Toward a New Understanding of Arab Nationalism: Ethnic Survival in Non-Ethnic States

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Introduction

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Western scholars have discredited the study of Arab nationalism. In his essay on "The End of Pan-Arabism",[1] Fouad Ajami officially proclaimed the death of this seemingly outdated paradigm. During the era of the Cold War, Western observers of the Middle East emphasized the secular aspects of Arab nationalism and its susceptibility to Communism. After the rise of an Islamic government in Iran, however, they shifted their attention to the study of the "Islamic dimensions" of Arab societies.[2] The events following Khomeini's seizure of power in Iran seemed to justify this trend. The assassination of Anwar al-Sadat by Islamic fundamentalists in 1981, the outbreak of civil wars in Lebanon and Sudan along confessional lines, the unprecedented electoral success of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria (1992), the increasing assertiveness of fundamentalists in Egypt, and the rise of the populist Hamas as a challenge to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the Occupied Territories, all demonstrate that a revitalized (or rather repoliticized) Islam poses a severe threat to the stability of the Middle Eastern social and political order.

Initially the United States only feared for the security of its oil supply and the well-being of its historic ally, Israel. At the same time, Western European states envisaged the invasion of fundamentalist hordes aimed at Europe's "soft underbelly" in Italy and Spain.[3] However, the evaporation of the Cold War also globalized the Western perception of a growing Islamic threat. In Western Europe, notably in France and Germany, a surge of xenophobia has been directed primarily against the Muslim

population of these countries. In the United States the perception of a global Islamic conspiracy has replaced the former perceived communist threat. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City reinforced this perception. The influential Samuel Huntington has even conjured up nineteenth century notions of the clash of civilizations, Islam and the West (once again!) fighting a battle of life and death.[4]

The rhetoric of the Arab-Israeli conflict also mirrors these changes. No longer can Israel derive its *raison d'etre* from being the staunchest ally of the United States against Communist expansionism in the Middle East. In order to remain indispensable to the United States, and thus not to interrupt the multi-billion dollar cash-flow from the time of the Cold War, the Jewish state now prefers to present itself as a bastion of liberalism and moderation "against murderous Islamic terror [which is] meant to awaken the world which is lying in slumber."[5] Like the West, Israel has created for itself a new enemy. The "Islamic terrorists" of Hamas has surreptitiously replaced the former "terrorist organization" of the PLO as the country's chief foe. The Israeli Labor party's willingness to strike a deal with the PLO is directly related to the party's attacks on the fundamentalists.

Still, in the Middle East the debate on the viability of Arab nationalism carries on. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, numerous Middle Eastern leaders called for an "Arab Solution" to the crisis.[6] Whereas Western scholars continue to re-bury Arab nationalism,[7] many Arab scholars continue to point out that behind the facade of fragmentation, "the Arab nation remains true to itself - loyal to its past achievements, conscious of its present needs, and [...] on the brink of a new surge forward".[8] The Arab world, they argue, remains united by virtue of its common language, religion, history, and ancestry.[9] If the Arab world remains fragmented in spite of these ties, in the opinion of such scholars, it is the result of the malicious plotting of foreign interests to maintain the division of the Arabs in order to avoid having to confront one powerful, unified Arab nation. This theory, however, does not explain why so far all attempts at establishing even minimal unity among the Arab states either ended in failure (like the United Arab Republic) or proved to be highly inefficient (the Arab League).

The conceptual confusion that obfuscates the discussion of Arab unity and disunity stems from the fact that there never has

been a coherent theory of Arab nationalism. Scholars either emphasize a number of the above mentioned elements of Arab nationalism without showing their interrelation, or they simply blur the difference between Arab nationalism as an historical movement, and Arab nationalism as a political ideology. An early bibliography on the topic elucidates this lack of conceptual elaboration when it associates Arab nationalism concurrently with Arab Unity, Islam, Communism, separatism, party movements, and Nasserism.[10] In the meantime, scholarship on Arab nationalism has contributed relatively little to solve these shortcomings.

The study of Arab nationalism has been characterized by its compartmentalization along linguistic and national lines.[11] While there have been numerous case studies on the emergence of Arab nationalism as an historical movement,[12] scholars have spent little effort understanding the ideological and cultural aspects of the phenomenon.[13] One of the more fruitful attempts so far to theoretically come to terms with Arab nationalism as a political ideology has been Bassam Tibi's application of the concept of acculturation.[14] In order to fully understand the phenomenon it is necessary to go beyond confined regional studies, and leave behind ahistorical sociological explanations. Instead of elaborating solely on the internal aspects of the ideology of Arab nationalism, its specific conjunctural conditions as a historical process must be examined.[15]

Unfortunately the vast majority of scholars on Arab nationalism narrow-mindedly only deal with what has been published in the field of Middle Eastern studies and obsequiously build on and reshuffle elements that once percolated from now obsolete scientific paradigms. Not infrequently it takes scholars of the Middle East decades to adopt and synthesize research done outside their regional field of specialization.[16] On the other hand, innovative studies on nationalism deal with the Middle East only in the most superficial manner.[17]

What is needed is a redefinition of Arab nationalism that is broad enough to encompass all the different approaches which explains Arab nationalism in terms of language, religion, and ancestry. Moreover, it has to show how these elements were transported through space and time. Finally it should explain why—in spite of the de facto annihilation of the Arab Nation by European colonial-

ism—the idea of being a member of the Arab Nation still occupies an important place in the minds of a large number of Arabs.

I will argue that the paradigm shift from Arab nationalism to the study of Islamic fundamentalism conjures up a false dichotomy between Islamic loyalties on the one hand and Arab affiliations on the other. These approaches did not "function as mutually antagonistic, distinct political paradigms."[18] Both were and are the political expressions of the desire to maintain the integrity of the Arab *ethnie*, the imagined community of those who by virtue of their language, history, religion, and interests claim to share certain values and beliefs.

This imagined community has its roots in the days of the early Islamic empires. In spite of internal and external threats, the Arab ethnie managed to maintain its identity until the emergence of imperialism in the region. When the members of the Arab ethnie saw that outside forces (the Young Turks and the Europeans) tried to eliminate the identity of this community by attacking their values and beliefs, they developed a strategy of ethnic survival. By systematically emphasizing and politicizing their difference as opposed to other ethnies, they resorted to *ethnonationalism*.[19] Although a modern state system, imposed by the colonial powers, fragmented the territorial affiliations of the members of the Arab ethnie, their pre-national ethnic loyalty lives on. This is why Arab nationalism as the politicized expression of ethnic affiliation remains an important factor in present day politics. By emphasizing the attitudinal aspects of Arab nationalism rather than its institutional structures, I will try to understand Arab nationalists in their own terms. The point of my argument is not that there is an essential difference between Eastern and Western conceptions of nationhood. The decisive factor is the sense of ethnic cohesion which, as the recent developments in the former Yugoslavia have blatantly shown, is as much a European as it is a Middle Eastern phenomenon. In the Middle East, Arab-Islamic fundamentalism *and* Arab nationalism are two different manifestations of the desire to ensure ethnic survival.

Ethnonationalism

An ethnie does not exist in and of itself but is defined in relation to other ethnies with different beliefs and value systems. As a named human population with shared ancestry myths, history and culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity,[20] it requires both the development of a certain nostalgia after the sedentarization of the population, as well as an organized religion to survive. The trauma of the transition from nomadism to sedentarization entails a yearning and glorification of the "lost past", which in turn gives rise to the development of shared customs and habits. The institutionalization of religious practices facilitates the diffusion and universalization of these shared values.

The ethnie is the connecting link between the collective cultural units of former times and modern nations. Centered on the quartet of myths, memories, values, and symbols, it provides form and identity to a certain number of people. As media of communication, these myths, memories, values, and symbols give cohesion to an ethnie, bridging contradictory group and class interests. Over time, different myths amalgamate into a *mythomoteur*, the constitutive myth of an ethnie.[21] In modern nations as in classical ethnies "myths mingle factual observations and generalizations with dramatic narrative, and [...] relate past events to present and/or future purposes."[22]

Ethnies are in continuous competition with exogenous forces, at times amalgamating, at times surrendering certain elements of identity. On the basis of the principle of uniqueness and exclusion, ethnicism becomes an autonomous "collective movement, whose activities and efforts are aimed at resisting perceived threats from outside and corrosion within, at renewing a community's forms and traditions, and at reintegrating a community's members and strata which have become dangerously divided by conflicting pressures."[23]

Apart from geo-political and demographic factors, religion becomes the pivotal force of ensuring ethnic survival. When religion embraces both ethnic forms and traditions as well as ethnic contents and traits, a modification of the latter may be rationalized with the necessity of maintaining the former in order not to endanger ethnic identity. Hence the threat of secularization appears to be tantamount to an attack on ethnic identity.

When does an ethnie become a nation? The nation is the last step in a process in which certain shared beliefs of a group of people are transformed into a national sentiment. Once they become institutionalized by political movements into nationalist ideologies, these sentiments contribute to the creation of a national myth, which is essential for the viability of any nation.[24] In the West the transformation from ethnie to nation was relatively successful, establishing new foci of loyalty, and a "civil religion" based on economy, law, and education. In the non-Western world the colonial experience resulted in a different development. Here, in reaction to colonialism, ethnic features became politicized; the "civil religion" of the Western territorial nation has its parallel in "a kind of missionary nativism, a belief in the redemptive quality and unique inwardness of the ethnic nation."[25] It is at the interstices of ethnie and nation where nationalism becomes a politically powerful force.

It has become obvious that nation-building requires the adaptation of ethnic myths to new realities. The politicization of an ethnie in its step toward nationhood involves the triple movement "from isolation to activism, from quietism to mobilization, and from culture to politics."[26] Contact with the national myths of already existing nations transforms ethnic sentiment into nationalist sentiment among intellectual strata. In their attempt to transform the ethnic myth into a nationalist myth, they become the "new priesthood of the nation."[27] The principle of inclusion requires a reformulation of ethnicity. In order to emphasize and disperse the ethnic-national sentiment, myths of origin and descent have to be activated. If they do not exist, they have to be invented. In the hands of these intellectuals, "'history' becomes the focal point of nationalism and nation-formation. The 'rediscovery' or 'invention' of history is no longer a scholarly pastime; it is a matter of national honour and collective endeavor."[28]

It does not matter whether history and mythologies of nationalist intellectuals are fabrications or based on real events. All they do is to draw on and reshuffle "traditional, perhaps unanalysed, motifs and myths taken from epics, chronicles, documents of the period, and material artifacts."[29] Moreover, in their attempt to refurbish and romanticize the ethnie's past, they spare no effort to utilize the latest discoveries in all fields of science.

Once activated, ethnic-national myths can create their own reality. On the one hand, they contribute to the infusion of meaning

into an otherwise anarchic environment. The ethnie-nation-to-be develops a special identity on the base of pre-existing but modified myth-symbol complexes. On the other, "ethnic nationalisms generate their own ritual and sacred practices, their feasts and celebrations, monuments and memorials, parades and pilgrimages, which commemorate and extol critical moments and exemplary persons in the life-story of the nation."[30]

The above analysis makes it clear that nationalism is more than an institutionalized political ideology. It is rooted in a particular cultural tradition that builds on the mythology and symbolism of the respective ethnie. By projecting them into the political arena, nationalism universalizes ethnic sentiments. This universalism, in turn, accounts for the possibility of fusing them with newfangled political ideologies, among them the European conception of the territorial state. In that sense, ethnonationalism is neither completely modern nor entirely traditional, but can assume the form of a political ideology in the process of nation-building.

To a large extent, the inability to perceive the historical continuity between nation and ethnie, as well as the close link between nationalism and ethnicism accounts for the undeveloped state of studies in nationalism. Of course it is necessary that one conceptualize the coexistence of these elements in concrete case studies. To acknowledge the significance of ethnicity for nationalist movements, however, seems to be a useful tool for better understanding of the way nationalism has an impact on the action of the individuals concerned.[31]

The Mythomoteurs of the Arab Ethnie

The idea of an Arab ethnie long precedes the post-Word War I liberation struggle of the territorial states in the Middle East. European colonialists were well aware that they were dealing with a community that had, over several centuries, developed a strong sense of identity. Whereas in sub-Saharan Africa colonialists used sheer violence to subdue what they considered racially inferior people, in the Middle East they resorted to different strategies. Their knowledge of the "Golden Age of Islam", their close ties with the Oriental Christians, and the military prowess of the Ottoman Empire made them challenge the Middle East on

cultural, political, and economic grounds.[32] They hoped to gain control of the area not so much by direct military occupation but by promoting their Christian allies, by softening the Arab-Islamic resistance to the West through missionaries as well as economic and political advisors to local rulers, and by encouraging the spread of secessionist ideas based on the principle of the territorial nation state.[33]

What was it that gave this sense of cohesion to the Arabs? Like any ethnie, their identity rested on a set of constitutive myths, which became politicized when they were challenged from outside the community. For generations, Orientalist scholars who wrote on Arab nationalism have dwelt on the significance of Islam for national independence. Islam unlike Christianity, they argue, is both a religious and a social ideology. Therefore Arab nationalists by definition have to deal with Islam. As a result they tend to label Arab nationalists either as secular or as religious.[34] This dichotomy, however, is misleading since it cannot explain why many nationalists oscillated between local nationalism, Pan-Ottomanism, and Pan-Islamism. Nor does it present any convincing solution for why Muslim and Christian nationalists were interested in working toward the same goal, the establishment of an Arab nation. Pragmatism and opportunism alone are insufficient motives.[35]

We can avoid these shortcomings by acknowledging that Islam is only one of the mythomoteurs that are essential for the identity of the Arab ethnie. Western scholars tend to overlook that there is another myth-symbol complex on which Arab identity rests. This second mythomoteur is *`Urubah* (Arabism), "the essence of the person who is an Arab."[36] Both Islam and `Urubah are necessary to ensure the survival of the Arab ethnie. Although political conditions at times make it necessary to emphasize one over the other, the abandoning of either one over a long period of time will lead to its members' alienation and the final dissolution of the Arab ethnie. Secularization, therefore, inevitably leads to *ethnocide*.

Even though they are not the same, there is a close interrelationship between these two mythomoteurs. Both have as their foundation the language, literature, fairs, and spiritual activities of the peoples who were affected by the Islamic conquests.[37] In

addition, both serve as powerful legitimizing myths in the political discourse of Arab-Islamic rulers.

There are, however, significant differences. `Urubah existed before the rise of Islam. One school of Arabist theory maintains that since time immemorial there had existed an "Arab stream of being" on the Arabian Peninsula. Unexplainable and unalterable, this "Arab stream of being" has its own logic, its own 'mind'.[38] `Urubah is its soul, its 'pneuma'. It is the reflection of divinity on earth. It percolated into the consciousness of the inhabitants of the area, and enabled them to formulate their identity when it became institutionalized in the religions of Judaism and Christianity.

> `Urubah reflects all the values present in the consciousness of the living, but equally in that of all past generations of humans who participated to any degree in the Arab stream of being. `Urubah is as much the spirit of Imru'ul Qays and Samaw'al, of Moses, Abraham and Jesus, of Cerinthus, Marcion and Justin Martyr, of Hunayn ibn Ishaq and Yahya ibn `Adiyy, as it is that of Malik Shafi'i and Abu Hanifah.[39]

Only when Jews and Christians could no longer fulfill the expectations divinity had set in them did Islam become the main medium for `Urubah.

Unlike `Urubah Islam had a start in history. Islam provided `Urubah with the means to spread to new territories. It provided `Urubah with a body of customs and rituals, with a language and with a script. With the rise of an Islamic Empire, Islam and `Urubah entered a symbiosis without ever becoming one and the same. Frequently, Islamization and Arabization did not coincide. Members of different ethnies who did not want to abandon their ethnic identity became Islamized (Persians, Turks), whereas members of the Arab ethnie adhered to their former beliefs (Jews, Christians). Even though the Arabs became part of larger multiethnic Islamic empires, they were able to maintain their identity as an ethnie, because Islam to a large extent utilizes the same myths and symbols which constitute the Arab ethnie. After the rise of Islam the Arabic language became associated with the transmission of God's word in the *qur'an*; the previous religions of

the Arab ethnie, Judaism and Christianity, were reinterpreted as leading toward the emergence of Islam; history was reinterpreted as *jahiliyyah* (the "age of ignorance") and post-jahiliyyah; and descendence of the Prophet Muhammad became more important than descendence from Qahtan or `Adnan.[40]

Ethnic Survival in Non-Ethnic States

The history of the Arab ethnie is one of constant alienation. Before Islam its ethnic consciousness had been weak. Without a unifying political framework it consisted of congeries of tribes and merchant towns on the Arabian peninsula. The sedentarization of Arab tribes in Petra, Palmyra and Kinda, as well as the monotheism of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids had already foreshadowed the possibility of ethnic unification when Muhammad developed the institutional framework for an Arab state. When he proclaimed the establishment of the *'ummah*, the Muslim community, with the qur'an and the *sunnah* as its constitution, the stage was set for territorial expansion.

After the Shi`i opposition had been largely confined to the neighboring Persian ethnie, the `Umayads (661-750) embarked on the Arabization of the conquered territories. It was inconceivable to be Muslim without being an Arab, and the only way of becoming Muslim was by association with an Arab tribe, thereby obtaining the status of *mawali*.[41] Authority positions were in Arab hands but territorial expansion increasingly integrated different ethnies into the empire. However, when mawali could no longer be successfully Arabized, they slowly penetrated into positions of political and economic power. What had started out as an ethnic Arab empire collapsed under the burden of ethnic inclusion and gave way to the non-ethnic Islamic empire of the `Abbasids. About fifty years after the Arab ethnie was unified it ran the risk of losing its identity in a multi-ethnic religious state. This did not happen because the Umayyad state was based on the double mythomoteur of `Urubah and Islam.

The revolt against the Umayyads had ethnic origins: the disadvantaged mawali in the agricultural regions in the periphery of the empire and the cosmopolitan class of merchants, writers and *`ulama'* battled the unproductive Arab warrior class of the Umayyad rulers. The revolt originated in the Shi`i dominated

territories of the Persian ethnie, and soon gained the support of the non-Arab element under Umayyad rule. When the Abbasid dynasty assumed power in 750, they replaced the tribal structure of the Umayyad empire with the cosmopolitan principles based on Islamic universalism. For a short time the former tensions between Arabs and mawali disappeared. Non-Arabs participated in exercising political power, and the principle of building the army on tribal foundations was abandoned.

From the ninth to the eleventh centuries the Persian influence became stronger. During this time the class of state secretaries (*kuttab*) expanded and became the foundation of the administration. They began emphasizing their ethnic Persian heritage, translating Persian literature into Arabic thereby belittling the historical continuity of the Arab ethnie. The Arab-Persian controversy also was reflected in the struggle for succession to Caliph. In 811 Ma'mun, governor of the Persian provinces, deposed Amin from the Caliphate with the help of his Shi`i supporters. He designated the Shi`i Ali al-Radi as his successor, but as soon as he felt that his power was secure he reverted to his ethnic origin. Ali al-Radi was assassinated and the Caliphate once more was in Arab hands.

In the Persian provinces the Persian ethnie soon asserted its independence. In 945 the Persian Buwayhids, the successor dynasty of the Persian Tahirids, and later the Safavids and the Samanids, invaded Baghdad and took the Caliph hostage. Ethnicity also served to express social discontent. The Persian Ali Ibn Muhammad was responsible for inciting the social revolts of the Zanj, Black slaves in the salt swamps of Basrah, between 869-883. After their conquest of Egypt (969) the Shi`i Fatimid dynasty remained a potential danger for the Arab ethnie.

The cohesion of the Arab ethnie came under attack from another side. The second Caliph, al-Mansur (754-775) had recruited Turkish (Mamluk) soldiers. Only when al-Mu`tasim (833-842) recruited them *en masse* in order to curb the growing Persian influence did they assert their ethnic independence. Early in the eleventh century the Mamluk Alptigin founded the Ghaznavid dynasty on the Persian provinces. At the same time the Seljuq Turks, nomads of the Kirgisian steppe, conquered Baghdad (1055), and occupied Fatimid Egypt and Syria.

During this time the Arab ethnie was condemned to cultural and political insignificance. Since the Mongol period (1258-1517) in the East, and the Mamluk reign in Egypt and Syria (1250-1517) Shi`i and Sunni Islam were the only legitimizing ideologies that kept the multi-ethnic empire together. This pattern did not change after the Ottomans conquered Istanbul (1453) and put an end to Mamluk rule in Syria and Egypt (1516-17). They simply replaced the Seljuq and Mamluk ruling elites with members of their own ethnie, replenished their military elite from the conquered peoples of the Balkans, and diffused any tendency toward ethnic self-assertion by the institution of the *millet* system based on religious affiliation. "Assuming the cosmopolitanism and the ethnic indifference of the `Abbasids, the Ottomans found an a-national empire *par excellence*, where Islamic laws and courts have universal authority and where, no matter of their ethnic affiliations, the peoples are equally linked to the sultan by the bond of Islam, communicating in the same essentially religious solidarity."[42]

Unlike the previous Islamic empires, the Ottomans were not able to suppress the ethnic identity of the Arabs much longer. This was the result of three forces. In part it was due to the fact that they replaced Arabic with Turkish as the official language of the empire. For the Arab ethnie this was another attack on its identity. In part it reflected the distribution of power. After the pinnacle of Ottoman power under Süleyman I (1520-66), the Turkish elite lost its leading position to their military elite, the Janissary *aghas*. Finally, the Empire began to feel the military power of Europe. The process, which had been underway since the Empire had granted the Europeans political and economic privileges in the Capitulations, was accentuated by a series of defeats after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699). The Ottoman Empire came under the crossfire of European differences. Under Selim III (1789-1807) the Empire opened itself to Europe. The reforms in the wake of the *khatt-i sherif* of Gülkhane (1839) and the *khatt-i hümayun* (1856) prepared the path for imperialist European countries to gain complete control over the Empire. When after World War I the imperialist countries of Europe no longer needed the integrity of the Ottoman Empire as a buffer against one another, they divided it along territorial lines. Neither Islamic nor ethnic affiliations were

preserved in the territorial states that gained independence after World War II.

What did this process mean for the Arab ethnie? Whereas Arab identity (although alienated) had been preserved under the `Abbasid and Ottoman Caliphate by virtue of its mythomoteur Islam, European imperialism resulted in a double alienation: Ottoman Europeanization attempts were an immediate threat to Islam. In 1850 the Ottomans adapted French law for their Commercial Code as they did for the 1858 Penal Code. In the field of education the Imperial Rescript of 1846 suggested the parallel establishment of a modern educational system alongside the traditional Islamic schools. The government rather than the Islamic clergy would from now on supervise education.

In the provinces imperialism asserted itself more forcefully in its attempt to challenge the Arab ethnie. Here the Europeans did not confront the relatively strong centralized forces of the Empire directly. In their struggle for greater autonomy from the Ottomans, local potentates had already carved out their own pockets of autonomy, facilitating European economic and military intervention. On the one hand, Western capital flowed into the peripheral areas of the empire, leading (amongst other things) to the state bankruptcy of Egypt (1875) and its effective occupation and colonialization by Britain (1882). On the other hand, the European powers intervened against the centrifugal tendencies in the province in favor of the Ottoman central state (in order to prevent their respective competitors from gaining the upper hand).

Whereas the French exercised direct imperial control of most of the North African territories, in the East great power competition resulted in cultural penetration. European influence became most acute in the region of Greater Syria. In Lebanon European merchants helped to create a new middle class from among the Christian notables by favoring them over their Muslim counterparts. At the same time when the French military occupied Algeria (1830), American, British and French missionaries were becoming active among the Syrian-Lebanese Christians, breaking up the century-old peaceful cohabitation of different religious communities by redefining ethnic identity in terms of religion. Perhaps the most blatant attack on the Arab ethnie was the European interventions in Lebanon. After the bloody revolts between Christians and Druzes during the 1840s and 1850s, the European powers agreed with the

Ottomans on military intervention in favor of the beleaguered Christians. The outcome of this venture, the *Règlement Organique* of 1864, assigned a fixed number of Christians, Muslims, and Druzes to the administration of the province.

More important than the fact that these arrangements were imposed on the Ottoman Empire is that they divided Arab territory along confessional lines. Christians and Muslims were granted equal representation regardless of ethnic affiliation. By this measure the European powers hoped to perpetuate the Ottoman administrative principle of millets which for centuries had kept the various minorities in check. They overlooked the fact that they did not possess the Islamic legitimacy of the Ottomans rulers. Taken together with secular Westernization, confessionalism implemented by non-Muslims now assumed a new meaning for the Arabs. It constituted an immediate threat on the second mythomoteur of the Arab ethnie.

In order to escape ethnocide, the Arabs revitalized their other mythomoteur, `Urubah. In Egypt where Muhammad Ali's modernization had made the most progress, al-Barudi (d. 1904), Shawqi (d. 1932), al-Tahtawi (d. 1873), `Ali Mubarak (d. 1893), and Muhammad `Abduh (d. 1905) tried to rejuvenate the Arabic language. Butrus al-Bustani (d. 1883), Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (d. 1887), Husayn al-Marsafi (d. 1890) and others appealed to the noble past of the Arabs, which, as soon as it was purged of all obsolete elements would once again enable them to rise to their previous grandeur. In Syria a number of cultural societies were founded. The Society of Refinement (*Jam`iyah al-tadhib*, founded 1845-6), the Oriental Society (*al-Jam`iyyah al-sharqiyyah*, f. 1850), the Syrian Society (*al-Jam`iyyah al-suriyyah*, 1847-52), and the Literary Authority (*al-`Umdah al-adabiyya*), to mention but a few, promoted literary revival and the development of strong ties to the Arab nation.

In the peripheral regions of the Empire, the notion that Islam had been corrupted under Ottoman rule emerged. The Wahhabi movement in the Arabian Peninsula and the Sanusiyyah in North Africa demanded the return to a pure Islam (Salafiyyah). The Ottoman Sultan `Abdülhamid recognized the rising assertiveness of the Arab ethnie and tried to counteract possible unrest by emphasizing the significance of Islam. Not only did the Sultan emphasize the importance of the Ottoman caliphate, he

also made it clear that the territorial integrity of the Empire was the precondition for the preservation of this element of Arab identity.

It is therefore not surprising that many Islamic reformists at that time advocated the rejuvenation of Islam *and* Arabic within the institutional framework of the Ottoman Empire. In the opinion of al-Zahrawi, Rafiq al-`Azm, and Shakib Arslan the interests of the Arab ethnie were safer under Ottoman domination than under the rule of the European imperial powers. For them existence in a non-ethnic state was preferable to the double alienation under European control.

Things changed when the Young Turks came to power (1909). Their attempts to Turkify the different ethnies of the Empire was intolerable for the Arabs. Their joint opposition to the Young Turks' attack gave the Arab ethnie a degree of cohesion it had never had before. A number of secret and expatriate societies such as the Society for Arab-Ottoman Brotherhood (*Jam`iyyah al-ikha' al-`arabi al-`uthmani*), the *Qahtaniyyah*, the Young Arab Society (*al-Jam`iyyah al-`arabiyyah al-fatat*), and the Decentralization Party demanded greater freedoms for the Arabs under the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire. And the majority of nationalist thinkers like al-Qasimi (d. 1916), al-`Uraysi (d. 1916), or `Umar Fakhuri (d. 1946) wanted to maintain the integrity of the Empire only if the Arabs were allowed to keep their ethnic identity. Of course there were those who proposed the creation of an independent Arab kingdom. At least for the time being, these voices, which had their chief proponent in the Lebanese Maronite Najib Azuri, were in the minority. As long as the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire was still intact, most supporters of the Arab ethnie believed that they could somehow arrange a compromise.

More and more it became obvious that the unity of the Empire would not last much longer. When Turkey entered the First World War on the side of the axis powers, the Arabs under the leadership of Sharif Husayn revolted (1916). In this context it is relatively unimportant that the Arab Revolt was sponsored by the British, and primarily served British imperial interests in the region. What mattered was that McMahon promised the Arabs their own state, one that would ensure the integrity of their ethnie.

The betrayal of the Arabs in the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) and the subsequent imposition of the Franco-British mandate system did not eliminate the Arab quest for ethnic survival. It did however redirect the strategies of how survival should be ensured. Each of these strategies emphasized one mythomoteur of the Arab ethnie over the other; each one seemed to approach the problem from a different angle. In the final analysis all of them attempted to escape ethnocide of the Arabs which under European control was much more threatening than ever before.

Under the mandate system three different strategies of ethnic survival emerged. The first school of thought continued where the pre-war pan-Ottomanism had ended. The circle around Hassan al-Banna, Ali `Abd al-Raziq and the Muslim Brethren claimed that for Arabs there was nothing outside Islam. Only a return to the true roots of Islam would enable Arabs to fend off imperialist advances. The second school paid no attention whatsoever to Islam. Antun Sa`adah accepted the territorial division of the Arab world and maintained that it consisted of four different geographic zones, each of which had developed a distinct nationality: Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, the Nile valley, and the Maghrib (North Africa). In his opinion "a nation stems not from a common ethnic origin, but from the unifying process of the social environment."[43] Sa`adah stressed the imaginary character of the Arab nation. For him it was a purely cultural-linguistic concept which in everyday political affairs was of little importance. Instead of concentrating on the unobtainable goal of Arab unity, he suggested that the Arabs should construct their different states as building blocks of Arab civilization.

The third school of thought tried to reintegrate both mythomoteurs. Usually referred to as Arab Nationalists, the most outstanding of these thinkers were Sati` al-Husari, Constantin Zurayq, Sami Shawkat, `Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, `Abd Allah al-Alayli, and Edmond Rabbath. With a few exceptions they agreed on two basic principles. For them Islam was an inseparable element of Arab history. Only by subordinating religion to Arabism was it possible to gain the support of non-Muslim intellectuals. The Lebanese Christian Edmond Rabbath declared that, "Islam is the national religion of the Arabs. There is no Islamic history, only Arab history."[44] This was a systematic attempt to rehabilitate the concept of ethnicity that had been discredited since the fall of the

Umayyad Empire. The second point of agreement was the definition of the elements which constituted the Arab ethnie. First and foremost it was a linguistic and cultural community. It was especially the former adherents of the pan-Ottomanist ideal around Sati` al-Husari and Shakib Arslan who projected their previous identification with the dissolved Empire onto the imagined Arab ethnie. Although they did not condemn regional nationalisms outright, they always considered these affiliations inferior to affiliation with the Arab nation.

It is true that these Arab nationalists have been criticized for their a-humanist vision of the future Arab nation, and for their neglect of democratic values and institutions.[45] However, one has to keep in mind that the task of overcoming the century-old alienation of the Arab ethnie required all the energies of these intellectuals. In their opinion, the modes of political interaction among the Arabs would follow once their ethnic identity had been formalized.

After World War II, the Arab ethnie lost the tenuous territorial basis for unity it had maintained during the Mandate. For some time the Zionist challenge let ethnic self-defense appear a politically viable option. Michel `Aflaq's call for "nationalism, unity, and socialism" in the Arab world, as well as Gamal `Abd al-Nasser's attempt to form the United Arab Republic together with Syria and Yemen (1958) showed that the idea of ethnic unity lived on. When the Arab ethnie, already territorially fragmented, came into the crossfire of the Soviet-American superpower conflict, the new rulers abandoned the Islamic mythomoteur in favor of the ideology of the respective superpower. A number of short-lived unification attempts followed. For example, in 1971 Egypt, Libya and Sudan established the Federation of Arab Republics, Egypt and Libya formed a unified state in 1973, and in 1980 Libya and Syria tried to merge. Since almost all of them appealed to political and economic integration, they were doomed to failure. Without recourse to both of the ethnie's mythomoteurs, unification seems to be impossible.

The anti-imperialist Islamic resurgence in the wake of the Iranian revolution in part tries to redress this shortcoming. Islamic fundamentalism by Arab groups maintains the Ottoman option.[46] If (unrealistic though it might sound) the Arab ethnie were once again integrated within a large non-ethnic Islamic Empire, it

would at least escape the alienation from one of its mythomoteurs. If this empire were further based on ethnic pluralism, the Arabs would be able to restore their ethnic identity.

However, Arab Islamic fundamentalists face one problem. Present-day political fundamentalism started out as the anti-imperial struggle of the Persian ethnie. By embracing the Islamic solution, Arab fundamentalists run the risk of ethnic confrontation. In the short run this danger seems to be negligible in the face of the complete loss of Arab identity. But over time ethnic differences will reemerge. As the Iran-Iraq war demonstrated, the danger of a clash between the two ethnies is more than merely a hypothetical possibility. Iran's sponsorship of fundamentalist factions in various Arab countries should not obscure the fact that for both donor and recipients such support is merely instrumental to short-term political goals. The ultimate motive of Arab Islamic fundamentalists is and remains the preservation of their ethnie. Compared to the impending ethnocide by the West, the collaboration of the Iranian ethnie certainly appears to be the minor evil. Since the secular appeal to `Urubah could not withstand the force of the West, for the time being politicized religion is seen as the panacea for ethnic survival.

Conclusion

The concept of an Arab ethnie with its mythomoteurs Islam and `Urubah enables us to understand certain features of Arab nationalism that would otherwise appear contradictory. Arab nationalism originated long before the emergence of nation states. I argued that the primary motive of Arabs in history has been ethnic survival. Such survival was ensured so long as at least one of the ethnie's mythomoteurs remained intact. Whereas the Umayyads preserved both Islam and `Urubah, the `Abbasids and Ottomans alienated the Arab ethnie from `Urubah in their universalist, non-ethnic religious empires. The Arab ethnie survived because Islam kept alive a large part of the value system of `Urubah. The fact that Islam served as a unifying ideology between the different ethnies of the empire prevented major confrontations. Only after the Young Turks and imperialism besieged Islam did Arab nationalism arise as a clear-cut political ideology. It was the politicized expression of Arab ethnic self-preservation. Modern

Arab-Islamic fundamentalism serves the same purpose: It postulates the return to a pluralistic religious empire in which the double alienation of the Arab ethnie would be dissolved.

This interpretation does not imply that Arab nationalists or Arab fundamentalists are always aware that they advocate the proliferation of their ethnie. Neither do I disregard fundamentalism's roots in concrete economic grievances. On the contrary, without the exploitation of the Middle Eastern countries by a secularized Western elite, and the subsequent alienation of large strata of society from traditional value systems, these movements would probably not have emerged. Consciously or unconsciously, however, their adherents follow the historical heritage of the Arab ethnie. Under different political conditions they might well become aware that their religious struggle of today in reality serves the preservation of their ethnie, a community which by reference to its mythomoteurs Islam and `Urubah and by its recourse to *turath* (tradition), has over the centuries been imagined and reimagined again and again.

Notes:

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1. Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism," in Tawfic E. Farah, ed., *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate* (Boulder and London: Westview, 1987), 96-114. [Originally published in *Foreign Affairs* v. 57, 2 (Winter 1978/79): 355-73.]

2. Cf. Edmund Burke, III, and Ira M. Lapidus, eds., *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988).

3. Reinhard Schulze, "Weil sie ganz anders sind: Alte Klischees verstellen uns den Blick auf einen Orient im Aufbruch," in *Die Zeit* 10 (March 8, 1991): 19; or Heinz Halm, "Die Panikmacher: Wie im Westen der Islam zum neuen Feindbild aufgebaut wird," in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Feuilleton-Beilage 40 (February 16-17, 1991).

4. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

5. Israeli Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, quoted in David Hoffman, "Israel Seeking to Convince U.S. that West is Threatened by Iran," *Washington Post* (March 13, 1993): 14.

6. Anthony Lewis, "It's not Over," *New York Times* (Jan. 11, 1991): sec. A, p. 29; Jonathan C. Randal, "PLO Sees Gulf Peace Crucial to Its Cause," *Washington Post* (Jan. 8, 1991): sec. A, p. 12; Robert V. Keeley, "Handwriting on the Wall," *Washington Post* (Jan. 4, 1991): sec. A, p. 17.

7. Bernard Lewis, "What Saddam Wrought," *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 2, 1991): sec. A, p. 8; Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Daedalus* 122,3 (Summer 1993): 171-206.

8. Mohammad H. Heikal, "The Future Arab World: An Overview," in Hani A. Faris, ed., *Arab Nationalism and the Future of the Arab World* (Belmont, Mass.: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1987 [AAUG Monograph Series: No. 22]), 6.

9. For an overview of a number of different approaches, cf. Elie Chalala, "Arab Nationalism: A Bibliographic Essay," in Tawfic E. Farah, ed., *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate* (Boulder and London: Westview, 1987), 50-1.

10. Fahim I. Qubain, *Inside the Arab Mind: A Bibliographic Survey of Literature in Arabic on Arab Nationalism and Unity. With an annotated list of English-language books and articles* (Arlington, VA: Middle East Research Associates, 1960).

11. Rashid Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature," *American Historical Review* (Dec. 1991): 1363.

12. E.g. Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Rashid Khalidi, "Social Factors in the Rise of the Arab Movement in Syria," in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 53-70, (and other case studies in the same volume); Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

13. In this essay, "ideology" does not refer merely to the institutionalization of certain ideas in the form of political programs. Instead it alludes to a complex interaction between ideas and reality both having an impact on one another without the one necessarily being in a causal or linear relationship with the other. For a suggestion for a reformulation of an Arab/Muslim ideology, cf., Bassam Tibi, "Islam and Secularization," *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 66,2 (1980): 206-22. "Culture" is used in the Geertzean sense of constituting a social system.

14. Bassam Tibi, *Vom Gottesreich zum Nationalstaat: Islam und panarabischer Nationalismus* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1987 [Originally

published as *Nationalismus in der Dritten Welt am arabischen Beispiel* (Frankfurt/M, 1971) [English translation by Marion and Peter Sluglett, *Arab Nationalism. A Critical Enquiry* (New York and London, 1981).] Cf., however, a critique of the concept of acculturation: C. Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana/Chicago/London: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 198 *ff.*

15. A useful starting point would be the article by Martin Allor, "Information, Institution, and Ideology: On the Discursive Control of Communications Systems," in Jennifer Daryl Slack and Fred Frjes, eds., *The Ideology of the Information Age* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1987), 15-23.

16. An extreme but not unusual case of this delayed reception is Gordon Welty "Progressive Versus Reactive Nationalism: The Case of the Arab Nation," in Hani A. Faris, ed., *Arab Nationalism and the Future of the Arab World* (Belmont, Mass.: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1987), 119-127. Welty uses works of Lewis Henry Morgan (1877), Robert Michels (1915), and Carlton Hayes (1928).

17. Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1983); John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

18. Christine M. Helms, *Arabism and Islam: Stateless Nations and Nationless States* (National Defense University: The Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1990), 5.

19. The term was coined by Waker Conner, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of Educational Affairs* 27,1 (1973).

20. Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 32.

21. The term was coined by Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals, "A Propos du Legs Visigothique en Espagne," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alt. Medioevo* 2 (1958): 541-85. [Cited in Armstrong (n.), 8 *f.*]

22. Anthony Smith, "The myth of the `Modern Nation' and the myths of nationalism," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 11,1(January 1988): 2.

23. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 50.

24. Ernst B. Haas, "What is nationalism and why should we study it?" *International Organization* 40,3 (Summer 1986): 726-729.

25. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 138.

26. Ibid., 154 *ff.*

27. Ibid., 157.

28. Ibid., 148. The following elements can be found in any nationalist mythology:

1) a myth of origins in time; i.e. when the community was `born'; 2) a myth of origins in space; i.e. where the community was `born'; 3) a myth of ancestry; i.e. who bore us, and how we descend from him/her; 4) a myth of migration; i.e. whither we wandered; 5) a myth of liberation; i.e. how we were freed; 6) a myth of the golden age; i.e. how we became great and heroic; 7) a myth of decline; i.e. how we decayed and were conquered/exiled; and 8) a myth of rebirth; i.e. how we shall be restored to our former glory. (Ibid., 192)

29. Ibid., 178.

30. Ibid., 202.

31. No doubt, there are other short-term motives for the study of nationalism. Ernst B. Haas, for example, analyzes nationalism in order "explore its role as a type of "rationalization" which helps or hinders domestic and international harmony." Haas, 708.

32. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Arab Cultural Consolidation: A Response to European Colonialism?" *Islamic Quarterly* 19, 1-2 (1975): 30-41.

33. This does not mean that in the Arab world colonialism did not resort to violence. The French occupation of Algeria and the Italian occupation of Libya are a case in point. In comparison to the colonial domination of Africa, however, violence was relatively restricted.

34. Cf. the various articles in the prolific anthologies of Sylvia G. Haim and Kemal H. Karpat. Sylvia G. Haim, ed., *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2nd printing 1964); Kemal H. Karpat, ed., *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

35. Cf. Nikki Keddie's emphasis on Afghani's pragmatism ("Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 41,1 (March 1969): 17-28.) Note the fact that Shakib Arslan has been classified under Pan-Islamism, Islamic Reformism, and Arab nationalism respectively. William L. Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign of Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press), xiv.

36. Isma`il Ragi A. al-Faruqi, *On Arabism: `Urubah and Religion. A Study of the Fundamental Ideas of Arabism and of Islam as its Highest Moment of Consciousness* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1962), IX. An interesting discussion on the relation between Islam and *`Urubah* can be found in Amin Huwaydi et al., *Al-`Urubah wa al-Islam: `Alaqat jadidah* (Beirut: Nadwah nasir al-fikriyyah al-khamisah, 1981).

37. `Abd al-`Aziz Duri, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation: A Study in Identity and Consciousness* (London/New York/Sydney: Croom Helm and Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1987), 119-120.

38. al-Faruqi, 206.

39. Ibid., 208.

40. For the significance of descendence in pre-Islamic times, cf. Duri, 10-12.

41. Charles Rizk, *Entre l'Islam et l'arabisme: Les Arabes jusqu'en 1945* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1983), 44.

42. Rizk, 74 (my translation).

43. Quoted in Rizk, 303 (my translation).

44. Edmond Rabbath, *Unité syrienne et devenir Arabe* (Paris: Rivière, 1937). Quoted in Rizk, 296 (my translation).

45. Rizk, 300-302.

46. Youssef M. Choueiri, *Arab History and the Nation-State: A Study in Modern Arab Historiography, 1820-1980* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 197.

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