meaning with which the word is used in this text, enlightenment is connected to the leap from

⁴⁶ <<http://www.prometheusonline.de/heureka/philosophie/klassiker/kant/aufklaerung.htm>>.

immaturity to maturity in a very similar way to al-Kawākibī's definition of 'knowledge' in the above paragraph. According to Kant, immaturity resembles the state of mind of a person who does not possess knowledge. He sees immaturity as the lack of courage to use one's own intellect without direction from somebody else; maturity is consequently having the courage to use one's own intellect. He says that Man is able to use his intellect, but does not have the courage or resolution to do so. This corresponds with al-Kawākibī, who blames Man's ignorance on a lack of determination. This means that it is very easy for others to make themselves others' guardians, Kant continues, and over time Man becomes incapable of using his own intellect because he has never been allowed to think for himself. Al-Kawākibī comments on the same matter and warns against the:

... ضياع الحزم, وفقد الثقة بنفسه وترك الإرادة للغير.

“...loss of determination and the loss of faith in oneself and leaving of [one's] will to others” (p. 510, § 5).

Man has to be awake, he urges his readers, because:

فإن وجدوكم أيقاظا عاملوكم كما يتعامل الجيران ويتعامل الأقران, وإن وجدوكم رقادا لا تشعرون سلبوا أموالكم ... وعندئذ لو أردتم حراكا لا تقوون, بل تجدون القيود مشدودة و الأبواب مسدودة لا نجاح ولا مخرج.

if they find you awake they treat you as neighbours treat each other and relatives are friendly with each other, and if they find you sleeping you will not realize that they have stolen your wealth ... and at that moment, even if you wanted to move you would not be able to, rather you would find that the chains are strong and the doors are closed: no escape, no exit (p. 511, § 4).

As a result, Man will never progress to maturity. Kant compares the immature to a domesticated animal in need of a lead, afraid of walking unaided and fearful of the dangers it thinks are ahead. Man will not learn that it is not dangerous to fall, and will never know that he will learn how to walk after a few attempts. Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why Man happily remains immature for life, Kant states, for as he says, “Es ist so bequem, unmündig zu sein. Habe ich ein Buch, das für mich Verstand hat, einen Seelsorger, der für

mich Gewissen hat, einen Arzt, der für mich die Diät beurteilt, u.s.w.: so brauche ich mich ja nicht selbst zu bemühen”.⁴⁷

This means that it is not only the sovereign and the conditions created in the despotic state that prevent the citizens from acquiring knowledge, but the citizens themselves actively contribute to their lack of enlightenment and knowledge by their mere passivity.

تشكون من الجهل ولا تنفقون على التعليم نصف ما تصرفون على التدخين.

“You complain about ignorance, while you do not spend on education half of what you spend on smoking” (p. 511, § 5) al-Kawākibī reproaches his readers.

Even plants attempt growth, contrary to the Man in the age of despotism:

النبات يطلب العلو وأنتم تطلبون الانخفاض.

“plants demand growth while you demand reduction” (p. 512, § 3).

Al-Kawākibī, therefore - in agreement with Kant - not only blames the despot and society for the conditions of the citizens, but also claims that the citizens are partly to blame, for as he says:

ما أليق بالأسير في أرض أن يتحول عنها إلى حيث يملك حريته.

“what is more proper for the prisoner in a land than to turn away from it to where he possesses his freedom” (p. 442, § 2).

فعلى الرعية أن تعرف ما هو الخير وما هو الشر فتلجئ حاكمها للخير رغم طبعه

“The citizens must know what is good and what is evil and force their ruler to good despite his nature” (p. 440, § 7).

The citizens must further know what qualities they ought to have and what their place is in relation to the sovereign:

⁴⁷ <<http://www.prometheusonline.de/heureka/philosophie/klassiker/kant/aufklaerung.htm>>.

وعلى الرعية أن تكون كالخيل إن خدمت خدمت. وإن ضربت شرست، وعليها أن تكون كالصقور لا تلاعب ولا يستأثر عليها بالصيد كله، خلافاً للكلاب التي لا فرق عندها أعطعت أو حرمت حتى من العظام. نعم على الرعية أن تعرف مقامها هل خلقت خادمة لحاكمها، تطبعه إن عدل أو جار، وخلق هو ليحكمها كيف شاء بعدل أو اعتساف، أم هي جاءت به لخدمها لا ليستخدمها. والرعية العاقلة تقيد وحش الاستبداد بزمام.

the citizens must become like the horse if served they serve, and if beaten they becomes vicious; they must become like the falcon, who can not be trifled and not possessed throughout all kinds of hunt, in contrast to the dogs which are indifferent to whether they are fed or deprived even of the bones. Yes the citizens must know their place, is the slave-girl created to serve her master, to follow him regardless of whether he is acting justly or unjustly, and is he [her master] created to rule her as he pleases with justice or coercion or did she [the slave-girl] bring him to serve her not him. The intelligent citizen ties the beast of despotism with bridle (p. 440, § 8).

Al-Kawākibī does not use the word ‘enlightenment’, *tanwīr* in Arabic, apart from employing its verb; ‘...enlightened with knowledge’, *tanawwara bil-‘ilm* (p. 457, § 1). Yet his concept of ‘knowledge’ is closer to ‘enlightenment’ than to that of ‘sciences’. When al-Kawākibī, in his chapter on “Despotism and Knowledge”, sets out to describe the citizens as children, he connects the concepts of ‘knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’ to ‘maturity’ and ‘immaturity’. ‘Knowledge’ then, according to al-Kawākibī, is not about philosophical quests for eternal truths, but instead it is about Man learning how to use his own intellect or understanding, to raise his awareness so that he comes to know his rights and demands them. Only then can he rid himself of despotism, ignorance and fear and only then can he taste the true delights of life and prosper. Marx saw in knowledge a means of promoting the progress of Man (Popper, 1945b, p. 82) and al-Kawākibī’s concept of knowledge is in line with that of Rousseau, whose aim was that the knowledge Emile gained should be relevant to his needs (p. 15).

5. The Language of al-Kawākibī

When al-Kawākibī sets out to describe the fatal consequences of despotism, he employs a rich vocabulary loaded with strong criticism of despotic regimes and his use of literary tools is extensive. His language is almost untranslatable at times, but his main ideas are not difficult to grasp and he leaves no ambiguities as to what he means. The language is powerful in the sense that he does not refrain from employing words like *'ablah*, 'stupid', *'ahmaq*, 'imbecile', *raḍīl*, 'despicable', *ta'īs*, 'wretched', and *šaqā*, 'miserable'. Through hyperbolic language, using exaggerations and overstatements, he tries to convince and influence the reader of his message. His text often reminds us of a political speech: the text at times seems oral, or has elements which give it an oral appearance. It is as if he is pointing his finger at the listener and, at times, when the severity of despotism is painted over the pages, anger is the first emotion visible in his text. Through his particular choice of vocabulary and the manner in which he directs his anger, namely towards despotism and the misery it creates, not only does he seek to persuade, but he also shows a deep and genuine concern for the individuals he is addressing.

I will in this chapter look into how al-Kawākibī conveys his message and I shall comment on some of the rhetorical elements that characterise his language. His use of comparing and contrasting is particular to his text and serves several purposes: I will look into how he has used these as a literary tool. I will then discuss his use of figurative language before I comment on the oral elements in his language.

5.1 Al-Kawākibī's Rhetoric

The purpose of rhetoric is to convince an audience of the point one wishes to make; the speaker encourages the audience to agree with his conclusion by seeking to confirm the existence of a relationship between him and his audience (Perelman, 2005, p. 14). The aim of rhetoric is also to provoke the audience to act. In order for communication to take place, the speaker and the listeners must share common values: the speaker must create a sense of connection and presence between him and the audience, so that there is a "meeting between minds" (Perelman, 2005, p. 12). To achieve this, the speaker or author must take into consideration the opinions of those he is addressing and their circumstances. The speaker normally prepares from an assumption of mutual values between him and his audience or from knowledge of the values to which he wants to appeal. By using metaphors and repetitions, he creates a sense of presence and tries to win the acceptance of his audience. In

order to be efficient, the speech must suit the context (Perelman, 2005, p. 44), which means that a speech is made with reference to the context and the audience, so that it is not made in a vacuum.

The audience is not necessarily those whom the speaker is addressing: he might, for instance, be addressing thousands of listeners over the radio or television, but only a small percentage of these might belong to the audience that the speaker has in mind. Perelman defines the audience as, “the totality the speaker wishes to influence by means of his argument” (Perelman, 2005, p. 12).

Assuming that there are common values between the speaker and his audience, we can say something about the circumstances in which *Ṭabāʿīʿ al-Istibdād* was produced. The values al-Kawākibī puts forward, like human rights and justice, can be classified as universal values. The topic and the manner in which the topic is presented convey information about society and historical circumstances. Discussing despotism in an urging and moralizing manner as al-Kawākibī does would be out of place in a present-day Western democratic country. The text informs us about the values and ideas brought from the European Enlightenment to the Arab world during this period, like the value of the individual, human rights and democratic government. The insistence with which he announces these values suggests that he is trying to sow them in the minds of his audience. He needs to convince his audience of their inherent value, not only as a part of a tribe and a community, but in the mere fact of being a human individual.

5.2 Comparing and Contrasting

I have above commented on al-Kawākibī's use of ‘synonyms’ and ‘antonyms’. He employs a given word, and then he quotes a word of opposite meaning. As this is a literary tool which frequently appears throughout the text, it deserves further exploration. It serves several functions. Al-Kawākibī does not use the terms ‘synonyms’ and ‘antonyms’, but when he explains the political terminology he says that one employs “in the place of the word (despotism) words [like]:...”, “*fī maqām kalima (istibdād) kalimāt:...*” (p. 437, § 3) where upon he lists the words that are used in the place of despotism. “And in its opposite place words [like]:...”, *wa fī muqābilatihā kalimāt:...*” (ibid.) The author wishes by this to stress a phenomenon with its opposite and I have chosen to refer to this as synonyms and antonyms. They are yet not synonyms and antonyms in a traditional sense, but are fitted to suit a political reality.

He employs synonyms and antonyms primarily in order to define and explain the expressions and topics dealt with in the text. Through the use of synonyms, he tells his reader what something is or is similar to, and through that of antonyms he explains which attributes a given subject does not have, but should have had. Put differently, he defines and explains concepts by comparing and contrasting.

These literary tools serve to make his message simple, as he does not present any further detailed or complicated elaborations. His concepts and ideas are explained through words and their counter meaning. By employing the word 'prisoner' more widely than he employs the word 'citizen', he makes it clear what he thinks the status of the citizen is. By repeating this, his purpose is to plant an idea, which relates to the condition the citizens are in. It is a constant reminder that his audience may not be free and are held captive in chains, but that they do have the ability to choose to change their living conditions and that they do have a right to live in liberty.

It further serves an educational purpose in that he defines the status and living conditions of the citizens. Defining and explaining the citizens' status through synonyms and antonyms serves to make his audience aware of their miserable living conditions, informing them of which rights they are being deprived. Their condition or situation is that of a prisoner and their right is to be free. He makes them aware of the wrongdoings of the despot who interferes in their affairs, while his duty, on the contrary, is to serve their interests rather than his own. He thus educates the readers in their rights and duties as members of society. He educates and informs them with the aim of making them act because, as I quoted earlier, the citizens are, "the ones, if they are ignorant, they fear and if they fear, they surrender. Just like they are those who when they learn, they speak and when they speak, they act" (p. 459, § 1), (cf. pp. 38–39).

Employing antonyms is also a part of his rhetoric. He does not ask any direct questions, but by employing these antonyms, he has a particular way of presenting the reader with a choice about his social condition. When employing synonyms and antonyms to the word 'citizen', the term 'prisoner' serves as one of several synonyms and 'free' as an antonym. He gives his reader, who in al-Kawākibī's view is a captive of despotism, the choice of being a free man or a prisoner. The answer is obvious, which is exactly his point. As stated above, Man is bridled, steered by others; others make his choices for him, meaning that he is unable make choices and cannot chose to make moral choices. Al-Kawākibī, by using synonyms and antonyms, reinstates the possibility of choice (Barqāwī, 2002, p. 27)

His particular choice of synonyms and antonyms also provides the modern reader with an insight into the political context of the text. The fact that he refers to the citizens as ‘prisoners’ more than he refers to them as ‘citizens’ or ‘the common people’ tells us about the conditions under which his intended audience were living. With the term prisoner, he has defined their status and condition, in that they are not free and are exposed to injustice. It is unlikely that the citizen of a democratic country would be qualified with the attributes of a prisoner.

His selection of both synonyms and antonyms, then, is not accidental. He has not chosen them from a dictionary but rather has carefully chosen his synonyms with the with reference to the political reality and to better describe the suffering of Man living under despotism. He quotes the antonyms in order to explain what life should have been like, or will be like once despotism is lifted.

While he has an extensive vocabulary to describe the misery of Man, it is interesting to note that, when describing Man’s delights, he almost exclusively employs the word *laḍda* (p. 463, § 2; p. 498, § 1), which Wehr renders ‘joy’, ‘rapture’, ‘bliss’, ‘pleasure’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘delectation’, ‘delight’, ‘sensual delight’, ‘lust’ and ‘voluptuousness’. The true delights that Man can experience are, according to al-Kawāḳibī, connected to spiritual delights, like the delight of succeeding in work.

5.3 Al-Kawāḳibī’s Figurative Language

Metaphors, in general, are often used for rhetorical purposes and to better explain certain concepts (Kövecses, 2002, pp. vii–viii). They are used as an indirect comparison between two seemingly unrelated subjects and are defined as “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4), and serve as a pedagogic tool in order to ease the understanding of a subject. Typical for a metaphor is that an abstract idea is expressed through a more concrete and tangible concept (Kövecses, 2002, p. 6), such as the abstract idea of ‘society’ taking on the image of the ‘body’.

5.3.1 The Use of Animal Metaphors and Similes

The most prevalent feature in *Ṭabā’i’ al-Istibdād* is al-Kawāḳibī’s use of animals as metaphors and similes, and his comparison of their various traits to those of human beings. It may perhaps be said that there is a scientist worldview in the book as the author picks his metaphors from biology and zoology. The reader will recognize that some of the animals

employed in the book have a long tradition of being used metaphorically. Whilst some of the animals are familiar to the Western reader, others are more uncommon in a metaphorical sense. The portrayal of the relationship between a sovereign and his subjects as that of a shepherd and his sheep can be found as far back as Plato (Popper, 1945a, p. 51) and is an image familiar to us, but thinking of human relations as a female spider eating its own kind is perhaps a less familiar idea:

إن النظام الطبيعي في كل الحيوانات حتى في السمك والهوام, إلا أنثى العنكبوت, أن النوع الواحد منها لا يأكل بعضه بعضاً, والإنسان يأكل الإنسان.

“the natural system of all animals, even fishes⁴⁸ and insects, except from the female spider, is that not none of them eat each other, but Man eats Man” (p. 473, § 5).

And only Man, together with the more lowly of animals, accumulates more wealth than he needs:

التمول, أي ادخار المال, طبيعة في بعض أنواع الحيوانات الدنيئة كالنمل والنحل, ولا أثر له في الحيوانات المرتقية غير الإنسان.

“acquiring possessions, namely accumulation of property, is a natural disposition to some kind of lower animals, like the ant and the bee, and there is no trace of this/it in the higher animals, except Man” (p. 476, § 5).

Al-Kawākibī resorts to an extensive use of animal metaphors; some of the animals figuring in the text are ‘wolf’, ‘sheep’, ‘dog’, ‘bee’, ‘ant’, ‘vermin’, ‘leech’, ‘horse’, ‘spider’, ‘falcon’, ‘nightingale’, ‘jackal’, ‘poultry’, ‘predatory’ and ‘bat’. Some of the metaphors are only employed once, while others are repeated in different contexts. They all have in common the fact that they are clear in their meaning and intention and most of the time he also quotes the animals with their attributes and qualities. Some of the animals are weak; some of them stupid; others are considered clever; some feed on others, while others are strong and brutal. As anyone reading the text is likely to have an immediate knowledge of the animals he is referring to, he does not depend on a specialized reader to understand his use of figurative

⁴⁸ Al-Kawākibī does not seem to have been aware of that other animals also possess cannibalistic traits, as fishes are also meat-eaters.

language. His variation in the use of metaphors leaves room for surprise and makes the text vital and refreshing.

Why does he use animal metaphors so extensively? He employs them for various purposes. He has chosen such figurative language to say something about the individual and his relation to others and to express what the citizen is deprived of when he lives under despotism. His use of language is perhaps the best indication of the fact that he considers Man living under despotism to be deprived of all dignity. A man with dignity does not have the characteristics of a fawning dog, an angry horse or a frightened sheep about to surrender to a wolf. Not only are the weak ones deprived of dignity, but neither is the despot – portrayed as a leech sucking the blood of the nation – a man of dignity. These are but some of the qualities that al-Kawākibī attributes to Man living under despotism and describing him as such serves to underline the severity of his condition. As the saying goes, “a picture is worth more than a thousand words” and he tries, through the use of metaphors, to paint the situation of his audience by means of words. He actively seeks to make his message clear by the use of these simple pictures.

The use of language can be problematic because by using the animal metaphors as he does, al-Kawākibī himself deprives Man of dignity; he deprives Man of the elements that makes him human. But he goes even further; he extends the domain of metaphors and in light of dignity and the elements that make Man human, one probably does not get any lower than being referred to as a virus or a plant. The vegetative state or condition is also one of the traits he attributes to the citizen who lives under despotism (cf. p. 39).

5.3.2 The Variety of Metaphors

The ‘human body’, ‘health and illness’, ‘animals’, ‘plants’, ‘light and darkness’, ‘movement and direction’, ‘construction and building’ – all of these concepts employed by al-Kawākibī, – are some of the most commonly used metaphors when explaining more abstract ideas like ‘emotions’, ‘desire’, ‘morality’, ‘society’, ‘politics’ and ‘human relations’ (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 15–25). Al-Kawākibī refers to ‘despotism’ as an ‘illness that needs remedy’, to ‘light’ as the equivalent of ‘science’ and ‘darkness’ as equal to ‘tyranny’. In terms of metaphors of ‘movement and direction’, Man’s natural disposition, according to al-Kawākibī, is to requests upwards movement and ‘society’ in relation to its ‘individuals’ is seen as a ‘building’ where each ‘chamber’ has its function. Despotism portrayed as a virus which spreads (cf. p. 34–35) again suggests a scientist worldview in the book: if the illness is detected a cure can be

prescribed and the patient cured. In this context we may see al-Kawākibī as the doctor who will heal the sick patient or the society.

The use of metaphors demonstrates that the physical world is a logical foundation for the explanation of more abstract notions. The human body is used for metaphorical purposes because we know it well and health and illness are aspects of the human body. Animal metaphors are frequently used in literature to attribute animal qualities to humans, and metaphors of light and darkness, movement and directions are all basic experiences in human lives (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 15–25).

His figurative language also gives the present day reader further information as to who his intended audience were. When expressing his ideas through metaphors, al-Kawākibī makes use of images that are simple for the non-specialized reader to comprehend. His specific use of metaphors might be new to some readers, but as the reader is familiar with the image being used, the idea behind the metaphor is easy to grasp. This suggests that his intended audience was not exclusively the specialized scholar, but also the ordinary man and woman, the individual he refers to as a ‘citizen’ or ‘prisoner’ in the despotic state.

5.4 The Oral Elements of al-Kawākibī’s Language

Even though he clearly refers to the ‘reader’, *al-muṭālī*^c in several places (p. 502 § 2; p. 489 § 3) the language has an oral outlook. This is reflected in the fact that he keeps his points brief, sometimes he repeats them before he moves quickly to the next topic. I will first present some of the verbal expressions that makes the text seem more like that of a man making a statement in front of a group of people than that of a written text.

By actively using expressions like ‘yes’ and, to a lesser degree, ‘no’ when making his points or repeating them, the vision of the text is that of a political orator or an activist, who tries to make his audience understand his message:

نعم لا يخاف علم اللغة

“Yes, he (the despot) does not fear the sciences of language” (p. 457, § 4)

نعم ما أبعد الأسراء عن الاستعداد لقبول التربية

“Yes, how far are the prisoners from accepting education” (p. 499, § 3)

نعم, الاشتراك هو السر كل السر

“Yes, cooperation is the secret of all secrets/biggest secret of all” (p. 489, § 3).

In the chapter “Despotism and Wealth” he resorts to insisting;

لا لا لا يطلب الفقير معاونة الغني.

“No, no, the poor does not seek the assistance from the rich” (p. 475, § 5).

Another feature which characterizes oral speech perhaps more than a written text are the use and repetition of verbs like *nāšada* “I implore you (or them)” (look p. 465, § 2; p. 513, § 3). Also by often referring to what he has previously said or to what he is about to say, the text reminds one of a political speech and so the reader of the text seems to listen rather than read.

Another well-known expression from political speeches and which adds an oral quality to the text is the expression “long live the...” which al-Kawākibī proclaims when ending a statement of how one ought to live in contentment:

فلتحي الأمة فلتحي الهمة.

“long live the nation, long live ardour” (p. 497, § 2)

- and he later repeats the expression and declares:

فلتحي الأمة فليحي الوطن فلنحي طلقاء أعضاء.

“long live the nation, long live the fatherland, long live us mighty free” (p. 515, § 2).

5.5 The Peak of al-Kawākibī's Rhetoric

The peak of al-Kawākibī's rhetoric is in the second to last chapter, ‘Despotism and Development’ and the following discussion will be with reference to this chapter. Even though these paragraphs are written on paper, their appearance is more oral than written and the reader can almost hear his voice emanating from the text itself, particularly when he

strongly urges his readers to wake up. It is as if he is on stage, vibrantly addressing his audience: the text comes to a climax over these pages, just like a novel reaches its peak before the story comes to a point of resolution, or like the turning point of a film where the sound of drums become higher and higher before they die out and the end is reached. How does al-Kawākibī create this sense of reaching a peak in his text and how does he create the tension mentioned above? I have briefly commented on the oral quality of the text and will further comment on it, as it is an important element in making the text ‘spoken’ rather than ‘written’. His rhetoric is an important element when explaining the tension of the text and what I have come to call the climax of the text.

Over several pages he begins each of a succession of paragraphs by addressing his reader with, *yā qaḥm*, ‘Oh People’, before he asks for God’s protection, forgiveness and the like on behalf of the very same reader:

يا قوم: وفاكم الله من الشر

“Oh People, may God protect you from evil” (p. 510, § 2)⁴⁹

Over the first few pages, he refers to the people in general, but at some point he shifts his focus and limits his scope by saying, “I mean the Muslims among you” (p. 513, § 4). A few paragraphs further, he again shifts his focus as if physically turning towards another group and calls on the Arabs, or those who pronounce the *ḍāḍ*⁵⁰, who are not Muslims (p. 515, § 2). He then calls on the East (p. 516, § 2–6), before calling for the attention of the West (p. 516, § 1–2). Finally, he addresses the youth and the coming generation (p. 516, § 3–4).

Over these pages, his rhetoric is at its strongest and most insistent. He basically repeats what he has previously stated in the book, but now he puts social problems directly in front of his audience and blames them for their lack of determination and action. After addressing them, he poses questions like:

⁴⁹ Other examples found in the text are:

“Oh People, may God kill stupidity” (p. 510, § 4)

“Oh People, may God make you among the rightly guided” (p. 512, § 3)

“Oh People, may God take misfortune away from you” (p. 512, § 5)

“Oh People, I urge you by God” (p. 513, § 3).

⁵⁰ Arabic is the only language where the letter *ḍāḍ* is present; Arabs are therefore sometimes referred to as those who pronounce *ḍāḍ*. Here al-Kawākibī calls on non-Muslim Arabs.

يا قوم: قاتل الله الغباوة

يا قوم: أبعد الله عنكم المصائب

يا قوم: أناشدكم الله

يا قوم: جعلكم الله من المهتدين

هل موقفي هذا في جمع الحي... أم أنا أخاطب أهل القبور.

“is this position of mine in the group of the living ... or am I addressing the grave dwellers?”
(509, § 5)

إلى متى هذا الشقاء المديد

“until when is this misfortune to be prolonged?” (p. 509, § 6)

إلى متى هذا النوم، و إلى متى هذا التقلب على فراش البأس ووسادة اليأس؟

“until when will this sleep and this unsteadiness in the bed of misery and on the pillow of hopelessness, last?” (p. 510, § 3)

If he does not ask at the beginning of each paragraph, it is because the questions are likely to come before the paragraphs ends, such as;

هل خلق الله لكم عقلا لتفهموا به كل شيء، أم لتهملوه كأنه لا شيء.

“did God create a mind for you to understand everything or in order for you to neglect it as if it is nothing?” (p. 510, § 5)

إلى متى هذا الإهمال؟

“until when will this neglect last?” (p. 511, § 2)”

ما هذا الحرص على حياة تعيسة دنيئة.

“what is this desire for a wretched life in inferiority?” (p. 511, § 3)

ألم يخلقكم أكفاء أحرارا طلقاء... ماذا استفدتم من هذا الخضوع والخشوع لغير الله؟

“were you not created equal and free?...what did you benefit from this obedience and submission to others than God?” (p. 511, § 6)

هل سلب الاستبداد إرادتكم حتى في الموت؟

“has despotism plundered your will even in death?” (p. 513, § 1).

This is yet an example of how al-Kawākibī places his intended reader or audience in a position of moral choice, but here he poses direct questions. The questions are rhetorical in that he has designed them to be of a persuasive kind.

The questions are also not, according to rhetoric, neutral, as they presume an answer or response that has already been given. He does not wait for any answers, but keeps moving on to the next topic and posing new questions. He not only asks questions, but he also directly blames the reader for his malady, and by that emphasises that despotism has its causes in the very society in which he lives. Throughout these pages, he makes it clear that he blames his fellow citizens for the malady and that he does not blame their misery on external factors or God. For God killed despotism, he has previously stated (p. 490, § 1), and he blames the individual himself for the evil that has fallen upon him when he says:

يظلم الإنسان نفسه

“Man does injustice to himself” (p. 510, § 5).

He further blames them for thinking that they are created for the sake of the past and not for the present, and for the fact that they only follow their forefathers in despicable matters. He then asks where religion, the self-respect, the insolence and decency have gone, before he resorts to the question:

هل تسمعون أم أنتم صم؟

“Are you listening, or are you deaf?” (p. 510, § 2).

Al-Kawākibī sees Man under despotism to be like a living dead when he says that:

بل أنتم بين بين: في برزخ يسمى التنبت...أرى أشباح أناس يشبهون ذوي الحياة وهم في الحقيقة موتى لا يشعرون, بل هم موتى لأنهم لا يشعرون.

“Rather you are in between, in a state which is called vegetative, I see the ghosts of people that resemble living creatures while in reality they are dead and do not feel; yes, they are dead because they do not feel” (p. 509, § 5).

His tone is moralizing and serious, yet, knowing his intention and purpose – namely to make Man rid himself of despotism and step out of a life in misery – his tone is perhaps above all compassionate. He is not cynical, revealing helplessness and hopelessness, but instead calls for action.

He moves from paragraph to paragraph without interruption, posing new questions, constantly bringing in new elements that keep the attention of the reader, who is starting to wake up from his slumber. And that is exactly the intention – to wake the reader up from his slumber, because the reader he has in mind knows the relevance of his speech to his daily life.

6. Summary and Conclusion

I have presented the work *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri' al-Isti'bād* by 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī. The text is primarily an investigation into the characteristics of despotism. The author does not propose a theory, but attempts to make an analysis of the consequences of despotism upon a society and its citizens. His focus is on the individual living under despotic government and not abstract political ideas, concerned with and seeking to promote human welfare, al-Kawākibī's ideas in *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād* can be seen as humanitarian.

I have attempted to shed light on this work by looking at how al-Kawākibī sees the status of knowledge in the despotic state and my main focus has been to portray his 'society', and define his concept of *'ilm*, knowledge, in order to identify the mechanisms that confine, restrict and prevent knowledge under despotism. Throughout my reading I have also discussed possible influences from the thinkers of the French Enlightenment.

Al-Kawākibī was formed by his personal experiences, the ordeals he endured while living in Syria, and his later exile. The very topic he is dealing with, namely despotism, and the anger and concern he expresses are the most visible signs of the relationship between his personal experiences and the text. As he published articles in various Egyptian journals of his time (cf. p. 9), we may assume that he was influenced by the writings and ideas of his time, in which Arab intellectuals wrote on the values of democracy, personal freedom and justice. As so many of his contemporaries, he tried to combine and adapt these ideas with the region's Islamic past and heritage. We do not know what he read from original French Enlightenment texts, given that he did not know any European languages, but it is likely that he was familiar with the ideas that migrated and formed the focus of discourse among Arab intellectuals in this period. There seems to be some resemblance in his text with the writings of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant. Yet, the text is written within his own historical, religious and cultural context, and this is visible when he refers to the Holy Koran, Arabic poetry and the region's past civilisation. Drawing from both his own cultural and religious heritage and from modern European ideas to solve the political problems of his time, he is a man who had his legs placed in two different traditions, seeking to combine the best of each of them.

6.1 Despotism and Knowledge

When al-Kawākibī employs the term 'knowledge', he does not refer to the sciences of mathematics, linguistics, religious sciences, or the philosophical quest for meaning. By

'knowledge' he intends "the sciences of life, like theoretical knowledge and philosophy" (cf. pp. 51–52), a knowledge which teaches Man to question his surroundings and condition, to raise his awareness so that he will come to know and demand his rights. The sort of knowledge that he stresses the importance of is knowledge is connected to Man's daily needs, a knowledge that brings prosperity to the nation as well as happiness to the individual. Equipped with knowledge Man will be come determined, able to make moral choices and live a life in dignity. In terms of intellectual capacity, the spread of knowledge is described as a leap from immaturity to maturity, a leap from childhood to adulthood.

With knowledge, Man will use his understanding and intellect to learn to separate good from evil. Thus he will be able to force the despot to do good, despite his nature, and turn him into a sovereign who fears the consequences of misgoverning. Knowledge will make Man vigilant of the government and he will become determined and self-confident. Knowledge, in al-Kawākibī's view, is the means by which the nation can rid itself of despotism – only through the spread of knowledge can despotism be lifted. In terms of metaphors, knowledge can thus be seen as the remedy and despotism as the illness that needs curing.

Judging from our standpoint today it is not difficult to agree on the importance of knowledge in the progress of nations and improvement of living standards. Yet we know that progress is also achieved in non-democratic states, and that despotism also prevails in nations where the level of education is high. The spread of knowledge alone cannot restructure the workings of society. Social and cultural traditions and institutions also need to be questioned. The implementation of new ideas into a society is bound to change moral values, as the moral values held by members of a society are closely connected with the traditions and institutions of that society, and these values cannot survive the destruction of the institutions upon which they are dependent. Knowledge is but one of many means to achieve development in a society and improve the quality of people's lives, and al-Kawākibī fails to recognise this in this text.⁵¹ The prominence he attributes to knowledge as a means of lifting despotism is therefore rather optimistic.

There is also the question of how al-Kawākibī understood 'despotism'. Provided I have read the text correctly, statements like "whenever the light of knowledge spreads in a nation it shatters the prisoners' chains and the fate of leaders and politics deteriorate" (p. 462, § 2), and "the intelligent does not serve anyone except himself and at that the despot

⁵¹ He did also recognise poverty as a reason, which was one of his motives when founding his office for the oppressed.

inevitably withdraws and (becomes) moderate. How often have the nations with their progress forced the evil despot to rise with them, and transform him, despite his nature into an honest man who fears the consequences, a just leader who fears revenge...” (p. 459, § 3) are indications that knowledge is the remedy for lifting despotism in al-Kawāḳibī’s view. Taking these statements in combination with my reading, I read and understand al-Kawāḳibī as saying that ignorance promotes despotism and knowledge lifts it. Consequently, for despotism to be sustained, one must presuppose the general absence of knowledge. Despotism cannot be sustained without ignorance.

For this reason I have translated the title as *The Characteristics of Despotism* and not as *The Essence of Despotism* (cf. p. 14–15). Despotism, according to al-Kawāḳibī, seems to be dependent on certain characteristics without which it cannot exist; despotism is not the intrinsic nature of human affairs, and cannot be understood as essence in this text. Despotism in this text is in general defined as a phenomenon which consists of certain characteristics, and if deprived of those characteristics it cannot any longer be described as despotism. Yet there are ambiguities as to whether he intends despotism as an intrinsic phenomenon or a phenomenon defined by its characteristics. Al-Kawāḳibī refers more than once to the despot as a person who is evil by nature, needs to be steered with bridles and who has to be forced to good despite his nature (cf. p. 38). This suggests an essentialist approach and produces inconsistencies in the text as to whether al-Kawāḳibī holds that despotism is a contingent characteristic of something or is inherent. If despotism is inherent in human affairs, it is not dependent on ignorance to sustain itself, for it is not dependent on its attributes or characteristics. Whether al-Kawāḳibī was aware of this distinction, or if he was carried away in his anger towards the despot and the malady it causes the individual, I cannot say.

6.1.1 The Mechanisms that Prevent Knowledge

What is the status of knowledge according to al-Kawāḳibī in the despotic society, and what are the mechanisms that prevent knowledge? Despotism and knowledge are described as two contrary and incompatible factors, and those seeking to spread knowledge are persecuted by the despot. Knowledge then enjoys a limited and confined status under despotism and its spread is prevented due to various mechanisms within the despotic society. Knowledge is also prevented by unconscious mechanisms, which are as important as the conscious effort to prevent people from attaining knowledge. Knowledge is prevented on various levels of the despotic society, actively and passively, consciously and unconsciously. I have attempted to

uncover these elements by looking at the functions of the various groups in al-Kawākibī's society and their relationship to each other: I have thus traced how, according to al-Kawākibī's, the spread of despotism into society prevents the spread of knowledge.

The chaotic society of despotism is one of the elements that prevent knowledge. While Montesquieu held that the aim of the despotic society was to create tranquillity, al-Kawākibī's society is defined by chaos. It is a society of no stability, a society where no one is certain of his relationship to others, and where the individual lives under a constant threat of attack from the despot and his helpers. Thus the social body is destroyed and corrupted. Man under these conditions lives drowsy, low in awareness and perception, and unable to distinguish right from wrong. Man is formed and educated by his surroundings and as the despotic education is random, he is formed by chance. The problem with education is that it is a time-consuming process and the results are not immediate. It is in need of stability and a defined goal and educating a whole nation can only be achieved as a common project, not an individual one. Left without the stability and the continuous society of which education is in need, there is little possibility of progress.

Education also has consequences other than attaining knowledge. It serves to wake the individual up, with the result that he starts to feel and perceive the pain created by the despotic society. As a consequence of this, the citizens resist education and leave their children negligent. Deprived of education, they do not learn to see the results of their work, and when they do work they do so without enthusiasm and determination and so fail and give up.

The spread of knowledge is suppressed yet further in the fact that the despot actively seeks ignorant citizens to fill public positions. He is safe in his position as a sovereign as long as the majority of the people are ignorant and do not question his actions. He therefore wants his citizens to be obedient like children or like bootlicking dogs. The nation's general ignorance is secured by the manner in which he appoints his servants. The despot chooses those of low moral standards to fill positions in his administration, and so these low morals spread, beginning the decay of society and the individual. The despotic state is thus a stupid state of the wretched, according to al-Kawākibī. The despot actively chooses his helpers from all layers of society and his helpers actively seek positions in his administration. There is no room for those who wish to see the nation progress and they are dismissed from their positions, leaving the ignorant to fill them. The rightly guided '*ulamā*', whose task is to call on the people, wake them up and make them act, are not only persecuted by the despot they are

also too few in numbers to combat the despot. Too few of the citizens avoid the grasp of despotism to make a difference in changing society and turn social regression into progress.

Al-Kawākibī finds that the role of the *mutamajjidūn*, the self-glorifiers further prevents the spread of knowledge. The self-glorifiers, in their quest for positions in the administration, deepen the roots of despotism yet further. In their wish to be the country's executioners, they destroy the possibility of cooperation and continuity within the nation. As self-glorification is an individual project pertaining to selfish interests, they destroy the possibility of cooperation and the chance of building the community as they serve themselves and not the nation. Deprived of the fruits of cooperation, the nation cannot lay the foundation needed for organized education.

The self-glorifiers are the fuel of the despotic society and build their esteem and respect in the eyes of others on the ruins of glory. Al-Kawākibī stresses the importance of this group when explaining the logic of the despotic society. The self-glorifiers are the embodiment of the virus that spreads and fills the body with sickness. It is interesting to pause for a moment at the difference between al-Kawākibī's concept of 'glory' and Montesquieu's concept of 'honour'. The latter wrote that in the despotic state no man can prefer himself to others, and there exists no honour under despotism. Al-Kawākibī holds a different view. Man does try to seek preference over others. He says that despotism is sustained and reproduced precisely because Man does indeed seek preference in the despotic society.

The problem in the despotic state is that the possibility of attaining glory is limited, and so it becomes perverted and turns into self-glorification. Not only does glory exist, but in al-Kawākibī's view, it is perhaps more important than life itself, a natural quest of mankind, rich or poor. Since glory is such a strong drive for the individual, it causes even more social damage when it is frustrated and replaced with self-glorification. It is important to note that it is initially the same quest driving men of glory and the self-glorifiers, namely a place of respect in society. Engaging in self-glorification is glory, but with the opposite prefix and opposite results: while glory as a common project leads to a stronger community, self-glorification as an individual and selfish project destroys the society. The quest for glory, which under despotism is transformed into self-glorification, forms a vicious circle, as Man continues to seek positions in the despotic administration and so causes further destruction of the social body.

Unconscious processes also keep the citizens ignorant and obedient. Al-Kawākibī blames the citizens for their lack of determination, and their mere passivity is another element

that suppresses knowledge. As a result of his lack of determination, Man keeps himself ignorant and lets himself be treated like an immature child, or a fawning dog. He lives in self-abasement, which deprives him of dignity still further.

Because the despot picks his helpers, who willingly oppress their own people, from the very society he lives in, Al-Kawākibī found the causes of decay in his own society and did not blame external factors for the nation's regression. The despot's helpers are not brought from abroad; they set out to gain their positions at the expense of their own people and nation. For, as al-Kawākibī says:

فالمستبدون يتولاهم مستبد والأحرار يتولاهم الأحرار. و هذا صريح معنى: كما تكونوا يولى عليكم

“a despot takes control over the despots and the free take control over the free, and this is/has an obvious meaning: The way you are is the way you will be governed” (p. 442, § 1).

These are the elements that suppress knowledge in the despotic state and they explain how the despotic society is sustained and reproduced. Man has an inherent value, as he is created by God, but living like an immature child, or with less will and freedom than an animal and being ignorant and fearful of everything he does not know, deprives man of dignity or the elements that makes man human.

6.2 His Society

Describing society as a body where the different parts and elements have various functions and are dependent on each other, al-Kawākibī portrays and explains society as an organic entity. His understanding of society is a traditional one dividing society into a pyramid with the despot, or the political leader on the top, the ‘*ulamā*’ in the middle and the common people at the bottom. According to al-Kawākibī, the ‘*ulamā*’ are the common people’s rightly guided brothers. That the ‘*ulamā*’ are the group supposed to lead and call on the common people also places the text within a religious horizon.

The manner in which al-Kawākibī portrays the common people in relation to the ‘*ulamā*’ is particularly problematic. He does not question the relationship between the ‘*ulamā*’ and the common people. He wants the common people to limit the position of the despot but he does not challenge the leading principle of the ‘*ulamā*’; the ‘*ulamā*’ lead and the common

people are led. He describes them as followers of either the despot or the ‘*ulamā*’ – they are pulled simultaneously in both directions. As they are led, the common people are not active and must be understood as a passive group. He displays these two factions in the dichotomy of good and bad; subsequently, following the ‘*ulamā*’ is right, whereas following the despot is wrong. The common people are portrayed as the orphans who sleep and do not know anything; if they fear, they surrender, and if they speak, they act. Seen in light of his definition and concept of knowledge, his view of the common people is problematic because with knowledge – where the aim is that Man should learn to think for himself – following the despot is wrong, but following the ‘*ulamā*’ is right as they make people speak and act. But following the ‘*ulamā*’ presupposes that the common people are not thinking for themselves; they have only changed direction, in the sense that they are no longer following the despot. His view on society is therefore not a modern one, but remains within a traditional understanding of how society works.

Al-Kawāḳibī also makes the presumption that if the common people are woken up from their slumber, those who did not previously possess knowledge, will suddenly act according to principles of justice. He presupposes that once they learn, they will force the despot to good.

His view of the common people is a rather stigmatising one: they are helplessly straying, moving with the wind like a feather. The individual is not given the chance to fulfil himself as a member of the society under despotism; instead, he lives like an animal – concerned only with his immediate needs – and has no passion for the real delights in life. Man under despotism, according to al-Kawāḳibī, is not in charge of his affairs and does not control his surroundings. He even blames Man to be below animals as he is steered by the will of others (cf. p. 40). He holds that the elements that make Man human are the ambition, the determination and the certainty – *al-himma, al-’iqdām, wa at-ṭabāt* (p. 464, § 2) –, qualities Man does not have under despotism. Being deprived of these elements, Man is deprived of the elements that make him human. He is still a human being, with an inherent value given him from his Creator, but Man living under despotism is deprived of dignity and he lives an animal-like life. Describing them with the attributes of animals and plants is problematic as by doing this he himself strips the common people of dignity and the elements that make them human.

Elitist ideas about the social classes were apparently common among intellectuals at his time (Rooke, 2000, p. 206–207), but al-Kawāḳibī does not seem to hold such views. Al-

Kawākibī's insisting on people to read and understand the Koran for themselves combined with his genuine concern for those he is addressing, may indicate that he does not look with disdain at the common people. He does denounce blind following, urge people to read and understand the Koran for themselves and insist that God has created a mind for them to use, but the place of the common people in society remains the same, led by the *‘ulamā’*.

The human being is above all other creatures God created, he “reflects God as God”, and is created as the vicegerent on earth (Murata; Chittick, 1994, p. 120). God has instilled in him the power of knowledge so he can control the things around him (Murata; Chittick, 1994, p. 122). In view of this it would be interesting to raise the question: What is the value of Man under despotism, according to al-Kawākibī? Lacking the elements that makes him human, is Man's value then reduced due to despotism?

6.3 His Language

I have demonstrated how al-Kawākibī makes an extensive use of metaphors, in particular animal metaphors, when conveying his message. He uses metaphors in order to make abstract ideas simpler, and his use of metaphors therefore has an educational purpose. I have concluded from that that his intended audience includes not only scholars, but also individuals and groups without any specialization. His metaphors further serve the purpose of describing the misery of Man under despotism, by giving him the attributes of prisoners, animals and plants. We recognize some of these metaphors such as the relationship between the statesman and the people as that of a herdsman and his sheep, and political crisis as a disease that needs remedy. Other metaphors, like ‘spider’, ‘bat’, ‘leech’ and ‘jackal’, are more unusual and add vitality and playfulness to the text.

Another feature characteristic of his text is the use of synonyms and antonyms which serves various functions. He employs them in order to define his given topics or terms making his message simple, concrete and accessible to the non-specialist; by constantly repeating the various attributes, he seeks to make the reader aware of his condition and his rights. This is thus another pedagogical tool employed in the text.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī despised despotism and its consequences upon the individual, and he conveys this through a particular language. His language is rhetorical in the sense that he leaves no room for doubt about his message. He does this by employing synonyms and antonyms with no shades of meaning between them, by asking rhetorical

questions where the answer is already given, and by ensuring no second opinion is given in his text and that arguments taken from other sources all support and strengthen his views. In al-Kawākibī's defence is his genuine concern for the people he is trying to address. By this language he tries to wake them up, to teach them their rights, to make them aware, to make them move, and to drag them out of their frozen state in order to make them act. He cannot force them with guns as the despot can, but the spoken word is his weapon, which he uses for whatever it is worth; when he comes towards the end of the book, it does indeed feel like gunpowder. His newspapers might have been prohibited and stopped due to his boldness, he might have been persecuted and driven into exile, but the little document that was saved from the confiscation on a summer's day in Cairo in 1902, speaks a thousand volumes about his concern.

6.4 A Final Note on the Relevance of Al-Kawākibī Today

My fascination with al-Kawākibī rose not only from the beautiful language he employs, but also from the relevance his text has today, over 100 years after it was written. Living in a Western country under relatively stable and democratic government, we might easily fail to recognize the profound effect that government has upon our quality of life. The impact of government on daily life is better felt in undemocratic countries, as unstable government is more likely to cause the regression and decay of society and thus the suffering of the citizen living in it. The lack of democracy in general, in the Arab world, affects people's lives in terms of restricted freedom, the violation of human rights and limited possibilities for setting one's own political agenda. There is a difference in how people living under democratic governments organize their lives in comparison to those living under non-democratic regimes.

Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād is forbidden in Morocco and Saudi-Arabia.⁵² A television series on al-Kawākibī, made in the early 1990s, was forbidden in Syria but not in Iraq, so Syrians living along the Euphrates were able to watch the Iraqi broadcast.⁵³ In Syria, high school students are briefly introduced to his works, including this particular book.⁵⁴ The French Institute in Damascus hosted a conference in Aleppo in 2002 to mark the 100th anniversary of his death, and a centre has been founded in his name in Algiers to deal with issues linked to

⁵² I cannot tell whether the book is still forbidden in Morocco after king Muḥammad VI entered the throne in 1999 and opened Morocco up to wider political freedom.

⁵³ Personal communication with Hayṭam al-Kawākibī, Damascus, 7. October, 2006.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

democracy.⁵⁵ There have been various publications and studies of his works and his name appears frequently in Syrian newspapers and throughout my studies in Damascus, I failed to meet anyone not familiar with his name. Barqāwī's study on the *mutamajjidūn* from 2002 is but one example that shows the relevance al-Kawākibī today. When he interprets this group within a modern framework and rename them *intihāziyyūn*, 'opportunists', Barqāwī demonstrates that certain elements from al-Kawākibī's society are still present in the Syrian society today. Due to censorship he does not say so openly, but conveys with subtlety that the *mutamajjidūn* still exist, but with a more modern name.

In the last year of high school, Syrian students are introduced to al-Kawākibī through a course in modern Arabic literature. I will briefly make an outline of how he is presented, as textbooks tend to express the official attitude towards a given literary work. The textbook, *al-'Adab al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth* (1991), *Modern Arabic Literature*, sets out three small extracts from the book *Ṭabāʿ al-Istibdād* over a page and a half, followed by two pages where the students are encouraged to discuss the literary pieces presented (pp. 41–46). Extracts from the book are presented together with two other pieces of literature, under a chapter called; "al-Insān al-ʿArabī fī Muwājahat al-Istibdād", "The Arab Man Facing Despotism".

The first extract is taken from the chapter entitled "What is Despotism," and explains how the despot supersedes the desires of his citizens by imposing his own will on their affairs and is therefore the enemy of freedom and rights; he will always continue to transgress the proper limits of sovereignty unless he is confronted and challenged by his people. The second extract is from "Despotism and Glory" and states that despotism is the root of all decay, on the grounds that it puts pressure on the mind, religion and science and corrupts them. The third extract is taken from the chapter "Despotism and Science" where al-Kawākibī describes despotism and science as two opponents in combat: whereas *ʿulamāʾ* attempt to enlighten people, the despot tries to smother this light by persecuting the *ʿulamāʾ*.

After the presentation of the text there are various questions which students are meant to discuss relating to grammar, the topic of despotism and the text itself. Of note here is the following discussion question (p. 45): "Are the philosophical sciences today sufficient as a stance towards despotism and do these applied sciences play any role in resisting the despot? Explain!"⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Personal communication with judge Saʿd Zaġlūl al-Kawākibī, Aleppo, 24. February, 2007.

⁵⁶ A university student informed me that the despotism "in mind" here is the despotism of the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation. I have not had the chance to discuss these particular questions with anyone teaching the subject in high school.

Given Syria's current political situation – marked by a lack of democracy, the curbing of individual freedom and limited freedom of speech – the pieces chosen are interesting. The extracts give quite a concise definition of despotism, and seeing Syria as a country where people do not participate in political life and political opponents are sometimes arrested and put to torture, these definitions are easily applicable to the daily lives of many Syrians. When discussing *al-Kawākibī* and *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād* throughout my stay in Damascus, Syrians would often make parallels between the book and their social and political conditions. Yet, the book is not forbidden and Syrian students are introduced to his works. Even if not directly having Syria in mind, discussing a topic like despotism in schools has the potential to make some aware of their country's condition and their personal rights to participate in political life. On the other hand, a three-page introduction to a book does not constitute a deep study of the topic, and may instead serve political ends. *Al-Kawākibī* is hereby introduced and perhaps demystified. The authorities can point to the fact that they do introduce students to the author and that the topic of despotism is discussed in schools. Yet the practical results of such an introduction are limited and controlled, a well-known strategy employed by authoritarian governments in need of justifying their methods.

It is worth noting that in 1980 the renowned Syrian author Zakarīyā Tāmīr [Zakaria Tamer] was dismissed from his role as editor of the periodical *al-Ma'rifa*, published by the Syrian Ministry of Culture, after the publication of extracts from *Ṭabā'ī' al-Istibdād*. As a result of this dismissal he traveled to London where he has since made his home (Mahmoud, 2006).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ <<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/brill/haw/2006/00000004/00000001/art00004>>. I have not been able to find the extracts which were censored.

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Summary

Between 1898 and 1902 the Syrian thinker ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, a pioneer of the Arabic *nahḍa* wrote the book *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-Istibdād wa Maṣāriʿ al-Istiʿbād*, *The Characteristics of Despotism and the Destructions of Enslavement*. The text can be placed within the realm of political philosophy. Apart from being a criticism of the despotic regime of the Ottoman Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II, the text is also an exposé of the causes of despotism and its effects upon the society and the individuals.

In this reading I seek to look at the relation between the status of knowledge and despotism according to al-Kawākibī and at the mechanisms which prevent knowledge and promote ignorance within the despotic society. These mechanisms are closely related to how despotism spreads in the society al-Kawākibī's portrays.

Despotism is portrayed like a virus that penetrates all layers of society, pervades all social classes and in the end destroys the social body. Despotism, in order to be sustained, is in need of people's ignorance or a general absence of knowledge. Knowledge is important because through knowledge Man will come to know his rights and only if Man knows his rights can he demand his rights and thus force the evil despot to act in the interest of the people. Knowledge then is the remedy that cures the illness of despotism.

A combination of conscious and unconscious processes prevents knowledge from spreading; psychological factors in the individuals, the relation between the various groups within society and the physical outlook of the despotic society which is defined by chaos and unrest leaves no room for organized education. These factors contribute to that knowledge under despotism has a confined and limited status.

The text is characterized by a rich vocabulary and a wide use of metaphors something which makes the text vital and refreshing. Al-Kawākibī employs rhetorical tools and the book at times bears resemblance with that of a political speech.

Al-Kawākibī was, as were other thinkers of the Arabic *nahḍa*, influenced by the writings of the French Enlightenment. In order to place the text in a possible relation to Western influences and in attempt to clarify some of his ideas, I have throughout the thesis made references to Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant relating to the concepts of 'despotism' and 'knowledge'.

