CENTRAL ISSUES IN THE ARAB NATIONALISM DEBATE

The Arab defeat of 1967 and the death of Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser put the supporters of Arab nationalism into eclipse. Since then, both Arab nationalist activists and scholars championing the Arab nationalist cause have taken a back seat to proponents of other political agendas. Although the major rival of Arab nationalism, namely the Islamic ideology, has posed a strong challenge to the advocates of Arab unity, this challenge is not the main reason for their retreat. The series of setbacks which Arab nationalists suffered after 1948 explains their current low visibility, which is not a final defeat but only a temporary withdrawal from political discourse.

Before WWI, it was easy to attribute the Arabs’ disunity and inability to promote their national interests to the Ottoman Empire’s four centuries-long occupation of Arab lands. But this explanation was not so readily accepted during the inter-war period. The Arabs prided themselves in Prince Faysal’s establishment of the first Arab state in Syria and his attempts to unite all Arab lands. Faysal’s failure was attributed to the French who fought him and prevented the establishment of such a state.

But with the end of WWII, when the majority of the Arabs gained independence, it became difficult to attribute their inability to accomplish unity to either the Ottomans or the British and the French. The events that unfolded during the post-independence era were not promising as far as Arab nationalist interests were concerned. When the Arab armies fought the first war to prevent the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine in 1948, they suffered a collective defeat. This defeat, which was associated mostly with the Hashemites, also symbolized a defeat for Arab nationalism, primarily because they were the champions of a special version of Arab unity at the time.

Yet the weakening of the nationalist spirit after the 1948 defeat did not cause Arab nationalists to lose hope. The cause of this defeat was laid at the door steps of the conservative Arab regimes, monarchical and republican. When the Egyptian revolution took place in 1952, one of the Free Officers’ major grievances against the old regime was its performance in the 1948 war. Gamal Abd al-Nasser’s pan-Arabist orientation, which became clearer in the mid-1950’s, injected new life into Arab nationalism. Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal, ending the Western monopoly of arms transfers to the Middle East, challenging Western defense arrangements, and...
establishment of unity with Syria (1958-1961), all gave Arab nationalism an unprecedented momentum.

But after the 1961 failure of the first unification of Arab states in modern history and the defeat of three Arab armies within six days in 1967, Arab nationalism suffered a setback similar to, if not more serious than, that of 1948. Even the wrongly named victory in 1973 amounted to a defeat, where two major Arab armies failed to regain what they had lost in 1967.

These defeats influenced the discourse on Arab nationalism in many ways. There was what could be called “soul searching,” a questioning of one’s belief as well as self-criticism. Under the impact of defeats, many Arab nationalists started to question what they had been taught and had read about the ties that linked them with each other. They asked why those who were supposed to be “brothers” were not coming to help, and equally why they were supposed to help other “brothers.” The answers provided to these questions led some Arab nationalists to break away from the ideology they once held while others clung to their pre-existing beliefs.

Though the ideas of today’s Arab nationalists are not attracting as much popular support as they did in the 1950’s and 1960’s, their presence is still felt in many Arab countries. The strength of these ideas stems from social, economic and political conditions prevailing in the Arab world. It is true that the momentum Arab nationalism gained earlier was associated with specific historical acts (such as the nationalization of the Suez Canal and defiance of colonial powers) and with charismatic leaders like Nasser. But it is equally true that even though these events and leaders have passed into history, Arab nationalism remains powerful and is still being advocated by many theorists. It embodies a set of values and symbols salient in Arab societies.

Even if it is true that the early development of Arab nationalist theory can be attributed to a certain social class – that is, the Arab notables, who needed an ideology to mobilize mass support in their conflict with the Ottomans—it has also been a fact that this ideology has appealed to other social forces in subsequent decades, such as the middle class, the workers, and the peasants. Thus, as long as the Arab ruling classes have lagged behind in building a structural basis for legitimate government and social and economic justice, Arab nationalist ideology has remained important not only to the rulers but also to the ruled. For the former, it provides a source of legitimacy to justify their policies. For the latter, it provides an outlook, even a theory, by means of which the sources of their problems can be identified and their political actions justified.

Demonstrating, evaluating, and explaining the importance of Arab nationalism are the goals of this article. It consists of six parts. In the first, I provide a set of definitions essential for familiarizing the reader with basic concepts and terms used in the debate on Arab nationalism. In the second, third, and fourth parts, there is a discussion of the debate—involving both the participants and the issues—during three historical periods: pre-WWI, post-WWI, and the period succeeding the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. A review of the “End of Pan-Arabism” thesis which gained popularity
in the late 1970’s will be offered in the fifth part. A critical evaluation of this latest argument will be presented in the sixth and final part.

1. Concepts and Terms

A key issue in the discourse on Arab nationalism is deciding who can be considered an “Arab.” There are different definitions of this term. George Antonius, a Palestinian Arab Christian who himself played a key role in the Arab national movement provides one definition in his classic work, *The Arab Awakening:*

> The connotation of the word *Arab* changed accordingly. It is no longer used solely to denote a member of the nomad tribes who peopled the Arabian Peninsula. It gradually came to mean a citizen of that extensive Arab world – not any inhabitant of it, but that great majority whose racial descent, even when it was not of pure Arab lineage, had become submerged in the tide of Arabisation; whose manners and traditions had been shaped in an Arab mould; and, most decisive of all, whose mother tongue is Arabic. The term applies to Christians as well as to Moslems, and to the off-shoots of each of those creeds, the criterion being not Islamisation but the degree of Arabisation.

Another definition, much more zealous than that by Antonius, is offered by Sati al-Husri, one of the preeminent theorists of Arab nationalism:

> Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab. Everyone who is affiliated with these people is an Arab. If he does not know this or if he does not cherish his Arabism, then we must study the reasons for his position. It may be a result of ignorance – then we must teach him the truth. It may be because he is unaware or deceived – then we must awaken him and reassure him. It may be a result of selfishness – then we must work to limit his selfishness.

A third definition of who is an Arab is given by the late Charles Malik, a professor of philosophy in the American University of Beirut who served as Lebanon’s Foreign Minister in 1958. His definition, compared with those of Antonius and al-Husri, remains cautious in concluding that the peoples who speak Arabic constitute an Arab nation:

> The word “Arab” denotes neither a race nor a religion. For the most part, its connotation today is “Arabic-speaking.” The overwhelming majority of the Arabic-speaking peoples (or Arabs) are Moslem, just as the overwhelming majority of the Moslems are non-Arab; so the two terms do not coincide. Although there are vast diversities of culture among them, the Arabs have certain cultural traits in common. They also have common aspirations. Whether all Arabic-speaking peoples constitute a single nation depends first on the meaning of the term “constitute” and second on the “Arab” adaptation of the European concept of “nation.” All this, of course, is independent of the question whether they should constitute a nation.
The term “Arab world” is frequently used in both English and Arabic literature. Fayez Sayegh, a Palestinian political scientist and a well-known Arab scholar defines this term to mean

The area known ... from the Atlantic Coast in North Africa to the Persian Gulf in Asia – stretching continuously and without break along the southern shores of the Mediterranean in Africa and the eastern Mediterranean shorelands in Asia, and bulging in the latter sector to embrace all Mesopotamia as well as the peninsular subcontinent enclosed between the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

II. The Beginnings of the Discourse: The Nineteenth Century

Arab nationalism has been discussed for over a hundred years. But throughout this long period, the discourse has involved different participants as well as issues. There are three periods according to which we can distinguish different types of discourse on Arab nationalism: pre WWI, post-WWI, and the period following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

The questions of when Arab nationalism began and who its earliest advocates were remain unsettled. Some would trace it to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-91), the originator of the Wahhabi movement in Nejd towards the eighteenth century; others to Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) and his son Ibrahim Pasha’s attempt to found a Near Eastern empire based on Egypt and the territories of the Levant. Several scholars and theorists of Arab nationalism trace its origins to the writings of important thinkers such as Rifaat al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), an Egyptian student sent by Muhammad Ali to study in France; the Persian thinker Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-97); his pupil Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905); Rashid Rida (1865-1935); Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1902); Najib Azoury (d. 1916), and to the revolution of the Sherif Hussein of Mecca in 1916. All these scholars and political advocates of Arab nationalism fall within the first period of the discourse.

Zaki al-Arsuzi, one of the lesser known founders of the Ba’th Party, traces Arab nationalism to ancient times, to the jahiliyya, the pre-Islamic era, when, according to him, a national feeling prevailed. According to Bassam Tibi, a scholar of Middle Eastern politics and history, Rifaat al-Tahtawi can be considered as the first Arab nationalist thinker. Tibi writes that in al-Tahtawi’s thought

the social takes precedence over the religious, and here, for the first time, an Arab is using the word ‘nation’ in a secular sense ... al-Tahtawi stresses that love of a country is one of the prime virtues of civilisation. Where there is no hubb al-watan [love of country] civilization must be condemned to perish. The word watat does exist in classical Arabic, but only in the sense of the country from which one originates, or in which one lives. Al-Tahtawi also
uses *watan* in that sense, as in his reminiscences of his home village Tahta. But it is Egypt, and not Tahta, that is his *patire*, which is why he must be considered the first Arab nationalist thinker.7

Antonius was interpreted by Sylvia Haim to have traced the beginnings of Arab nationalism to the Wahhabi movement.8 What Antonius said, however, does not clearly admit of this interpretation. He said that

Even such movements as the rise of Fakhruddin in Syria, the establishment of the Wahhabi power in Arabia, and the campaigns of Mehemd Ali against his Turkish suzerian, must be relegated to the background as being isolated movements due to particular causes rather than steps in the march of an advancing Arab nationalism. For all their importance at the time, and their ultimate bearing on the destinies of Arab populations, they represent the achievements of individual genius goaded by great ambition or great faith, not the exertions of suffering idealists moved by the pride of race.9

Antonius’ cautious reference to the Wahhabi movement – which called for the revitalization of Islam by restoring its original purity – is criticized by Haim. She finds no compelling evidence for the claim that the Wahhabis were nationalists. Haim writes that “such views [those of Antonius] … lack historical evidence. The Wahhabis were not nationalists by any acceptable definition of the term … Their concern was with Islam, not with the Arabs, and they directed their zeal against lax, backsliding, or heretical Muslims rather than toward the creation of an Arab national state.”10 Haim’s characterization of the Wahhabi movement are consistent with those of Basam Tibi. He writes that Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the spiritual leader of the Wahhabis, “did not object to the despotic autocracy of Ottoman rule as such, but to the corruption and debauchery into which it had fallen. He believed that only the Arabs could bring Islam back to its original pristine purity, and he considered it his life’s purpose to mobilize the Muslims for the achievement of this backward-looking utopia.”11

Antonius, however, comes close to considering Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim Pasha as advocates of Arab nationalism. Though it was never realized, Muhammad Ali’s project, Antonius writes, was to carve “out for himself an Arab empire from the Sultan’s dominions.” He adds that

It was during the Egyptian occupation of Syria that Mehemed Ali’s plans for setting an Arab empire became a matter of public concern. He had cherished the dream for many years, but had not yet taken steps to enlist popular support for his designs. The conquest of Syria, however, and his recognition as governor of it gave him his opportunity. He was now in actual, if not titular, possession of an important possession of the Arab world, that contained Mecca and Medina, Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus; and, by an act of provision which was not foreign to his ambitious nature, saw himself extending his sway over the remaining portions of it and then wrestling a title to the whole.12
The nationalist leanings of Ibrahim Pasha [Muhammad Ali’s son] are evident from some of his policies during his rule over Syria, as well as some of the statements he made. Albert Hourani quotes Ibrahim Pasha as having said: “I am not a Turk. I came to Egypt when I was a child, and since that time, the sun of Egypt has changed my blood and made it all Arab.” This statement to a French writer has often been quoted, as has the visitor’s comment that Ibrahim’s aim was to found an entirely Arab state, and “give back to the Arab race its nationalist and political existence.”

Haim challenges the argument that Muhammad Ali was an Arab nationalist. Muhammad Ali, Haim writes

was a dyinst and an opportunist who tried to take advantage of the
enfeeblement of his Ottoman masters and of the Anglo-French rivalry in the
Levant in order to enlarge the domain which luck, circumstance, and his own
considerable ability had enabled him to seize and retain ... he would have
been skeptical of the use or value of ideology as a tool of political power, and
it is safe to say that had he attempted to use it in the Levant he would have
found it useless, since it is generally agreed that in his times political passions
in the Middle East were stirred by religion, not nationality.”

On the relationship of Muhammad Ali to Arab nationalism, Albert Hourani concurs with Haim: “Did Muhammad Ali aim at creating an Arab kingdom? Nothing in his words and policy seems to show it, although there are signs of it in the words of his son and chief helper, Ibrahim Pasha.”

Though not an Arab, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani has been considered one of the early intellectual precursors of Arab nationalism. The writings of this Persian scholar are contradictory, especially regarding his preference for either religious or national solidarity. In one of his articles, he seems to show preference for national solidarity, as being more efficacious than any other type of solidarity in gaining and establishing political power: “…Al-Afghani argued that a ‘national’ unity based on a common language was both more powerful and more durable than one based on a common religion.” Sati al-Husri mentions that al-Afghani had prefaced one of his articles with a few lines in Arabic which read: “There is no happiness except through nationality (al-jinsiyya) and no nationality except through language.” Yet in another article, al-Afghani said that the religious tie among the Muslims is the only bond that “has made the Muslims shy away from the consideration of nationality and refuse any kind of solidarity (asabiyya) except Islamic solidarity.”

Muhammad Abduh, who co-edited a journal, Al-Urwa al-Wuthqa, with al-Afghani in Paris, held views similar to his teacher’s. Tibi gives qualified support to the argument that both Abduh and al-Afghani had contributed to Arab nationalism. Even though he establishes a clear distinction between Wahhabism and Islamic modernism, he concludes that the two movements remain an “inherent part of the national movement in the Middle East.” Considering the time in which al-Afghani and his student Muhammad Abduh lived, their modernism can be considered revolutionary. “They
had to face Europe as a colonial power, and their attitudes were hence uncompromising. In their writings, Islam becomes an anti-colonialist ideology...” Thus a relationship exists, though indirect, between these three Muslim scholars – Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, al-Afghani, and Abduh – and Arab nationalism, premised on opposition to foreign domination, whether Ottoman or European, and on emphasis on the Arab origins of Islam. In Tibi’s opinion, they had contributed to the nationalist cause, although in their minds “they were not nationalist but Muslim...”

Tibi’s assessment of al-Afghani and Abduh is shared by William Cleveland. By recognizing the threat from Western Europe, and by not accepting the long-term superiority of European civilization, both Abduh and al-Afghani “attracted young Muslims and gave to Islamic religious sentiment a politically-charged coloring. This Islamic activism played a significant part in the early formulations of Arab nationalism and, as recent events in the Middle East have shown, continues to be a reservoir from which all classes of Muslims draw strength in times of uncertainty.” Al-Afghani’s writings, which showed the Arabs the importance of reviving their own religious, social, and national life if they were to overcome European superiority, had made “evolution and revolution” to be “recognized for the first time by the Arabs as a vital necessity for their states, nations, and communities.”

Was al-Afghani a precursor of Arab nationalism? Haim questions the role al-Afghani played in encouraging Arab nationalism, claiming he was mainly concerned with pan-Islamism. His support of a union of Muslim states was the factor which made Abdul Hamid, “who was himself interested in Pan-Islamism, welcome him [al-Afghani] to Istanbul.” Haim adds, “what al-Afghani did was to make Islam into the mainspring of solidarity, and thus he placed it on the same footing as other solidarity-producing beliefs. His political activity and teaching combined to spread among the intellectual and official classes of Middle Eastern Islam a secularist, meliorist, and activist attitude toward politics, an attitude the presence of which was essential, before ideologies such as Arab nationalism could be accepted in any degree.”

Haim is also skeptical of Abduh’s contribution to Arab nationalism, claiming Muhammad Abduh simply exemplified and made popular a hopeful attitude toward politics, a belief that human action, based on rational and scientific principles, could ameliorate the human condition. She adds, “If both al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh are essential to the understanding of a phenomenon such as Arab nationalism, it is as well to emphasize that they nevertheless cannot be considered as its initiators. To do so would be to run the risk of confusion by dissolving the lineaments of a clear-cut ideology and a specific history into amorphous speculation and loose generalization.”

Another scholar considered to have contributed to Arab nationalism is the Syrian Rashid Rida, who settled in Egypt. He said that the Arabs had a special place within the Islamic nations, and that “other Muslims were pupils of the Arabs.” Despite this and his opposition to the Ottoman rule, Rida “rejected any tendency toward establishing separate Arab states based on non-Islamic solidarity in the Islamic world.”
But in the opinion of Haim, one can trace more roots of Arab nationalism in Rida’s writings than in al-Afghani and Abduh. This is mainly due to Haim’s classification of Rida as a salafi. She writes “it is in the arguments of the salafiyya that we may trace the first intellectual burgeoning of Arab nationalism.” The term salafiyya means “a return to the ways of the Prophet, his Companions, and the Muslims of the early centuries, when Islam was in its pure state and the Arab caliphate in the heyday of its glory... Thus implicit in the arguments of the salafiyya is a glorification of Arab Islam and a depreciation of the Ottoman Islam.”

More specifically, Rida’s association with nationalism is supported by his use of the term umma, meaning nation in Arabic. Haim writes that “Traditionally, the word (umma) meant the body of all Muslims, and made no distinction based on race, language, or habitation. But Rashid Rida here seems to be saying that the Turks, Muslims as they were, were not really part of the umma, that the umma consisted only of Arab Muslims.”

But according to both Haim and Majid Khadduri, Rida falls short of being an explicit advocate of Arab nationalism. Though he clearly shows his partiality for the Arabs, Haim says that this was really a defense of Islam which, so Rashid Rida thought, had been best insured by the Arabs. It was only after the “Young Turks deposed Abdul Hamid, [and]...they manifested indifference to Islam...that Rashid Rida felt able wholeheartedly to support Arab nationalism.” But in the “latter part of his life,” Khadduri writes, Rida “turned to reassert primary loyalty to Islam in its puritanical Wahhabi form in Arab lands that remained in his eyes immune from foreign influence.”

Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, another Syrian who left Aleppo for Egypt in 1898, is considered to have gone further than al-Afghani, Abduh, and Rida in presenting the Arabs’ case against the Turks. He wrote two important books which are widely referred to by students of Arab nationalism, Taba’i al-Istibdad (The Characteristics of Tyranny), and Umm al-Qura, the name by which Mecca was known. In Taba’i al-Istibdad, al-Kawakibi clearly advocates an Arab unity based on the separation of religion and politics: “Here are the nations of Austria and America who have been guided by science to find a variety of paths and deep-rooted foundations for national unity and harmony, but not administrative unity, for national harmony, but not sectarian unity. Why is it that we cannot follow one of these paths?” This line of nationalist thinking in al-Kawakibi’s thought lies in his emphasis on language and race. He claimed that the Muslims “are now a dead people with no corporate being or feelings. Their stagnation is the result of tyranny, of the decline of Islamic culture, and of the absence of racial and linguistic bonds among Muslims, and partly for this reason the Ottoman Empire is not fit to preserve Islam.”

But what appears to be clear nationalist thinking disappears in his second book, Umm al-Qura. In this work, al-Kawakibi becomes “more concerned with wresting Islam from the Turks and restoring it to the Arabs. Arab hegemony is seen as the only way to salvage Islam from decay.” For al-Kawakibi, the Arabs “are of all nations the most suitable to be an authority in religion and an example to the Muslims.”
Despite his contradictory position on religion and nationalism, al-Kawakibi, according to Haim, “may be considered as the first true intellectual precursor of modern secular Pan-Arabism.... For all his preoccupation with the state of Islam, al-Kawakibi, once he introduced the idea of a spiritual caliph, was led to consider politics as an autonomous activity divorced from divine prescription, and fully subject to the will of men. Such an idea is an essential prerequisite of nationalism.”

Najib Azoury (d. 1916), an Ottoman Christian who studied in Paris and worked as an official in the provincial government of Jerusalem, advocated views similar to those of al-Kawakibi. In 1905, he published *Le Reveil de la National Arabe*. According to Azoury, the separation of civil and religious powers was in the interest of both Islam and the Arab nation. Also, he suggested that something al-Kawakibi did not: “He desired to have an Arab empire set up; its ‘natural’ frontiers would be the valley of the Euphrates and the Tigris, the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean.”

Haim correctly observes a certain significance in Azoury’s views. First, his program “constitutes the first open demand for the secession of the Arab lands from the Ottoman Empire,” and second, this demand came from a Christian and not a Muslim since, according to Haim, the Muslims “were wary of any move that might disrupt the Ottoman Empire, the only great Muslim power in the world.” However, Azoury’s importance as an intellectual figure has been downplayed. “The Ligue de la Partie Arabe [which was established by Azoury] was probably a one-man business, since no Arab, so far as it is known, was associated with it, and Azoury seems to have been a shady character who may have been a French agent actually taking money from French sources. At any rate, it is certain that he went so far as to ask for it.”

Sharif Hussein, the leader of the 1916 Arab Revolt, is considered an important force in supporting the cause of Arab nationalism. Francesco Gabrielli, a distinguished professor at Rome University who has devoted many years to studying Arab culture and literature writes, “The Emir at that time, Hussein, had not remained unmoved by the current of revolt that was stirring the Arab world, and his sons, Feisal and Abdullah, had both been associated with various pan-Arab irredentist Associations and Leagues.” Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajjani also says that Arab nationalism as a political term was used first by Sharif Hussein.”

Antonius’ account of the 1916 Arab Revolt shows an implicit rather than explicit reference to the revolt’s Arab character. In one of his footnotes, Antonius writes, “According to popular report, the officer in command of the garrison, when he telephoned to the Sharif Hussein, said: ‘The Arabs are in revolt, and it is said that they have declared their complete independence. Will you do what you can about it?’ The Sharif is reported to have dryly replied: ‘I have also heard that they want their independence. I shall certainly do all I can about it.’”

The Arab nationalist character of the 1916 revolt is disputed by both William Cleveland and Sylvia Haim. Cleveland argues that while the revolt “provided a more specific focus for those intent on gaining an independent Arab state,” it nevertheless “was proclaimed in the name of preserving Islam, not in the name of Arabism or the Arab nation.” Haim contends that Sharif Hussein did not justify his rebellion by “an appeal to Arab nationalism; he appealed rather, to traditionalist sentiments, calling the Young Turks impious innovators who had put Islam in danger, and representing
himself as rising against them in the interests of the Faith.” The same observation is made by Hans Tutsch who writes that Sharif Hussein wanted to “give new life to the caliphate abolished by the Turks.” Similarly, Mansfield writes that “when the Arab revolt came it was not an uprising of the whole Arab people to throw off the Turkish yoke. Only a small minority who had become embittered and intransigent as a result of their treatment at the hands of the Young Turks saw it in those terms. Most of the Arab reformers wanted to change the empire in order to strengthen it, and the majority of the Arab people remained loyal to the caliphate and Sultanate.”

Another group of scholars is influenced by assumptions derived from Marxist and other types of class analysis. Though theoretically differing with Haim, they end up reaching the same conclusion: that there was no nationalist thought in the nineteenth century. Among these scholars are Faysal Daraj and Walid Qaziha. Faysal Daraj, who wrote an article titled “The Form of Arab Nationalist Thought in the Nineteenth Century,” argues that if one scientifically studied the works of al-Afghani, al-Kawakibi, and Rida, it would be possible to conclude that they do not constitute a consistent nationalist ideology. Among the several propositions which Daraj advances is the claim that Arab thought in the nineteenth century did not reflect nationalist consciousness of its own and an awareness of certain historical tasks; instead, it reflected an organic crisis that affected all Arab peoples. Thus, this thought was historically defined.

Qaziha attempts to prove the social and economic basis of nineteenth century Arab nationalism. He states that al-Kawakibi and Rida belonged to a social and political elite, to a class of landowners who lived in the cities. Qaziha focuses attention on the significance of two major points emphasized by al-Kawakibi. The first is the administrative decentralization of the Ottoman state. Here, Qaziba argues that al-Kawakibi reflects the interests of the landowners (al-a 'yan). The second point centers on limiting the powers of the Turks in the Arab region and delegating those powers to traditional Arab social leaders, who belonged to the big families.

Samir Amin, born in Egypt and educated in France, is better known for his work on economic issues than on Arab nationalism. He becomes relevant here, however, because of a book published originally in French and later translated into English, *The Arab Nation*, in which he attempts to provide a class analysis of Arab nationalism.

In discussing the social forces that made Arab civilization, Amin singles out the ruling class. This class, according to him, was urban, a world of courtiers, clerics, artisans, and clerks. “The ruling class was the cement which held things together: everywhere it had adopted the same language, the same orthodox Sunni Islamic culture... This was the class which made the Arab civilization.” Arab unity declined due to the “decline of trade.” Because of this, “The Arab world had become no more than a heterogeneous conglomerate, under a foreign power, the Ottoman Empire.”

Amin’s explanation of Arab nationalism and Arab unity is criticized by Bassam Tibi:

Amin attempts a Marxist analysis, and he interprets the history of the Arab nation in terms of economic and social history. While many authors have
been primarily concerned to write the intellectual history of Arab Nationalism, Amin confines himself to the socio-economic sphere. It seems to me that neither of these approaches should exclude the other; expertise on the ideology of Arab Nationalism must be complemented by an analysis of the social structures in which this ideology has emerged and now exists. Amin has not thought it necessary to concern himself with the literary products of Arab nationalism, and has confined himself to a class analysis, which I consider to be a serious weakness in an otherwise stimulating approach.  

Tibi is also critical of arguments which suggest that the capitalist class constituted the social base of Arab nationalism. One of the advocates of this argument is C. E. Dawn, who claims that the Arab national movement was supported not only by Western-educated men of letters and officers from petty bourgeois backgrounds, but also, and particularly after 1914, by large landowners and grand bourgeois forces. But this is disputed by Tibi, who writes

The secularism of the Arab national writers, based on the acculturation of Western bourgeois ideas, could hardly have found a social base in the upper reaches of Syrian society... Syria was by no means a bourgeois society. It was more a semi-feudal society with some incipient bourgeois features. It is therefore not surprising that the undeveloped Syrian bourgeoisie, and the petty bourgeois writers, were unable to lead a revolt against the Ottoman Empire by themselves. They allied with the feudal masters of the Arabian peninsula, the Hashemite dynasty, and left it to them to lead the rising.

The issue which is central to the debate in the first period is whether or not the aforementioned scholars gave precedence to Islam over nationalism or vice versa. Also important is whether they used the strategy of reforming Islam as a means to promote Arab nationalism by using it against colonialism. And implied here also is whether or not a national consciousness did exist before the twentieth century. The answers provided are problematic. However, during the second period a relatively clearer picture emerges of the relationship between Islam and nationalism and of nationalist consciousness. Unlike al-Afghani and Abduh, there are accounts of political leaders and scholars who gave priority to Arab nationalism over Islam.

**III. The Post WWI Debate: A Consistent Nationalist Theory**

The debate on Arab nationalism in the post-WWI period assumed different dimensions. The War itself was a factor in giving credence to the idea of a separatist Arab state, an idea that gained little support in the first period. “The new circumstances introduced by World War I greatly affected the course of Arab nationalism and called for the reformulation of Arab aims ... British support for Arab claims against the Turks brought to the fore those revolutionary leaders who made their imprint on Arab nationalism and transformed it from a slow and peaceful movement into a revolutionary
The development of a consistent theory of Arab nationalism is attributed to the writings of theorists like Edmond Rabbath, Sati al-Husri, Constantine Zuraiq, Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz and Michel Aflaq.

Unquestionably, with the end of World War I, when all the Arab parts had seceded from the Ottoman Empire with the exception of the Alexandretta Province, there was a need for an ideology that could gain support from European powers and move toward holding all Arab regions together, uniting them into one state. The articulation of an elaborate nationalist ideology, therefore, was a necessity. That ideology was Arab nationalism. Among the issues central to the debate were the components of Arab nationalism: history, culture, language, common interests, and still more important, religion.

Though problematic, secularism is another feature which marked the second period. A “rudimentary theory of Arab nationalism,” in Haim’s words, can even be found in the statements made by Faysal, Sharif Hussein’s son. He is considered to be an Arab nationalist even in the modern secular sense. Faysal, an ally of the British, ruled Syria for a period of three years after the end of World War I before being expelled by the French. About the Arabs, Faysal said that they are “one people,” who live “in the region which is bounded by the sea to the east, the south, and the west, and by the Taurus mountains to the north.” Identifying himself as an Arab, Faysal said: “We are Arabs ... before being Muslims; and Muhammad is an Arab before being a prophet.” In a speech made in Aleppo, June 1919, he also said: “... there is neither minority nor majority among us, nothing to divide us. We are one body, we were Arabs even before the time of Moses, Muhammad, Jesus, and Abraham.”

One attempt to develop an Arab nationalist theory was that of Edmond Rabbath, a Christian from Aleppo who was a lawyer and once a member of the Syrian parliament. In 1937, he wrote a study in French entitled *Unite Syrienne et Devenir Arabe*. According to Rabbath, the Arabs formed a distinct racial group, and the history of the region, though labeled as Babylonian, Assyrian, or Phoenician, is Arab. The Arabs, Rabbath continues, are united by a common civilization. What is called Islamic, and here Rabbath means the history of the Arabs, is wrong. For him, Islam is the Arab national religion which has served to make the Arabs into a cohesive group. Language also played its part in bringing the Arabs together as did geography.

Haim correctly observes that “The man who did most to popularize the idea of nationalism among the literate classes of the Arab Middle East was the writer Sati al-Husri whose large output began in the 1940’s.” Al-Husri was a native of Aleppo, brought up in Constantinople, and educated more as a Turk than an Arab. Before World War I, he had been an Ottoman official of some standing in the Ministry of Education. When Faysal ruled in Damascus at the end of the war, al-Husri joined his movement and became Minister of Education; he followed Faysal in his exile from Syria, and then went to Iraq, where he became, and remained for many years, the Director General of Education.
In Sati al-Husri’s view, there are three sentiments that could create a political community: “nationalism, territorial patriotism, and loyalty to the state.” Al-Husri’s definition of a nation is not liberal by any standard. In his opinion, a nation is “something really existing: a man is, or is not, an Arab whether he wants to be or not.”

Al-Husri concentrated his energy on making three main points: no freedom for the individual outside the nation, Egypt is a part of the Arab nation (Tibi mentions that al-Husri was the only one to extend the term Arab nation to include North Africa), and pan-Arabism neither contradicts nor is inimical to Islam.

History for al-Husri, however, is not as important as language. “A common history is important but only secondary. It can strengthen, it cannot create, the national bond; and it can only strengthen if it is deliberately used to do so. We are not the prisoners of our past unless we want to be; every nation must forget part of its history, and only remember what helps it.”

Constantine Zuraiq, another Syrian Christian and a well-known Arab historian, published in 1939 *Al-Wa‘i al-Qawmi* [National Consciousness], an intellectual work that had an immense impact on Arab intellectuals at the time. His views do not differ much from those of his fellow Syrian Rabbath. When in January 1984 he was asked “what is that which is Arab that brings us together? Are there any Arab symbols that are independent of Islam?” Language is one, Zuraiq responded: “While it is true that Arabic is the sacred language of Islam, still, it is essentially the national language of the Arabs .... Language as such is to a large extent essentially connected with a certain nation, in this case, the Arab peoples trying to form a nation. It is true that the overwhelming culture of medieval times was essentially Islamic, but here and there, there are Arab manifestations.”

Michel Aflaq borrowed extensively from al-Husri’s theory of Arab nationalism. On Arab nationalism, Aflaq said that it is “racial in the sense that we hold sacred this Arab race which has, since the earliest historical epochs, carried within itself a vitality and a nobility which have enabled it to go on renewing and perfecting itself, taking advantage of triumphs and defeats alike...”

Although Aflaq is known for his mystic and ambiguous style, Khadduri’s reading of the Ba’thist leader’s view of nationalism lends clarity: “Arab nationalism, in Michel Aflaq’s view, is the embodiment of the Arab spirit. Language, history, and traditions, important as they are, are only external bonds. Nationalism means a striving toward the national goal and a will to progress which awakens whenever the nation’s course of progress is retarded or existing conditions deteriorate and the nation lags behind the progress of the world. Arab nationalism is thus the ‘procession’ of the Arab nation toward the realization of its needs and aspirations.”

Haim assesses Aflaq’s impact by saying that, “He, at the end of half a century of searchings and groupings, shows himself as the writer who, however small his output, provides a doctrine which contains all the necessary and classic features of nationalism.”

Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, a young Iraqi teacher, said that the Arabic language is the “soul of the Arab nation.” In *Islam and Arab Nationalism*, al-Bazzaz states that
Arab nationalism is based not on a “racial appeal but on linguistic, historical, cultural, and spiritual ties, and on fundamental vital interests.”

The Arab nationalist theory or the elements considered to constitute such a theory by these scholars has been called into question in a sizable body of literature. The underlying premise of most criticisms is that there is no single Arab nation, but several: Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Tunisian, etc. This may not often be stated explicitly but it is evident in the questioning of the various components which are argued to constitute Arab nationalism. What is also criticized is Arab nationalist thought itself, particularly in the second period, namely during the 1930’s, 1940’s, and 1950’s. This thought is understood by some to be fascist, fanatic, and radically different from the liberalism that characterized nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

History as a component of Arab nationalism is not only questioned by Westerners but by Arab scholars as well. Muhammad Izzat Hijazi argues that the historical experience of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with imperialism is not necessarily similar to that of Egypt. As for heritage as a unifying factor, Hijazi does not see the Saudi heritage to be identical with either the Yemeni or the Syrian.

The unifying influence of Arabic language, which in al-Husri’s thought is the most important component of Arab nationalism, is also contested. Carl Leiden is one critic of the emphasis al-Husri places on language: “The most obvious common feature in the Arab world is its language, but it is also fair to say not all Arabs speak precisely the same Arabic and, like fragments of the English-speaking world, they do not always take each others’ quarrels to heart merely because of the language.”

Richard Plaff is also skeptical of the role of the Arabic language. He writes that “The division of Arabic language between the classical form used in writing and the many colloquial variations used in daily speech adds a further complication for the Arab nationalist. With less than twenty percent of the total population within the Arab world capable of reading classical Arabic, or even ‘journalistic’ Arabic, the language is a limited tool for spreading the message of nationalism through the printed word.” Some Arab scholars also are reexamining the unifying role of language. Hijazi questions the Arabic language as a common characteristic of all the Arabs, saying that classical Arabic is in fact confined to formal settings like symposiums.

Arab nationalist thought during this period is further criticized as being elitist and insensitive to both the socio-economic dimension of nationalism and to regional nationalisms. Al-Husri’s elitism has been noted by many scholars of Arab nationalism, including William Cleveland, whose work, The Making Of An Arab Nationalist is a study devoted primarily to Sati al-Husri’s thought. Al-Husri pays little attention to the notion of class or economic factors. Cleveland adds that al-Husri seeks no inspiration from the people or the masses for his ideology.

In evaluating the theoretical contributions of al-Husri, Khadduri writes that he “ignores the strength of local or regional forces that cannot be dismissed as merely parochial (ṭiqlīmi) feeling just because they run contrary to Arab unity – the cherished objective of his nationalist ideal.”
Another major criticism of Arab nationalist thought in this period focuses on some of its fascist features, which distinguish it from nineteenth century nationalist discourse. In *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry*, Bassam Tibi draws a clear distinction between the two generations of nationalists. He accounts for a significant transition from francophilia and anglophilia to what he calls germanophilia. According to him, this change “can be considered simply as the substitution of one set of ideas for another.” Tibi sees this germanophilia as narrow, one-sided, and influenced by German nationalist ideas current during the Napoleonic Wars and marked by romantic irrationalism and a hatred of the French. “They were particularly attracted by the notion of the ‘People,’ as defined by German Romanticism, which they proceeded to apply to the ‘Arab Nation,’ while philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and others were excluded due to their “universalism.” “For the nineteenth-century nationalists, such as Adib Ishaq, the liberal national state was simply a means of emancipation; its democratic constitutional character was always taken for granted. The germanophiles of the World War I period, however, saw the national state as the apogee of the ‘Arab Nation’ – in other words, as an end in itself.” Tibi considers Sati al-Husri as an ideal representative of the germanophile school: “It was Sati al-Husri who began this tradition of populist germanophile Arab nationalism. His nationalism was not mystificatory, fanatic, or fascist, but he laid the foundations for the kind of fanatical nationalism formulated by his disciple Michel Aflaq, which has found expression in the semi-fascist military dictatorship in Iraq and Syria under the aegis of the Ba’th Party.”

Regarding the Nazi influence on Aflaq, Eric Rouleau quotes the following from a letter he received from a companion of Aflaq who had taught at the University of Damascus: “He [Aflaq] came back to Syria full of admiration for the works of Alfred Rosenberg, the theorist of Nazi racism, and in particular for the *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which he had read in Grosclaude’s translation. He thought at the time that Hitler’s Germany, by contrast with the Communist countries, had succeeded in achieving the perfect synthesis of nationalism and socialism.” Furthermore, included in Aflaq’s polemics is a statement in which he says that the Arab nation is endowed with an “immortal mission,” a statement which Gordon Torrey explains in terms of Aflaq’s acquaintance with nineteenth century German philosophy.

As indicated earlier, Islam remained an issue in the second period as well. Perhaps, among the many debated components of Arab nationalism – language, history, ancestry, interests – Islam was the most important. The significance of religion rests on the claim that those who consider Islam a basic component of Arab nationalism are not secular, while those who accept the affinity between Islam and nationalism are likely to be accused of weakening the Arab nation by excluding non-Muslim groups. Is this the only factor that makes the relationship between Islam and Arab nationalism significant? Not at all. There is another factor, a strategic one: how to mobilize support for the Arab nationalist cause without using Islam as a means? In other words, would there be a viable Arab nationalism without Islam?

Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz tries to reconcile Islam and Arab nationalism. Aware of the importance of the universal character of the Islamic religion, al-Bazzaz stresses its
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revelation to the Arabs and not to others. Al-Bazzaz implies that the Arabs should be
proud that the Prophet is one of them and that the Quran was written in their language.
Realizing that what preceded Islam was an era referred to as al-Jahiliyya, meaning
ignorance of Islam, he does his best to deny any discontinuity in the history of the
Arabs. This becomes clear when al-Bazzaz states that Islam retained many of the pre-
Islamic Arab customs and that because the pre-Islamic Arabs were civilized a genius
like Muhammad could arise from among them.70

Similar views are advocated by Christian theorists of Arab nationalism. A
reconciliation between Islam and nationalism remains a prerequisite for a theory
which could gain popular support. Constantine Zuraiq writes “Arab nationalists should
fall back on the sources of their religion and derive from it inspiration and spiritual
guidance.” In the life of the Prophet, he “found the basis of a new civilization.”71
Rabbath, like Zuraiq, “carried the idea of the religious basis of Arab nationalism a
step further by arguing that Islam is in essence a national religion. True, he analyzed
Arab nationalism essentially in terms of culture and language, but he attributed to
Islam the basis of political unity.”72

Michel Aflaq, in a lecture delivered in 1943, commemorated Prophet Muhammad’s
birthday, echoed a similar view. In the lecture, Aflaq “shows a conscious and total
departure from orthodox religious attitudes and explicitly represents Islam not as a
divine revelation but in part as a response to Arab needs at the time of Muhammad and
in part as a foundation of Arabism.”73

Aflaq not only considers Islam as the beginning of Arabism, but he also tries to
reassure non-Muslims that there is no need to fear the natural affinity between Islam
and Arab nationalism:

The Arabs are unique among the other nations in that their national awakening
coincides with the birth of a religious message, or rather that this message
was an expression of the national awakening... They did not expand for the
sake of expansion...but to perform a religious duty which is all truth, guidance,
mercy, justice and generosity...as long as the affinity between Arabism and
Islam is strong and as long as we see Arabism as a body with Islam as its
soul, there is no room for fear of the Arabs going to extremes in their
nationality.74

Questioned also are the theoretical attempts to reconcile Islam and Arab
nationalism as well as the arguments which find religious conflicts among Arabs as
posing no threat to the pan-Arabist cause. Critics challenge both the logic of the
synthesis of Islam and nationalism and the validity of the motives of those making
such attempts.

Bezirgan observes some inconsistency in Aflaq’s definition of the relationship
between Islam and Arab nationalism. On one hand, the Ba’thist leader gives a definition
similar to that of al-Husri, yet be seems uncomfortable with it: “Islam is universal and
eternal, but its universality does not mean that it cannot accommodate, at the same
time, different meanings and different trends...its eternity does not mean that it does
not change...but despite its continuous change, its roots will remain the same...[Islam]...is relative to a specific time and space and absolute in meaning and action within the limits of this time and space.” But in 1950, Aflaq is quoted to have said that the state be conceived for the Arabs was a secular institution, founded on a social base, or nationalism, and a moral base, or freedom...”75

The problematic relationship between Islam and Arab nationalism and how this relationship is reflected in the development of a nationalist theory is expressed by Sylvia Haim:

the idea that the Arabs by themselves constitute a true political entity could not be a familiar one in the Middle East. Hitherto, Muslim historiography had been based on and had taken its bearings from the fact of the Revelation given to Muhammad and the prodigious consequences which followed it. It had not previously occurred to a writer to claim historical continuity with pagans and idolaters, to seek glorification in their exploits, or to put on a par Hammurabi and Harun al-Rashid, Sargon and al-Ma’mun, Christians and Jews with Muslims, on the score that all these constituted original manifestations of the same original Arab genius. Yet such a revolutionary theory was necessary if the Arab nation were to be defined and endowed with an ancestry and entity. For it would not do to identify Arabs and Islam completely, since Islam comprised many more people than the Arabs, and since it would also make nonsense of the claim that the Arabs were different from the Turks and therefore had the right to secede from them.”76

Another important issue in the debate is the phenomenon of the zealouslyness with which some Christian Arabs advocated an intimacy between Islam and Arab nationalism. Two explanations are provided. Tibi explains the reasons for this support in the first period, while Haim explains the motivations of Christian Arab nationalists like Rabbath and Zuraiq in the second period. As for the Christians’ reaction toward Muhammad Ali’s son, Ibrahim Pasha, Tibi writes that

The devotion [of Syrian Christians toward Ibrahim Pasha] can be explained by the fact that Ibrahim Pasha had not attempted to justify his campaign against the Ottomans in religious terms, but claimed to be fighting for the Arabs against the Turk. He considered that the unification of Egypt and Syria would be the beginning of the foundation of a great Arab state, thus presenting the Arab Christians with the possibility of social emancipation, because in a specifically Arab state they would be full citizens, while under the Islamic Ottoman theocracy they were not members of the umma and therefore had the status of subjects.77

As for the motivations behind the zealouslyness with which Christians like Rabbath, Zuraiq, and Aflaq advocated Arab nationalism, Haim answers this question by showing how the considerations that motivate Muslim writers on Arab nationalism are different from those of the Christians: “When Muslim writers argue that Islam and Arab
nationalism are not incompatible, and even that each is implicit in the other, we can see that they are studying a vital problem which concerns them intimately.” Such writers used to “encounter traditionalist objections” as well as “convince themselves that in being Arab nationalists they are also good Muslims.” The Christian writers who advocate Arab nationalism, according to Haim, are often reacting to the breakdown of the Millet system without which “the younger generations [of Christians] no longer found communal ties satisfying, and some of them transferred their affections to an Arab nation of which they claimed to be fellow members, along with the Muslims.”

IV. The Post 1948 Period: Radical Nationalism

The discourse on Arab nationalism underwent some changes following the 1948 Palestine War. “Radical Arab nationalism” is what characterized the post-1948 period. During this period, Arab nationalism became more secular and the socio-economic dimension of nationalism received more attention than in the earlier two periods. The Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War was a factor in this change. The impact of the defeat is described by Tareq Ismael to have been

...So traumatic to the Arab masses...that it fostered a transformation of Arab nationalism from the glories of the past to the failures – particularly the failure in Palestine – of the present...Palestine symbolized the failure of Arab nationalism to meet the supreme challenge: the challenge of national survival. Liberal Arab nationalism had fed on the euphoria of Arab heritage; such euphoria appeared bankrupt indeed in the reality of Arab inaptitude in Palestine. Thus, a profound reappraisal of Arab society had ensued. Every aspect of Arab society has come under fire – social, political, economic, religious. Under the threat of extinction as symbolized by Palestine, Arab nationalism has reasserted itself, not in the glorification of the past but in the reform of the present.

Despite the startling consequences of 1948, the forces calling for radical reformulation of Arab nationalism were not unchallenged. During the 1950’s, Arab conservatives, mainly the Hashemites, still advocated their own version of Arab nationalism. They relied for their momentum on a traditional vision. Their model was a chapter in medieval history in which one part of the world was united under a banner hoisted and maintained by an Arab leadership. As children of the Arabian Peninsula where it all began, as political leaders directly related to the Prophet, Abdullah and then Hussein of Jordan, and Faysal of Iraq, considered themselves the inheritors of that legacy and the legitimate leaders of any manifest change in the Near East.

The Hashemites’ advocacy was soon discredited through their link with the British colonialists. Even before the Iraqi Free Officers overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in 1958, the Hashemites claim as the champions of Arab nationalism weakened. They were overshadowed by Nasser of Egypt, the Ba’thists, and Arab nationalists, forces calling for radical revision of Arab nationalism.
Nasser, Egypt’s strongman from 1952 to 1970 and one of the most charismatic Arab leaders perhaps since Prophet Muhammad, was the most important force in popularizing the idea of Arab nationalism. He made this contribution even though he did not develop an elaborate theory of Arab nationalism as did al-Husri and Aflaq. On the conditions that made Arab nationalism a powerful force, Leiden highlights the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, but equally attributes the powerful emergence of Arab nationalism to the leadership of Nasser himself: “… Arab nationalism required able Arab leadership... It was only in the aftermath of this war [the 1948-1949 war] that the leader emerged; Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. In short, Nasser and Israel were the symbiotic catalysts for the Arab nationalism that bloomed with fervor and excitement in the 1950s and 1960s and which still exists although in diminished form.”

Egypt’s size and strategic importance in the Arab world were two important factors that contributed to the powerful emergence of Arab nationalism in the 1950’s and the 1960’s. Nasser defied all Western objections and concluded a significant arms deal with the Communist bloc in 1955, nationalized the Suez Canal in July 1956, and fought against the British, French, and Israeli forces that attacked Egypt in October 1956. He also fought against all Western defense arrangements in the region, foremost among them the Baghdad Pact. Most important of all, he achieved a long cherished Arab nationalist goal, unity (the Egyptian-Syrian unity of 1958). Nasser, unlike either al-Husri and the early Aflaq, talked about socialism and carried out different types of reforms that appealed to large segments of the Arab population. In advocating a socio-economic dimension of nationalism, Nasser also differed from the classical theorists of nationalism – who succeeded only in reaching the literate members of the middle class – by appealing to the peasants and workers.

The Ba’th Party was a second force that called for a radical revision of Arab nationalist theory. Though the party’s credibility as an advocate of Arab nationalism suffered a setback when its leadership endorsed Syria’s secession from Egypt in 1961, its nationalist credentials were regained in 1963. In that year, a group of Ba’thist and Nasserite officers seized power in Syria and Iraq. Without much success, the Ba’thists attempted to forge a unity between Syria, Iraq and Egypt. Unlike Nasser who abandoned his active policy of pursuing unity after the collapse of unification negotiations with Iraq and Syria, the Ba’thists maintained the same interest but through a different approach.

The Ba’th Party’s approach in the 1960’s to unity and to the accomplishment of other Arab nationalist goals differed radically from those of al-Husri, Nasser, and the founders of the Ba’th itself. The radicals, who after 1963 were in virtual control of the party, still believed in unity but not from above, at the states level; instead, they advocated unity from below, at the level of the masses. They also injected Arab nationalist theory with notions like “scientific socialism” and “class struggle.”

The Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) was a third force that radicalized Arab nationalism. The early polemics of this movement did not differ from those of either al-Husri or the early Aflaq. Its leaders gave priority to unity over other goals such as
democracy, freedom or socialism. Even though the ANM lagged behind Nasser in emphasizing the social and economic dimensions of Arab nationalism, it supported the Egyptian president in his drive for unity in the 1950’s. But after the secession, the 1967 Arab defeat in the war with Israel, and after what its leaders saw as Nasser’s unwillingness and inability to liberate Palestine, the ANM leaders followed the path of the Ba’th party. From being a strong proponent of the organic unity of the Arab nation and of emphasizing unity prior to domestic social and economic reforms, the ANM underwent an ideological transformation, the result of which was the adoption of Marxism-Leninism. This shift led the ANM to call for social changes in the Arab world as a prerequisite to either unity or to the liberation of Palestine.81

Radical Arab nationalism, whether that advanced by Nasser or the Ba’th, had its critics. The criticisms were leveled by revolutionary socialists, Islamic fundamentalists, and liberals. Nasser’s form of nationalism still had its own adherents who considered it a panacea for the problems that afflicted the Arab world.

One of these critics was the late Marxist Arab nationalist thinker Yassin al-Hafiz. Critical of the Arab revolutionary and progressive intellectuals who refrained from addressing the issue of sectarianism and the minorities in the Arab world, he called for a renewal in Arab nationalist thought. One of his arguments was that Arab society lives in a pre-nationalist stage, or without nationalism and citizenship. The people still live isolated into parochial loyalties: family, tribe, religion, and village.82

Another important critic of Arab nationalist thought, also coming from the left, is Nadim al-Bitar. He starts his article, “Towards a New Unionist Thought,” by making important methodological observations. He notes that when we study phenomena such as suicide, for example, we study cases of suicide. When we study the revolutionary phenomenon, we study revolutions in history. Yet Arab unionist thought, according to al-Bitar, has studied the revolutionary phenomenon without studying revolutions in history. What unionist thought has provided to the study of unity approximates journalistic articles rather than scientific thought. He concludes by saying that unionist thought is not a political necessity only, but it is a science, and science is based on facts, incidents, and tendencies.83 Though writing from a socialist perspective, al-Bitar still sees the strategic priority in the establishment of Arab unity among revolutionary regimes.84

Another critic is George Tarabishi. His criticism blames Arab traditional thought for not paying serious attention to qutriyya (the separate existence of Arab nation-states). This thought, Taribishi writes, saw these countries as cartoons rather than formidable realities posing the foremost dangers to Arab unity.85

A second criticism of Arab radical nationalism comes from an Islamic fundamentalist perspective. Salah Eddin al-Manjid is one of several critics who belong to this school. For him, nationalism and socialism are responsible for the weakness and defeat from which the Arab peoples suffer. If Arabs and Muslims are to gain strength, they must be guided and inspired by principles consistent with their “soil” and “mentality.” The principles or the ideologies according to which Arab societies run are alien to Arabs and Muslims; they are imported from the West and imposed on
them. In al-Manjid’s opinion, a return to Islam is the panacea. He attempts to substantiate his argument through a comparative method of analysis: he attributes Israel’s victories over the Arabs to the Israelis’ fervent faith in religious Zionism.86 Concurring with al-Manjid is Al-Tibawi who writes, “Arab soldiers would have fought more bravely and effectively under the banner of Islam than they did under that of Arab nationalism.”87

Arab unity for al-Husri is paramount. It is more important than Islamic unity. This unity, al-Husri says, is a natural idea that stems from the Arabic language, the history of the Arab nation and from the connections between the Arab countries.88 In Arab unity, Aflaq finds strength, a factor which in his opinion is crucial for the Arab nation’s strategy for struggling against colonialism.89 Arab Unity, the title of a book by Fayez Sayegh, is equivalent to “the natural condition of health” while its absence, meaning disunity, is “the state of sickness.”90 This approach to Arab unity taken by the advocates of radical Arab nationalism came under attack by some liberals.

Though the concept of unity is not under attack, what is questioned is the approach and the means used to achieve Arab unity, based on critiques of the 1958-1961 Egyptian-Syrian union and other unity attempts. One such critic is Muhammad Hilmi. He says that one of the chief barriers to Arab unity is the unscientific, unrealistic means used to accomplish the goal. This non-scientific approach differentiates the Arab experiences with unity from those of the European countries. The latter adopted a gradual approach whereby they started their unity attempts in transitional economic unities, then moved to the Common European Market and finally toward political unity. In other words, political unity, which usually comes first in the Arab world, in Europe will come last. Hijazi believes that the difference between the Arab and the European approach towards unity can be explained by the difference between a society developed by every standard and a backward one also by every standard. Thus, he concludes, it is not surprising that all attempts to achieve Arab unity have failed.91

There are still those who look at Arab nationalism, as it was espoused by radical reformists such as Nasser, to provide a solution to the minorities, particularly the non-Muslims.

Despite important events such as the Lebanese Civil War and the Syrian regime’s massacre of the Sunni-dominated opposition in the city of Hama, which have affected the communal coexistence of different religious and ethnic groups in the Arab world, there are still those who are ready to view Arab nationalism as a solution to the sectarian problem. In a recent article entitled “Arab Christians and the Future,” Zuraiq still defends the way Islam treated the Christians. He writes that the Europeans in the Middle Ages did not treat Islam better than Islam treated the Christians and Christianity. While considering sectarianism to have emerged under the Ottomans and their Millet system, he believes that the basic conflict about the future of Arab Christians is not between Christianity and Islam or between Christians and Muslims. Rather, it is a conflict between the reactionaries and those believing in liberation on both sides. This problem becomes more complicated, and the future becomes darker, whenever reactionary forces grow stronger on either side. On the contrary, the problem becomes easier whenever the forces of liberation become strengthened.92
An advocate of a similar view on this subject is Victor Sahab. Though he acknowledges that Muslims and others have persecuted Arab Christians in history, the Muslims, he asserts, have been more tolerant than others. He does not see the solution in either the establishment of separate religious states or in secularism in its Western definition. Sahab downplays the impact of the Lebanese Civil War on Arab nationalism and on the relations between Christians and Muslims. As a solution, he suggests the establishment of an Arab state hostile to the West like Nasser’s Egypt. His example is Nasser’s position in support of the Christian Cypriots against the Muslim Turks.

Sahab is not the only one to argue that Arab nationalism has a place for non-Muslims and use the Arab nationalist regime of Nasser as an example. In a study of the speeches and statements made by Nasser, Marilyn Nasr found the Egyptian president to have been more secular than the Christian Michel Aflaq, who organically mixes religion and nationalism so that nationalism includes Islam and Islam includes nationalism. Nasr’s study of the relationship between nationalism and Islam in Nasser’s thought reveals interesting findings. She discovers that Nasser’s early usage of the term “nation” can be traced to a reference to Egypt and not to the nation of Islam. But later on, there was a change in the usage of the term: there was a shift from Egypt as the nation to that of the Arab nation which was evident in Nasser’s speeches in 1953, 1954, and 1955. As for the relationship Nasser envisioned between the Egyptian or the Arab people on one hand and the Muslim world on the other, this relationship was found to be one of “cooperation” and “solidarity.” As for the relationship between Egypt and the Arab world, that relationship was “organic,” one of “belonging” and “integration.” The way Nasser used the term Arab nationalism is also revealing: it lacked religious connotations and meanings. He used words such as “movement,” “ideology,” “race,” and “nationality” to refer to it. Similarly, Nasser’s reference to Arab unity turns out also to be secular. Nasr asserts that in talking about Arab unity, the religious factor as a basic component of nationalism is absent from Nasser’s speeches. The basic components, for Nasser, are unity of language, unity of history, and unity of hope.

v. “The End of Pan Arabism”: The Thesis

Some contemporary scholars proclaim the death of Arab nationalism, or what is often referred to as pan-Arabism. Although this argument was made at an earlier period, it only gained considerable importance when eloquently stated by an Arab scholar, Fouad Ajami, in a celebrated article in Foreign Affairs in 1978 as well as in other publications. The title of his 1978 article spells out his argument: “The End of Pan-Arabism.” Ajami writes that “An idea that has dominated the political consciousness of modern Arabs is nearing its end, if it is not already a thing of the past. It is the myth of pan-Arabism, of the Ummma Arabiya Wahida Dhat Risala Khalida, ‘the one Arab nation with an immortal mission.’ He adds: “Now, however, raison detat, once an alien and illegitimate doctrine, is gaining ground. Slowly and grimly,
with a great deal of anguish and violence, a ‘normal’ state system is becoming a fact of life.” This thesis is eloquently developed throughout the article. In another article, “The Struggle For Egypt’s Soul,” published in Foreign Policy, Ajami demonstrates how Egypt’s policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict confirms that both Arab unity and pan-Arabism are a myth. Between Egypt and the Arab world, Ajami writes, there is a gap, not simply created by a leader like Sadat, but with psychological and cultural foundations.

The death of pan-Arabism, or the end of utopian ideologies and the dreams of a new and united Arab world, is vividly pictured in Ajami’s book, The Arab Predicament:

Thus the movement from the era of nationalism and ideology to the era of commissions and the middlemen. In the former, the Arabs had subsisted on Nasser’s grandeur; some (unfortunately for them) were taken by the metaphysics of Michel Aflaq, the theorist of the Ba’th Party, and his abstractions about Arab unity, love, and the primacy of the nation. A decade later, they were being treated to the theatrics of the middle-men, to the great achievements of Adnan Khasboggi (a successful Saudi businessman); they were told about the ‘regional packages’—large deals involving Saudi capital, Egyptian labor, and Sudanese land that would achieve, without political struggles and disagreements, the unity that had eluded the pan-Arabists.”

Among the evidence Ajami cites to support his thesis are findings of a survey research conducted by Tawfic Farah in Kuwait University. The findings revealed a significant weakening of Arab nationalism which resulted in having the youth return to religious beliefs and to identify with the nation state.

William Brown stresses a similar theme. A distinctive difference between Brown and Ajami is that the former highlights the implications of the 1982 war for the importance of pan-Arabism as a force in Arab politics. Writing in Foreign Policy, Brown argues that

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon showed how wide the gulf between nation and state in the Arab world has grown. For the first time, Israeli troops invaded an Arab capital far from the territory that Jews could claim through divine promise. And the attack was directed specifically against the Palestinians, symbols of the Arab nation. Yet no Arab leader responded to Arafat’s appeals. Moreover, most Arab governments initially refused to provide haven for the PLO fighters. Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, and Tunisia provided limited hospitality. The Sudan, Syria, and the two Yemens also opened their doors. But in every case, the Palestinian guests have been isolated and carefully watched. Everyone uses them, but no one trusts them. As symbols of the Arab nation, they are inimical to the interests of an Arab state.

Carl Leiden presents a similar view, although not as extreme as Ajami’s. Though Leiden believes the idea of Arab nationalism is not dead, his analysis of the Arab world leads him to conclude that Arab nationalism is unlikely to survive as a significant
force: “But the Arab world today is so complex and fragmented, with such a maldistribution of population and resources (with a result that exploitation is also skewed in its local intensities) that it seems unlikely that Arab qawmiyya nationalism will survive as a major formative force.” He also asserts, “But the old nationalism that reached the peak of its intensity under Nasser in the late 1950s and early 1960s is not likely to again be so formidable within the foreseeable future.”

But still Leiden makes a defense of nationalism in general and of Arab nationalism in particular: “Yet, the idea is not dead; it still possesses force and it is possible that it can be resurrected at some later time.” As to its future, he suggests that “Nationalism will always exist where one group feels exploited by another. This of course will happen in the Arab lands as often as it will happen elsewhere. But its total demise is equally unlikely; those who articulate its virtues will be around for a long time. But other wataniyya nationalisms will arise as well as ‘regional’ agglutinative nationalism.”

While Ajami may find many scholars in the West agreeing with his thesis that Arab nationalism has ceased to exist, a sizable proportion of Arab intellectuals disagree. Hassan Nafaa, an Egyptian scholar, expressed the displeasure of these intellectuals in a lengthy study devoted to criticizing Ajami’s views. According to Nafaa, “the fact of Arab nationalism cannot be argued away. It is a major political and social phenomenon, as well as a mobilizing ideology that has shaken the whole region since the last years of the nineteenth century.” Nafaa argues that Ajami confuses “the idea and its implementation, the ideology and the political movement. This idea of ‘one Arab nation with an immortal mission’ has never been translated into a viable political project. It is still a slogan, like that of the Communist Manifesto: ‘Workers of the world unite!’ To say that pan-Arabism has died because it failed to achieve the one Arab nation is like saying Marxism does not exist anymore because it failed to unify the workers of the world!” As for Ajami’s argument that a state system logic has replaced that of the pan-Arabist one, Nafaa says the following: “In such conditions, a ‘workable pan-Arab system of states’ based on the concept of raison d’etat is hardly conceivable. Because in the states where institutions are dead and the mechanism process of consensus formation is blocked, the raison d’etat may be the raison de la famille royale or that of a dictator. Such a system will constantly be under the pressure of centrifugal forces which are unable to express themselves through adequate legitimate channels; and, after his emergence, a powerful Arab leader could be tempted to manipulate them.”

A defense of Arab nationalism has been offered by Walid Khalidi in the context of the Palestinian question. Khalidi hoped to convince Western intellectuals and politicians that it is difficult for the Arab states to dissociate themselves from the Palestinians. He argues that the Arab system is “first and foremost a ‘Pan’ system. It postulates the existence of a single Arab Nation behind the facade of a multiplicity of sovereign states. In pan-Arab ideology, this nation is actual, not potential ... From this perspective, the individual Arab states are deviant and transient entities; their frontiers illusory; their rulers interim caretakers or obstacles to be removed.” Advancing a
similar argument, though not so strongly as Khalidi, is Michael Hudson. In an
important work, Arab Politics: The Search For Legitimacy, Hudson asserts that “Arab
nationalism remains a formidable legitimizing resource for kings and presidents alike,
and the considerable potential power of a revolutionary like George Habash derives
in no small measure from his impeccable Arab nationalist credentials.”

Another defender of Arab nationalism is Clovis Maksoud, the permanent United
Nations representative of the Arab League, perhaps the most important pan-Arabist
organization. When asked if pan-Arabism has become a myth, Maksoud’s answer was
a qualified no. Despite several challenges, mainly because of the Camp David
agreement and Sadat’s 1977 visit to Jerusalem, which were in violation of the Arab
consensus that no Arab state should negotiate with Israel separately, Arab nationalism,
in Maksoud’s opinion, remains a reality. Maksoud added that Egypt’s separate peace
with Israel proved Arab nationalism to be a reality because negotiating with Israel did
not become a precedent to be followed but rather an aberration. However, classical
Arab nationalism, with its emphasis on language and culture, must be recast in a new
light, in Maksoud’s opinion. What should be emphasized today are the functional
aspects of Arab nationalism. These, according to Maksoud, lie in improving the
economic relations among the Arab states, efforts which should culminate in monetary
unity. One further proof cited by Maksoud of the continuing viability of Arab
nationalism is the perception of the Arabs by both friendly and unfriendly nations;
they consider the Arabs as one bloc, and this is due to the constant interaction between
the Arab states and also due to the fact that events in one Arab country are bound to
affect other Arab countries.

An optimistic note on Arab nationalism was given by one of its early advocates,
Constantine Zuraiq. On the Westerners’ criticism of the Arabs’ state of disunity, Zuraiq
said:

They [The Westerners] forget their own history. How long did it take Germany
to unite? When did Italy achieve its unity? It took the Renaissance, the
Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial
Revolutions – almost four centuries for them to achieve their unity. Why are
Arabs asked or expected to achieve unity within decades only, against a
background of centuries of oppression and ignorance and weakness?

The belief in Arab unity remains strong, though it appears to have passed the
romantic phase. This is the conclusion reached by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, an Egyptian
sociologist who has conducted field research in nine Arab countries. He writes that
despite unity setbacks

the hope of realizing Arab unity runs strong among most Arabs. But nowadays,
this call for unity is underlined by a measure of realism and rationalism...Few
people believe that total unity can be brought about in the near future; they
regard the possibility as more probable in a distant if not a far off future ...
The majority of Arab public opinion opted for a federal unity, according to
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which each country preserves its internal independence, and deals with its domestic affairs, while leaving for a centralized government the power to oversee matters involving defense, foreign policy and coordination of the various countries’ developmental plans in the social and economic realms.  

Another study, a survey of the opinions of Arab students at Northeastern University, shows that Arab nationalism is far from being dead. Stewart Reiser says that his findings “differ substantially from those given in the Kuwait study, which were namely the decline of Arabism as a political identification and self-conception with the concurrent rise of state nationalism and Islam.”

An essential point in the arguments that call into question the basic components of Arab nationalism, a point stressed by those announcing the movement’s demise, is the claim that many religious minorities in the Arab world, such as the Iraqi Shiites, feel no loyalty to nationalist ideology. Writers who are skeptical of Arab nationalism doubt that such groups, which are assumed by many Arab nationalists to be Arab, actually will support nationalist goals. They even doubt the sincerity of a country like Egypt, which is considered by many to be the center of Arabism. Their position has been challenged by many scholars in the Arab world who still defend the Arabism of Egypt and the Iraqi Shiites. Muhammad Rida Muharram writes that Egypt’s affiliation with Arabism is firm, anthropologically proven, and true historically and geographically regardless of the varying degrees of the Egyptians’ perceptions. Arabism, he adds, is evident in the names of the people as well in those of the streets.

Wamid Jamal Nazmi, in his article, “The Iraqi Shiites and the Question of Arab Nationalism,” presents three reasons for Shiite Arab nationalist feelings and solidarity with Arab Sunnis, whose Arab nationalist credentials are not in question: (1) the emergence of secular constitutional movements in Turkey and Iran which, by emphasizing the cultural and historical distinctiveness of Turks and Iranians, reinforced Iraqi Shiites’ feelings of Arab identity, (2) the fear of increasing Western imperialist penetration, and (3) the impact of Islamic reformist thought. He adds that the Iraqi Shiites were in the forefront of those who embraced ideas calling for reforms and Arab nationalism.

VI. “The End of Pan-Arabism”: A Critique of the Thesis

There is already a sizable body of literature which deals with Arab nationalism in the three periods discussed; I see little need to add to this debate. On the other hand, little has been said about “the End of Pan-Arabism” thesis, thereby I find it essential to examine this argument in some detail.

Popular as it nowadays, “the End of Pan-Arabism” argument suffers from two major flaws. First, the qualitative and the quantitative evidence on which the advocates of the “death” thesis base their argument are problematic. The evidence they claim constitutes “truths” is interpreted differently by others. Second, their definition and conception of ideology is flawed.
Part of the evidence for Ajami’s “End of Pan-Arabism” thesis consists of data gathered by survey research methods. Yet the findings of other studies that employ the same techniques weaken rather than support his argument. The study by Farah, on whose findings Ajami relies, is contradicted by Ibrahim and Reiser’s study as well as by other works which cast doubt on “the End of Pan-Arabism Thesis.” Levon Melikian and Lutfi Diab’s studies in 1957 and 1958 show that Arab nationalist affiliation came second among their respondents’ loyalties; it was preceded only by family. Religion came third, nation-state fifth, and political party sixth. Attributing the contradictory findings to the different historical circumstances does not help Ajami’s argument. It is true that Melikian and Diab’s studies were conducted in the heyday of pan-Arabism while Farah’s study was completed during what has been called as the “Saudi Era” of Arab politics (which was characterized with more appreciation for the nation-state and less enthusiasm for ideologies). But Ibrahim and Reiser’s studies were also completed at a time that falls within “the End of Pan-Arabism” era.

That Ajami’s thesis is challenged by more than one quantitative study should not be understood as an endorsement of using survey research in measuring the health of pan-Arabism. In my judgment, mathematical correlations do not constitute “truths;” a researcher’s exclusive reliance on research survey techniques is likely to alienate him or her from the subject studied. Meanwhile, the fields of both psychology and political science still lack a rigorous methodology to account for the influence of people’s belief systems on action. It is difficult to accurately document how a certain political act is explained by the individual’s belief in a given ideology. This problem is apparent in the voluminous studies done by psychologists that show how individuals may not express the beliefs they really adhere to, and how they will not at all times act upon them.

The historical evidence Ajami cites in support of his thesis is perhaps the most important. Unquestionably, Egypt’s separate peace with Israel was not the news ardent believers in Arab nationalism were waiting for. Even though at the time Ajami wrote his article the Iran-Iraq war had not started, this war has posed further problems for Arab nationalists. How would they defend the support given by two Arab countries – Syria and Libya – to a non-Arab country, Iran?

But now what about Egypt’s separate peace? Unquestionably, it is a setback for Arab nationalism. Not only because she broke away from the Arab consensus of not making a separate peace with Israel, but also because Egypt has always been the most populous and the militarily strongest Arab country. But this has not been a fatal blow. The goals of Arab nationalism could have been damaged further had Egypt’s separate peace become a precedent, namely if other Arab countries had followed suit. There has not been one country of the 22-member Arab League that has been willing to make peace with Israel. Egypt herself has been returning to what is being called the “Arab fold.” This return is possible because of the circumscribed relations that exist between Egypt and Israel. Since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and even before, economic, political, cultural, and social relations between the two countries have been kept to a minimum. The Egyptian president, for example, has met neither
the Israeli Prime Minister nor Israel’s president. One of the factors that prevent the improvement of relations between Egypt and Israel is the role of the Egyptian opposition, a sizable proportion of which are known for their strong Arab nationalist leanings. While these events do not rectify the damage done to Arab interests by neutralizing Egypt in any future Arab-Israeli confrontation, they do show that Arab nationalism remains a force that constrains policy choices for Arab countries, including Egypt.

The Iran-Iraq war is another example which shows both a setback for and continuing signs of life in Arab nationalism. The setback stems from the unfulfilled expectation that Syria and Libya should have supported Iraq against Iran despite the differences that separate Saddam Hussein from Hafiz al-Asad and Muammar el-Qaddafi. Had Syria and Libya supported Iraq, higher interests, meaning Arab nationalist interests, would have prevailed over particularist interests. Had this expectation been fulfilled, it would have confirmed a major Arab nationalist proposition, that language plays a key factor in unifying the Arab peoples.

Students of the Iran-Iraq war have been advancing several explanations as to why the hostilities occurred. Among the many proposed are miscalculations on the part of Saddam Hussein and a change in the balance of power after the collapse of the Shah. The concern here, however, is not with the conditions that led to the war, but rather with how the war has been maintained, given its immense human and financial costs. What resources can Iraq draw on to keep its war machine working? One source, of course, is Iraq’s oil revenues and the loans and grants made available by the Arab oil producing countries. Without minimizing these and other sources of support, Iraq’s utilization of the Arab nationalist ideology is one of these sources. This ideology has provided those going to the front with a cause to defend.

The Iraqi Ba’thists have been in power for over a decade and a half. A sizable proportion of Iraq’s youth has been molded by the Ba’thist pan-Arab ideology and recruited into the Ba’th Party and its militias and other political organizations. Nothing illustrates the impact of Arab nationalism better than the regime’s ability to hold Iraq together despite the size and number of its different sectarian communities, especially the Shiites who alone make up about half the population. The effective use of ideology, which qualifies the Iraqi regime as a “mobilizing” one, is the factor that shattered the prediction that Iraqi Shiites would rise and welcome the Iranian forces.

Another sign which questions the absence of pan-Arabism is the assistance received by Iraq from the Arab oil producing states and the political support given by a majority of the Arab countries (with the exception of Syria and Libya), including Marxist South Yemen. An argument can be made to the effect that the support given by the Gulf states is motivated by their purely state-centered interests, since an Iranian victory would lead to the collapse of the Saudi Kingdom and along with it the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. But one of the assumptions underlying this argument is that the definition of these interests by the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers is blindly accepted by their populations. Despite the authoritarian character of these regimes, a character which reduces input from the population into the decision-making process, it is unlikely
that the observed consensus in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait to support Iraq is motivated only by considerations of each state’s interest. Arab nationalist feelings among members of rising middle classes and certain groups in the military also contribute to this consensus.

The second major flaw in “the End of Pan-Arabism” thesis – and for that matter in “the End of Ideology” argument – is theoretical and epistemological. Neither “ideology” nor pan-Arabism has been clearly defined, at least in how they have been used. If ideology is something that one can “carry on his back” and then get rid of at some point, that assumption is epistemologically flawed. In fact, ideology is “ahistorical,” and thus it has always been present. In other words, we always see the world through some ideology by which we were socialized.

Does this mean that Pan-Arabism is dead? If Ajami means that pan-Arabism is dead as a determining force of inter-Arab politics, he errs on the grounds that ideology, be it pan-Arabism, Ba’thism or Islamic fundamentalism, does not shape Arab foreign policies except in being used as a rhetorical tool. In short, only living things can die; nothing dies if it is never born. Ajami’s enterprise, therefore, becomes a palace built on sand.

Whether in Iraq, Syria, or in other Arab countries, pan-Arabist polemics remain essential components of the intellectual discourse, among both private and public circles. But it remains of limited importance on foreign policy-making. What is important, however, is the development of the Ideological State Apparatuses (the dissemination of Ba’thist ideology into the media, education, unions, the army, among others) in the 1960s, and the unwillingness of the state to dispense with them in the 1970s and 1980s, never mind that these apparatuses were introduced by Ba’thists who are persona non-grata in today’s Syria and Iraq. For ideology to work along with economic incentives and repression, it needs to be installed in apparatuses, only these apparatuses succeed in making it part of the popular discourse. This is precisely what the Iraqi and Syrian regimes did.

The question then centers on the effectiveness of ideology in legitimizing regimes like those in Iraq and Syria. Since ideology, whether Ba’thist or pan-Arabist, is not “relatively autonomous” from the centers of powers in Iraq and Syria, it cannot play the same important role ideology plays in Western societies. But at the same time, one cannot argue with great certainty that Ba’thist ideology as installed in State Apparatuses and by which a whole generation of Iraqis and Syrians have been socialized while denied access to alternative ideologies, plays no role in consolidating the dictatorships.

Ajami, among others, underestimate the role ideology plays once installed in apparatuses. Perhaps their conception of ideology is that of the inter-war and the immediate post-independence periods, when pan-Arabism and Ba’thism was a form of pure intellectual discourse about the past and the relations that link the different Arab peoples. This ideology never guided inter-Arab relations, and even ideology as propagated by State Apparatuses does not shape these relations. Its function, however,
lies in enabling regimes to agitate and mobilize popular support for policies, rather than in dictating them.

The fact the Iraqi army has not show dissension, whether in the form of successful military coups or surrender _en masse_ at least more than a year after “Desert Storm,” and the fact that the Syrian army and other layers of powers have held together in Syria despite unpopular decisions such as the 1976 intervention in Lebanon, supporting Iran against Iraq in the 1980-1988 Gulf War, waging relentless war against the P.L.O., and currently siding with the “imperialist” West against Arab and Ba’thist Iraq, all these do strongly indicate some utility of ideology as a means of holding together sizable elements of Syrian and Iraqi civil society.

Advocates of “the End of Pan-Arabism” thesis have yet to provide us with compelling evidence. The evidence Ajami presents is not only insufficient but can also be used against his own thesis. Arab nationalism as conceptualized by al-Husri and Aflaq has underwent a metamorphosis; but regardless of the form it assumes nowadays, the idea of Arabism remains relevant in studying Arab and Middle East politics, and thus is far from over.

**Notes**

9 Antonius, p. 13.
10 Haim, pp. 3-4.
11 Ibid.; see also Antonius, pp. 21-34, and Tibi, pp. 62-64.
12 Antonius, p. 25.
14 Haim, p. 3-4.
15 Hourani, p. 261.
18 Tibi, pp. 64, 68.
21 Haim, pp. 9, 14-15.
22 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
23 Bezirgan, p. 38.
24 Haim, p. 21.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
28 Bezirgan, p. 39.
31 Bezirgan, p. 39.
33 Haim, p. 27.
34 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
38 Antonius, p. 196.
39 Cleveland, p. 28.
40 Haim, p. 34.
42 Mansfield, p. 86.
46 Tibi, pp. xi-xii. For a critical review of Amin’s work, particularly from an Arab nationalist perspective, see Victor Sahab’s review “Al-Umma al-arabiyya wa sira’ al-Tabaqat” [The Arab Nation and Class Struggle], Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi (January 1979). The reviewer finds that the Arabic translation of Amin’s book suffers from factual errors.
47 Tibi, pp. 87-88.
48 Khadduri, p. 20.
50 Quoted in Faysal ibn al-Husayn fi aqwalihi wa khilabatihi [Faysal ibn al-Husayn in his Sayings and Speeches] (Baghdad: 1945), p. 175, cited in Haim, p. 35.
51 Haim, p. 35.
52 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
53 Haim, pp. 42-43. On al-Husri’s life and thought, see works by Tibi, Cleveland, and Hourani, esp., p. 312.
54 Hourani, pp. 312-313.
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55 Haim, p. 44. 00 Egypt in the writings of al-Husri, see the interesting work by Khayriya Qasimiyya, “Misr fi kitabat Sati al-Husri” [Egypt in the Writings of Sati al-Husri], Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi (May 1979), esp. pp. 131, 139. In defense of Egypt’s Arabism, see Muhammad Rida Muhamm, “Al-Awda ila al u‘ruba” [The Return to Arabism], Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi (June 1981).

56 Quoted in Hourani, pp. 313-314.

57 Constantine Zurayq, interview conducted by Hala Salam Maksoud, Arab Perspectives Vol. 4 (January 1984), p. 22.


59 Khadduri, p. 195.

60 Haim, p. 72.


70 Haim, pp. 55-56.

71 Constantine Zurayq, Al-Wa’i al-Qawmi [The Nationalist Consciousness](Beirut: 1939), pp. 112-13, II7, quoted in Khadduri, p. 184.

72 Khadduri, p. 184.

73 Haim, p. 62; see also p. 58; and see Bezirgan, p. 42.


75 Fi sabil al-Ba’th. p. 131, quoted in Bezirgan, pp. 42-43.

76 Haim, p. 37.

77 Tibi, p. 72.

78 Haim, pp. 57-58. On this question, see Hisham Sharabi, Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 64.


80 Leiden, pp. 47,45.

81 On the views of the three forces that radicalized Arab nationalism, see Ismael, The Arab Left.


For an account of this view, see Dessouki, pp. 189-190.


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112 This conception draws on Louis Althusser, who in turn draws on Sigmund Freud’s analysis of the “unconscious” as “eternal,” in that it has no history.” See Louis Althusser. Essays On Ideology (London: Verso, 1971), pp. 34-35.

113 See Ibid.