Arab Nationalism from a Historical Perspective: A Gradual Demise?

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Abstract

Arab nationalism emerged as a secular ideology in the early 20th century in the Ottoman Empire. During the First World War, it proved influential enough to motivate an Arab rebellion against the Ottomans and, following the war, several Arab states were founded. Its popularity rose in the interwar period, and many Arab mandates became independent after the Second World War. Its popularity peaked at the hands of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958 when Syria and Egypt united to form the United Arab Republic. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab nationalism began losing its appeal and declined dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s. At the turn of the 21st century, Arab nationalism became an almost irrelevant ideology in the Middle East. This study examines the birth, the dramatic rise, and the sudden decline of Arab nationalism from a historical perspective and concludes that Arab nationalism today, as an ideology, is on the brink of demise.

Keywords: political history;Arab nationalism; pan-Arabism; Islam

Tarihsel Perspektiften Arap Milliyetçiliği: Tedrici Bir Ölüm Mü?

Özet

Arap milliyetçiliği 20. yüzyılın başlarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda seküler bir ideoloji olarak ortaya çıktı. Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında Osmanlılara karşı bir Arap ayaklanmasını motive edecek kadar etkili oldu ve savaştan sonra birkaç Arap devleti kuruldu. Arap milliyetçiliğinin popüleritesi iki savaş arası dönemde yükseldi ve birçok Arap devleti İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra bağımsız hale geldiler. 1958'de Suriye ve Mısır, Birleşik Arap Cumhuriyeti'ni kurmak için birleştiklerinde Arap milliyetçiliğinin popüleritesi zirve yaptı. 1967 Arap-İsrail Savaşı'ndan sonra albenisini kaybetmeye başlayan Arap milliyetçiliği ve 1970'ler ile 1980'ler boyunca dramatik bir şekilde düşüşe geçti. Bugün 21. yüzyılın başında Arap milliyetçiliği Ortadoğu'da neredeyse yersiz bir ideoloji haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma tarihsel bir perspektiften Arap milliyetçiliğinin doğuşu, dramatik yükselişi ve hızlı düşüşünü incelemekte ve bir ideoloji olarak Arap milliyetçiliğinin bugün bir ölümün eşiğinde olduğu sonucuna ulaşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: siyasi tarih; Arap milliyetçiliği; pan-Arabizm; İslam

Introduction

Arab nationalism was born as a secular ideology in the heated political atmosphere of the early 20th century. Deeply influenced by the Turkification policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (henceforth CUP) (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) in the first decades of the 20th century, it gradually earned the appeal of educated Arabs in the Empire, mainly in pivotal cities such as Istanbul, Damascus and Beirut. Its genesisis closely connected to the identity crisis of Arab elites who were brought up in a secular lifestyle and received Western education in newly-founded modern schools of the Empire after the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization) reforms which were put into effect in the 19th century. With the intellectual and military support of the British Empire, it triggered an Arab rebellion against the Ottoman troops during the First World War, after which a number of Arab states were founded as mandates under either Britain or France.

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The interwar period experienced several anti-colonial revolts with the aim of gaining independence from the colonial rulers. These revolts became the primary force behind the rise of Arab nationalism at that time (Tibi, 1997: 45-48). Therefore, for example, Hitler's assaults on the Alliance were happily welcomed by the Arab governments which leaned towards Arab nationalism during the Second World War (Nicosia, 1980: 351). After the Second World War, several Arab nations gained independence, and emergence of a charismatic leader, the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, became the last piece in the puzzle. Arab nationalism lived its heyday in late 1950s when, in 1958, Egypt and Syria were united to form the United Arab Republic (henceforth UAR) which only lived three years. When Nasser was severely defeated in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,the decline of Arab nationalism began. In the following years, Arab nationalism gradually vanished from the political arena of the Middle East, opening room for Islamism.

In this article, firstly, the birth and rise of Arab nationalism are investigated in parallel with the rise of the secular Arab elites in the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 20th century. The political atmosphere, in which Arab nationalism originated, and the intellectuals, in whose hands it was utilized as a political instrument to gain legitimacy, are examined. Secondly, the relationship between Islam and Arab nationalism is investigated. Arguments of the Arab nationalist theorists to reach a compromise between Arab nationalism and Islam will be given a critical treatment. Afterwards, contours of the miscellaneous patterns of Arab nationalism are drawn to observe more clearly inner tensions of Arab nationalism. In this part, three basic nationalist semi-ideologies in the Arab regions of the Middle East, namely (1) nation-state Arab nationalism(s), (2) Pan-Arabism, and (3) socialist Arab nationalism, are comparatively examined. Then, the decline of Arab nationalism after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War when Arabs were severely defeated is analyzed. Lastly, the current situation of Arab nationalism is shortly examined and a projection into the future of Arab nationalism is provided.

1. The Birth and the Rise of Arab Nationalism

Modernization in the Ottoman Empire dates back to the late 18th century. Debates among the well-educated Ottoman elites about the reasons for the economic backwardness and political disorder in the Empire then gave birth to quests for reform. In this political setting, various Western political ideas began to infiltrate into the Empire, sometimes via those who had been sent to the Western countries for receiving higher education. When these Ottoman students returned home, they brought Western ideas and concepts such as liberty, equality, and nation. With the gradually increasing use of newspapers in the 19th-century Ottoman lands, these ideas began to spread among the elites. Some of the Westernized Ottoman intellectuals later became Ottoman statesmen oradvisers to the Ottoman sultans, which gave a further fillip to the Westernization in the Ottoman Empire (Findley, 2010).

In those days when the Empire was under existential threat in many fronts, quick solutions to extend its life appealed to the Ottoman statesmen. *Tanzimat* reforms in

1839 were the greatest leap forward in this respect in the 19th century. At the same time, the more the Empire weakened, the more other states put pressure on the Ottoman administrations to make reforms. The Imperial Reform Edict (also known as *Islahat* reforms), which were part of the *Tanzimat* reforms, came as the second leap towards the ideal of Westernization in 1856. On the one hand, the Empire sought to adopt Western institutions such as the parliament; on the other, it endeavored to oppress the nationalist and secessionist movements in various parts of its vast territory, especially in the Balkans. The secession of the Greeks, of the Serbians, and of the Bulgarians fostered the idea of Turkish nationalism which was adopted by the CUP which captured the political power in 1908 by a palace coup called The Young Turk Revolution against Abdul Hamid II who had been leading the Empire for about three decades (Tibi, 1997: 106-110). The CUP propagated the idea of Turkish nationalism on intellectual platforms, in particular at the newly-founded modern Western-type schools of the Empire, as well as putting it into effect, which would later be called the *Turkification policies*. The primary region affected by these policies was the Arab lands in the Middle East. Arab nationalism was born in such a political environment in the early 20th century (Dündar, 2002: 30-36; Dündar, 2008).

Rubin argues (1991: 535) that the triggering idea of Arab nationalism was the perception that something fundamental was wrong with Arabswho were much poorer and less powerful than the Europeans. A number of leading Arab intellectuals who were brought up at the modern Western schools that were established with the *Tanzimat* reforms contended that new ways should be developed to save the Arabs from their current backwardness (*al-takhalluf*). In this respect, they contended that Arab nationalism was the way forward for "the Arab nation." According to their thinking, the centuries-long economic, political, social, scientific, and cultural crisis (*al-azmah*) of the Arab nation would be terminated by the accomplishment of the Arab nationalist goals, the foremost of which was to bring all the Arabs together and create a great Arab state. The glory of the Arab nation, which the world saw in the medieval era, would return by the breakaway of Arab societies from the Ottomans who captured the "Arab fatherland," colonized it, and caused its laggingbeing the West. Some of these Arab nationalists believed that the Arabs were on the edge of becoming powerful again, thereby creating the old magnificent Arabic civilization (Pfaff, 1970: 162).[2]

Similarly, Gelvin argues (1994: 646) that the birth of Arab nationalism is interconnected with the emergence of the belief that the Ottoman administration was not legitimate in the Middle East. That is, when the Ottoman Empire began weakening in the Middle East and becoming vulnerable to a possible attempt of colonializationby the Europeans, the power vacuum was immediately noticed by the local Arab elites who received modern education and adopted Western political

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[2] For an exhaustive treatment of the philosophical origins of Arab nationalism, see Stephen P. Halbrook (1982), Left Hegelianism, Arab Nationalism, and Labor Zionism. *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*. VI(2), 181-199. For another comprehensive work on the origins of Arab nationalism, see C. Ernst Dawn (1973). *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. For a short article on the same subject, see M. A. Aziz (1956). The Origins of Arab Nationalism. *Pakistan Horizon*. 9(1), 29-37.

ideas. Gelvin explains (1994: 645) this phenomenon by the term "political sociability" which he defines as the "specific mode of organizing the relations between citizens (or subjects) and power, as well as among citizens (or subjects) themselves in relation to power." In this respect, he argues that the *Tanzimat* and the ensuing reforms led to a decrease in the political sociability of the Ottoman state system. New patterns of political sociability, which are modern, like nationalism, started to fill this gap. Arab nationalists took advantage of this political and social setting; they emphasized the importance of the Arabic language vis-a-vis Turkish, glorified Arabic civilization in the Middle Ages, reminded the Arabs about their primary role in the spread of Islam. These activities amounted to a smooth transformation from vertical political sociability into a horizontal populist political sociability.

However, Gelvin (1994: 657) does not overlook the role of the CUP's policies in the birth of Arab nationalism as well as the fact that Arab nationalism, to some extent, served as the ideological political instrument in the hands of the secular Arab elites providing them political legitimacy to rule over the Arab people. In other words, like in most of the other third-world countries, nationalism in Arab societies too were partly *created* by the Arab elites so as to serve as a political instrumentas well as being partly *born* as a natural socio-political phenomenon which filled the growing vacuum of political legitimacy after the erosion of the Ottoman power in the Middle East in the first decade of the 20th century. But there was not one single Arab nationalism as one monolithic ideology in a specific region at the hands of some particular people; it would be better to speak of various Arab *nationalisms*. Similarly, various dimensions of the birth of Arab nationalism should be handled separately to understand it better, and according to Haddad (1994: 202), there are basically three dimensions of its birth: the cultural, the social and the political dimension.

The cultural crisis of the Arabs in the modern era caused unease in the traditional Arabian life, which facilitated the infiltration and acceptance of modern ideas among the Ottoman Arabs. Cultural activities related to the Arabic language or Arabic customs are organized, mostly by the Christian Arabs, in pivotal cities of the Ottoman Empire such as Istanbul, Damascus, and Beirut. In local newspapers in the Middle East, victories of the Arabic history were glorified (Pfaff, 1970: 160). The first Arabs to organize these activities were Shukri al-Asali, Muhammad Kurd Ali, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, Abd al-Ghani al-Uraysi, Abd al-Wahhab al-Milihi, Salah al-Din al-Qasimi, Abd al-Karim al-Khalil and Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar (Khoury, 2003: 68-75; Haddad, 1994: 202).

As for the social dimension of the birth of Arab nationalism, it should be noted that Arab nationalismbegan burgeoningduringAbdul Hamid II's tenure (1876-1909). After Abdul Hamid II, the CUP introduced Turkification policies which include an increase in the number of Turkish officials and a decrease in the number of Arab officials in the Ottomancities of the Middle East, a decrease in the number of high-level Arab bureaucrats in the entire Empire and the promotion of Turkish as the Empire's official language while downplaying other languages including Arabic. These policies begot unrest among the Arabs in the Middle East. State cadres were

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filled with Turks who were able to speak only Turkish, which brought about practical problems for the Arab citizens of the Empire who were unable to speak Turkish. Lawsuits in the courts started to be heard only in Turkish even though the parts did not know Turkish. In such cases, translators were called for (Haddad, 1994: 208). On April 4, 1910, the British council in Damascus reports (Haddad, 1994: 208):

> "The Ministry of Justice abolished the old system of assigning judicial membership in Damascus to natives elected for a term of two years, and appointed permanent members to fill these posts. Four of the newly appointed members are natives of Damascus, while the other eight are Turks. Similar procedure has been applied in four cazas of the vilayet, viz.: Homs, Baalbek, Bekka and Salt.

Haddad quotes (1994: 206) an Arab nationalist, al-Asali, complaining therefore: "A degree of injustice is in order here!... Is it possible that the Arab nation lacks competent young men for a position of an examining clerk? And yet we find in the Ministry of Finance 111 Turks, 13 Jews, 10 Armenians, 4 Greeks and not a single Arab."

The political dimension of the birth of Arab nationalism was the last piece to make it emerge as a full-fledged ideology. Arab nationalism as a political movement has its originsin at least three things: reaction to Turkish nationalism and pan-Turkism, reaction to Turco-centric Ottomanism of the CUP, andreaction to a possible European colonial control over the Arab lands, more specifically French colonialism (Haddad, 1994: 213).

Haddad states (1994: 213) that the first political society created by Arab nationalists was the Young Arabs Society (*Jam'iyyat al-Arabiyya al-Fatat*) which was founded in Istanbul as a secret society by Avni Abd al-Hadi and Muhammad Rustum Haydar as a replica of the Society of Young Turks. It aimed to foster the idea of Arab nationalism among the Arab citizens of the Empire and embarked on a campaign against the Turkification policies of the CUP. Furthermore, many Arab students formed small associations and organized grassroots activities, mainly in Istanbul, in the name of Arab nationalism. In this sense, Arab nationalism, politically speaking, started as a student movement whose members were studying at higher education institutions of the Empire, mainly in the fields of pharmacy, medicine, and engineering. At this point, one could easily see the striking similarity between the birth of Turkish nationalism as a student movement and the birth of Arab nationalism. The Arab nationalists thought that the Empire, more specifically the CUP cadre who ruled the empire until 1918after the 1908 Revolution, were treating the Ottoman Arabs in the way that the French treated the Algerians. The first student members of Arabic nationalist associations and small secret societies were mainly from among the Syrian Arabs. They prioritized the use of Arabic in all aspects of modern life, emphasized national solidarity among the Ottoman Arabs and sought to propagate Arab nationalism to recruit more members into their associations (Dawisha, 2003: 6-21). Nevertheless, Haddad argues (1994: 217) that Arab nationalism as a political movement was more of a reaction to the possibility of dissolution of the Empire and less of a reaction to the Turkification policies of

the CUP. In this sense, he argues that the foremost aim of the first members of the Arab nationalist movements was creating political power foci against a possible French invasion.

After its birth in Istanbul, Damascus, and Beirut almost simultaneously, Arab nationalism spread to other parts of the Arab lands such as Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt, being cast into different shapes at the hands of local elites and following different trajectories in each society.In Iraq, for instance, itbecame connected with a social class called *Effendiyya*—a term that was used for the Westernized land-owners living in Iraq, residing generally in cities, andremaining in the vicinity of the local state administration in the early 20th century (i.e., the CUP). They received Western education from the modern schools established by Abdul Hamid II, could speak several Western languages, wore Western clothes and led modern lives. These Westernized elites, who were suffering identity crisis with the advent of modernism and experiencing a breakup of their traditional social bonds, often quickly adopted Arab nationalism (Pfaff, 1970: 149). In other words, Arab nationalism carved room for itself in an age of loose identities among the Westernized *Effendiyya* class of the Iraqi society (Wien, 2006). Education was the primary tool for the Arab nationalists in Iraq to spread their ideologies whereas it was the newspaper in Syria and Lebanon. The first members of the nationalist associations were from among modern high school teachers and high school students in Iraq such as Sati al-Husri, Sami Shawkat, and Fadhil al-Jamali. The *Effendiyya* elites embraced Arab nationalism not only to ease their identity crisis but also to use it to manipulate the publicto gain political legitimacy and claim power to rule the society of the newly-founded Iraqi state in 1920s (Eppel, 1998: 228-235).

After the birth and rise of Arab nationalism which aimed at forming an opposition against the Turkification policies of the CUP and creating a sense of solidarity among the Arabs in the Middle East against a possible French occupation, the British was quick to manipulate it (i.e., Arab nationalism) against the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. Hussain ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca at that time, was provoked by Britainagainst the Ottomans during the war, and as a result of that, an Arab revolt beganin the Arabian Peninsulain 1918 against the Ottomans. With the purpose of founding an independent Arab state, the Arab rebels defeated the Ottoman troops and pushed them back to north of Damascus. Sharif's son, Faysal, became King of the newly declared Arab state stretching from Damascus to Hejaz, but Sykes-Picot agreement did not allow it to live independently after the war. Iraq and Egypt were taken under the British mandate and Syria under the French. This political deceit would generate much resentment among the Arab rebels, and various anti-Western and anti-colonialist revolts would break out in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt after the First World War (Karsh and Karsh, 2006: 374-377).

The biggest challenge Arab nationalism faced was the question of compatibility of Islam with the ideals of nationalism. Now this dilemma as the major obstacle before the Arab nationalist dreams will be given a critical treatment.

2. The Compatibility of Arab Nationalism with Islam

The first Arab nationalists, who were mostly not religious, were cognizant of the problem that a secular Arab nationalism would not appeal to most of the Arabs. At that time, there were already debates as to whether Islam might be a ground for political unity among the Muslims of the world. These debates would end up creating another political ideology which would later be called Islamism which originated before Arab nationalism. Hence, although Arab nationalism was not born as an ideology entangled with Islam like Islamism, its theorists felt compelled to compromise it with Islam to make it appealing to the Arabs because the idea of nationalism was attacked by various Muslim scholars and local religious leaders (*sheikhs*) on the grounds that it was irreligious. First members of the Arab nationalist associations and secret societies were either aware of that initially, or they grew aware of it over time. They developed many arguments to achieve the compromise between Arab nationalism and Islam and to oppose the Muslim scholars who advanced that these two cannot be reconciled (Morrison, 1948: 154-157).

Arab nationalists argue that the idea that Arab nationalism and Islam are incompatible with each other is a misperception of those who examined the European history without considering the context within which it emerged. The apparent contradiction between them was caused by aheedless treatment of the European history. They examine the specific events in European history such as the French Revolution which was connected to both French nationalism and anti-clericalism, thereby concluding that religion and nationalism cannot co-exist. The emergence of European *nationalisms*, which were usually indifferent to Christianity if not against it, is only a specific case that cannot be generalized as a statement that nationalism and religion cannot co-exist. Having made this point, al-Bazzaz (1954: 203) starts to give reasons for the misperception at hand.

Firstly, al-Bazzaz argues (1954: 204), Islam, unlike Christianity which is usually taken as a little more than a set of moral rules, is inherently a political religion. Therefore, it may get along with nationalism. Secondly, Arab nationalism is constructed on linguistic, cultural, historical, and spiritual grounds, not on racial and ethnic appeal like European nationalisms. Thirdly, the non-Arab powers in the Middle East throughout the history, such as the Ottomans, created a cosmopolitan doctrine out of Islam, which resulted in the birth of the perspective that Islam militates against any particularistic, parochial ideology like nationalism. This cosmopolitan view of Islam served as an instrument to downplay the role of the Arabs in building the glory of Islam in the history, which facilitated the rule of non-Arabs over the Arabs. Hence, al-Bazzaz concludes, Islam fosters Arab nationalism since the Arabs has always been the principal supporter of Islam.

After listing the reasons for the misperception of the incompatibility of Arab nationalism with Islam, al-Bazzaz (1954: 206) begins explaining his arguments which are commonly used after him by many other Arab nationalists. Firstly, he argues that Islam was first revealed to the Arabs, which means that, in the first place, it is their own religion. The prophet of Islam was an Arab, and the Qur'an

was revealed in the Arabic language. Many pre-Islamic traditional beliefs and rituals of the Arabs like the holiness of the Kaaba and the festival day of Friday was repeated after the advent of Islam, which means that Islamic rules include strong flavor of the quintessentially Arabic traditions. Secondly, Arab nationalists claimed to have found verses from the Qur'an which were supportive of Arab nationalism. They give verse 2 of the Surat *Yusuf* running, "We have revealed it an Arabic Qur'an that you may be wise" as an example of the inherent existence of Arabic nationalism in Islam. Other Qur'anic verses they indicate as examples of the compatibility of Islam with Arab nationalism include the following: "We have never sent a messenger save with the language of his people (*Ibrahim*, 4);" "It is indeed a reminder for you and four your people and you shall be questioned (*al-Zakhraf*, 24);" "We have thus made you a middle nation that you may witness against mankind and that the Prophet may witness against you (*al-Baqara*, 143);" "We have made it easy in thy language only that they be warned (*al-Dukhkhan*, 58);" "He it is who sent to the unlettered a Messenger from among themselves to recite to them his verses, to give them grace, and to teach them the Scripture and the Wisdom (*al-Jum'a*, 2);" "There has come to you a Messenger one of yourselves, to whom all that you suffered is important (*al-Tawba*, 128);" "Your people have denied it but it is the truth (*al-An'am*, 66);" "We have sent thee only in mercy for mankind (*al-Anbiya*, 107)."

Apart from the Qur'an, Arab nationalists claim that Muhammad made several remarks which supported Arab nationalism. They point to several *Hadiths* as examples, among which are: "Power will remain in Quraysh so long as two of them still exist," "The Imams are from Quraysh," "O Salman, do not hate me and part with your religion," to which Salman, a Persian friend and follower of Muhammad, asks "O Prophet of God, how can I hate you seeing that it is through you that God directed us?" The Prophet responds by saying "If you hate the Arabs, you hate me (Haddad, 1954: 208)."

Furthermore, the fact that Muslims levied the *jizya* tax on members of other religions outside the Arabian Peninsula, demonstrated that the Arabian Peninsula, the bulk of whose inhabitants were Arabs, has a special place in the emergence and spread of Islam. Moreover, Islam espoused good Arab traditions like the festivity of Friday and the respect paid to Kaaba but removed bad traditions of the pre-Islamic Arab societies. Thus, Islam has still many Arabic characteristics. The efforts of the first Muslims who were predominantly Arabs were regarded by the Arab nationalists as the indication of the authenticity of their argument that Islam and Arab nationalism can co-exist. The first Arab Muslims such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ibn Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, Khalid, Ali and many others endeavored to spread Islam on earth. It was they who achieved the greatest victories of Islam just after the demise of Muhammad. The following Arab generation created one of the brightest civilizations on earth, the center of which is Baghdad, in the Middle Ages. The fluency and eloquence of the Arabic language before the revelation of the Qur'an was deemed another element of this compatibility in question since the Qur'an reassures this by being revealed in Arabic (Haddad, 1954: 206-212).

These are the arguments traditionally used by the Arab nationalists to support their view that Arab nationalism is compatible with Islam. That said, Arab nationalism is not a monolithic entity and contain miscellaneous patterns. In various regions, various Arab *nationalisms* emerged. Next section analyzes various patterns in Arab nationalism.

3. An Arab Triumvirate: Three Patterns of Arab Nationalism

The part of the globe that has been inhabited by the Arabs stretches from Libya to Iraq, from Syria to Yemen. In this vast region, Arab nationalism has taken many different patterns, three of which are of particular import. These are (1) nation-state Arab nationalism(s), (2) Pan-Arabism, and (3) socialist Arab nationalism.

Nation-state Arab nationalisms have different fashions in different countries. Iraqi example has been mentioned in the first half of this study. It is relatively moderate and somewhat tinged with socialism. Syrian Arab nationalism is similar to the Iraqi one because of the influence of the Baath Party in both countries but Syria is smaller and historically weaker than Iraq, which results in the fact that Syrian Arabs have less nation-state based Arab nationalism. Iraq, having a relatively greater territory, dreams at times to be the vanguard of the Arabic *Umma*. This dream was specifically strong when Saddam Hussain was in power in Iraqwith a considerable military strength (Devlin, 1991: 1405). On the contrary, in Syria where national identity is ambiguous, there is a historical tendency towards the unity of all Arab states. The attempt of the creation of the UAR between 1958 and 1961 under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser is telling in this sense.

Compared to the Syrians, the Egyptians have much stronger sense of national identity—a perception that claims a history of thousands of years in the lands of the ancient pharaohs.[3] Egypt, similar to Iraq, has relatively greater territory, as well as having a strategic location geopolitically. It is also the most populous country of the Arab world, having a population of more than 80 million people as of 2017. Many common Egyptians, therefore, see themselves as the pioneers of the Arab societies. However, whereas the Syrian nationalism transcend the borders, the Egyptian nationalism is more dependent on the Egyptian borders (Kienle, 1995: 53).

The case of the Palestinian nationalism is more complicated than those of the Iraqi, Syrian, and Egyptian. There are three Palestinian movements each of which enjoys different nationalistic sentiments. First of them was founded in 1948 after the catastrophe of *Nakba*under the name of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) and was generally supported by the urban middle and upper-middle class Palestinian students. Having emerged in Beirut as a student movement, it was shaped by the secular intellectual climate of Lebanon. It embraced the ideology of Arab nationalism, with Palestine at the heart of the Arab nation. Later in 1950s and 1960s, it embraced socialist Arab nationalism with the purpose of achieving

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[3] For a comprehensive examination of the roots of the Egyptian nationalism, see Ralph M. Coury (1983), Who "Invented" Egyptian Arab Nationalism?, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14(3), 249-281.

political unity of all the Arab states. Its principal goal was to transform the Palestinian society and liberate Palestine by Arab action (Baumgarten, 2005: 44). The second pattern of the Palestinian Arab nationalism was Fatah (formerly the Palestine National Liberation Movement), which was established in late 1950s. Being founded by lower-middle class urban refugees from the Palestinian city of Gaza in the aftermath of the war, it aimed to found a separate and independent Palestinian state (Muslih, 1987: 83-87). Influenced by socialism, it reached its pinnacle with the rise of the charisma of its leader, YasserArafat (Baumgarten, 2005: 44). The third pattern of the Palestinian Arab nationalism, Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement), was founded after the first *intifada* in 1987 by the camp refugees of Gaza who were also members of the Society of Muslim Brotherhood. The principal aims of Hamas are to Islamize the Palestinian society and to liberate Palestine (Baumgarten, 2005: 44).[4]

After sketching out the contours of the four types of nation-state Arab nationalisms, namely the Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian, and Palestinian nationalisms, the second pattern of Arab nationalism is Pan-Arabism. It aims to unite all Arabs under one single polity. Unlike nation-state Arab nationalisms, it contains a much stronger flavor of Islam. In this sense, many Islamic and Islamist movements among the Arab societies also support the Pan-Arabic ideal of achieving the unity of *Umma* which has also be regarded as a desirable idea in the Islamic tradition (Rubin, 1991). Many Islamic and Islamist movements in the Middle East embraced the ideal of Pan-Arabism as one of their aims since it has been regarded as Islamic, thus unlike secular Arab nationalisms.

The third pattern of Arab nationalism is socialist Arab nationalism which is a mixture of Arab nationalism and socialism. Upon taking hold of power in a military coup in 1952 with his friends from the army as a group called Free Officers, Gamal Abdel Nasser proved to be charismatic enough to spell charm over the society to mobilize them behind him by utilizing socialist and nationalist discourse. A program of industrialization that Nasser initiated, hopes of the masses to make Egypt a prosperous, strong country and to reach the goal of unity among the Arab societies, which has a strong flavor of Pan-Arabism, augmented the popularity of the socialist Arab nationalism, carrying it beyond the Egyptian borders. Ultimately, in 1958, Egypt and Syria united to form one single state, the UAR.

The popularity of Arab nationalism would live well after the Second World War with the aim of making Arab states independent from the colonial powers, and it would last until late 1960s when Arabs suffered a humiliating defeat by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (also called the Six-Day War). Now this phenomenon, the decline of Arab nationalism, will be examined.

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[4] For a study that examines in detail the early Palestinian nationalism, see Abdelaziz A. Ayyad (1999), *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians 1850–1939.* Jerusalem: Passia Publication.

4. The Decline of Arab Nationalism

During the Second World War, there was a strong anti-Western, Arab nationalist sentiment in the Middle East. In the eyes of many Arabs, the colonial powers of the region, Britain and France, were the primary enemies of the Arabs. After the war, Israel declared itself as a state, and before soon, three Arab states, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, declared war against Israel. The humiliating defeat of the Arabs in that war resulted in the obsessive demonization of Israel by the Arab nationalists. The primary aim of the Arab states became the brushing off Israel from the map and assuring all of its territory to Palestinians who they thought the real owners of the land. The military takeover of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952 gave even more momentum to the Arab nationalist sentiments. The Arab League was established with the purpose of developing multilateral relations between the Arab states. The Pan-Arabic ideal that the Arabs should unite under one single political unit whose head is Nasser was popular at that time. The Baath Parties of Syria and Iraq were also supportive of the Pan-Arabic ideal during late 1950s. When the Baath Party of Syria agreed with Nasser to unite the two countries, Syria and Egypt under the leadership of Nasser in 1958, Iraq preferred to keep a distance and did not join the union (Provence, 2005: 149-155).

After three years, Nasser's autocratic rule, giving no say to the Syrians in state affairs, engendered unrest among the Syrian nationalists who were either members of the Baath Party or officials in the military. This unrest ultimately reached its apex in 1961 when a group of officials from the Syrian army decided to secede from the UAR. Nasser wanted to resist at first but he gave up after noticing that standing against this secessionist declaration may bring about bloodshed. Thus, the state of Syria was founded again (Ashton, 1996: 61-65). This was the first blow to the popularity of Nasser as well as against the ideology of Arab nationalism itself. The second and more lethal blow would come in 1967 when Nasser was harshly defeated by Israel and the heyday of Arab nationalism finished in late 1960s and early 1970s (Kienle, 1995).

Following the tenure of Nasser, Arab nationalism became gradually distanced from socialism; it either became incorporatedinto Islamismor gradually faded away with the rise of Islamism (Tibi, 1997: 218-220). The Baath Party, which is still seeking to hold on power in civil war torn Syria, had claimed to rule the country with an agenda based on Arab socialism until the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011, but it was obvious that it was sheer political discourse. It is controlled by a small group of *Alawite*elites on the top and a tightly knit state bureaucracy around it. In Libya, where Arab nationalism was mixed with socialism, there was again a rich, parochial elite, at the top of whom was Muammar Gaddafi, in whose hands the ideology became a political tool for legitimacy. It is striking that regimes of the two allegedly socialist countries, Syria and Libya, proved to be relatively more resilient in the face of the Arab uprisings which began in 2011. Gaddafi fell after months of bloody civil war whereas the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is still endeavoring to hold on power although he lost control over a good portion of Syria. Overall, Arab nationalism lost its appeal after early 1970s and gradually left

the political landscape to be replaced by Islamism beginning from early 1970s (Kramer, 1993: 171-172; Khalidi, 1991: 1367).

Some analysts argued that Pan-Arabism resurrected during the Arab uprisingsthat were triggered in 2011 (Andoni, 2011). There were really some Pan-Arabic sentiments at display during these uprisings. However, these Pan-Arabic sentiments seem to be more of Islamist universalism, rather than of Arab nationalism. The Islamist movements which were the primary dynamics behind these revolts traditionally militate against Arab nationalism and argue that Arab nations should unite to form the *Umma*. Some of them even goes as far as to argue that a caliphate should be instituted to on behalf of the *Umma*, which will unite under one polity. Many of these revolts failed anyway if any Pan-Arabic sentiment is to be credited to them. Writing in 1993, Faksh writes (1993: 425), "Arab nationalism, which once seemed timeless and immutable, now seems obsolescent, if not obsolete. Its life cycle—a nineteenth century inception, a zenith in the 1950s and 1960s, and a diminution in 1970s and 1980s—is apparently coming to a close in 1990s." At the turn of 2017, there is not a remarkable change in sight in this decline, and Arab nationalism seems to be slowly dying, with no indication on the horizon that it will rise again.

Conclusion

Arab nationalism was the most influential political ideology in the Middle East in much of the 20th century. The Westernized Arab elites or local tribal leaders achieved to found their Arab states by revolting against the Ottomans during the First World War, but the disillusionment theyunderwent after the war because of the colonialization of their lands was profound. Although having accomplished some of its purposes like the foundation of the Arab League and the declaration of the UAR, even though it (i.e., the UAR) was dissolved after three years following its foundation, Arab nationalism has proved to be much rhetoric and little action.

Arabs have missed the opportunity to mobilize the masses and use their Pan-Arabic enthusiasm to achieve integration between Arab states, even though not as much as those of the Europeans, in the age of masses and nation states—inthe 19th and 20th centuries. The major dream of the Arab nationalists, the creation of a united Arab state stretching from Algeria to Iran,still remains unaccomplished.

In effect, the differences between Arab societies and historical or sect-related hostilities grew ever greater. Arab countries, which are mostly ruled by an array of alternating incorrigible tyrants, are today furthest away from realizing the dream of uniting under one single Arab state than yesteryears. Some types of nation-state nationalisms like Palestinian nationalism are still relevant today and have the ability to mobilize masses, but many abovementioned patterns of Arab nationalism are getting steadily weaker by time.

Today, if anything, Islamism seems to have substituted Arab nationalism in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Yemen, and to much extent in Palestine. In the near future, Arab nationalism does not appear to recover and reclaim its former social

appeal. Although the year 2016 experienced an intriguing rise of nationalism as crystallized in what came to be called *Brexit*, in the presidency of Donald Trump, in the irredentist foreign policy of Putin's Russia, and in the rise of the global far right, of *alt-right*, and of white nationalism, Arab nationalism still lies almost dead. It seems that Arab nationalism will be of little significance from this time on in the foreseeable future. Only an Islamic form of Pan-Arabism and Palestinian nationalism seem to be still relevant today in the short and middle term. Therefore, the policy advise of this study would be that Arab nationalist intellectuals and leaders might find it helpful to revisit the view that Arab societies are barren for nationalism, due mainly to the profound, centuries-long influence of Islamic universalism among the Arabs.

This article sought to analyze Arab nationalism from a historical perspective and to answer the question whether Arab nationalism was on the edge of a demise. It neither aimed at making a detailed treatment of the topic nor it tried to analyze in detail theintrinsic paradoxes in Arab nationalism, such as the tension between Islamic universalism and nation-state Arab nationalisms. It only examined the trajectory of the birth, rise, and decline of Arab nationalism and made a projection into its near future. Except some lesson drawing and a short projection into the future of Arab nationalism, this study has not investigated in detail the relationship of Arab nationalists with other contemporary political movements of the Middle East. The relationship between Arab nationalism and Islamist movements after the 2011 Arab Uprisings in particular is a significant question which can be a topic for further studies.

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