ONE

The Origins of Arab Nationalism

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For years, the most prevalent explanation of the origins of Arab nationalism undoubtedly was that contact with the West revived latent Arab nationality, so long suppressed by Islam or the Turks, among Lebanese Christian Arabs, who then led their compatriots in the movement to base political and cultural life on nationality, not religion. In this view, the genesis of Arab nationalism was part of the Arab awakening by which the Arabs moved into the modern world of Western science and secularism. First popularized among Western observers and students by George Antonius, this version has retained its popularity—and perhaps the best statement of some of its elements has been given by Albert Hourani and Hisham Sharabi. The Muslims sought in Western culture the means of warding off Western power, but in so doing had an “uneasy feeling of being untrue to themselves.” The Christians, on the other hand, did not feel that Christian Europe was alien.1 The role of the Christians is further explained by Sharabi and Bassam Tibi in their use of the common notion that nationalism is a movement of the bourgeoisie. The Christian Arabs, they believe, were the only bourgeois element in Arab society at the time.2

The Christian explanation faces insurmountable difficulties. Its exponents present no persuasive evidence or argument on behalf of either the supposed sympathy of Christian Arabs and European Christians or the bourgeois nature of either the Christian Arabs or the Arab nationalists. The common argument given for this explanation is the activity of Western missionary
schools, especially the American, which, it is claimed, first introduced Western ideas in the Arab world. This argument evidently was made by some Arabs before 1914, for we find a prominent Syrian Arab nationalist intellectual, Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali, rejecting it even then; and when Anis Nusuli made this argument in 1926, Kurd ‘Ali again rejected it. Kurd ‘Ali insisted that the learned and educational institutions of the Egyptian state were by far the most important promoters of the Arab awakening, and though he gave some credit to the missionary schools (especially for their use of Arabic as the language of instruction in their early years), he joined the common Arab nationalist criticism of the missionary schools as weakening national feeling. The missionary schools long confined their efforts to purely sectarian education, not modern secular learning. The learned and educational institutions of the Egyptian state, as Kurd ‘Ali insisted, were by far the more important force in the introduction of Western thought. The Ottoman state schools were probably as important as the Egyptian institutions. Among pre-1914 Syrian Arab nationalists, persons educated in Ottoman state schools (63 percent) were far more numerous than persons educated in either traditional or Western schools (20 percent and 17 percent, respectively). Moreover, Christians comprised only 6 percent of the pre-1914 Arabists while in 1926 they were 10 percent or 12 percent of the total Syrian population. Hourani, whose treatment in Arabic Thought of the Christian Arabs’ role in Arab nationalism was ambiguous, later wrote, “The Lebanese Christian movement was not a major factor.”

The process of forming a nationalist self-view among the Arabs began with the adaptation to Near Eastern conditions of the European concept of patria and patriotism. The evidence presently available indicates that Muslim Arabs and the Turks took the lead. Of the Arabs, Rifah Rabia al-Tahtawi was the most influential. Between 1834 and mid-century, in his account of his residence in Paris and in his poetry, Tahtawi expounded the ideas that the earth was comprised of countries with their own special characteristics, and that inhabitants of each such country had a peculiar relationship to and a special love for it. He rendered the French patrie by the Arabic watan, spoke of the love of the watan and, ultimately, of wataniyah, patriotism. Tahtawi’s watan was Egypt, and the people of Egypt had been a distinctive entity since the time of the pharaohs. During the same period, Ottoman Turkish intellectuals and statesmen were setting forth the concept that the Ottoman territories formed the Ottoman vatan, which the Ottoman people should love.

The appeal of the European concept of patriotism to Egyptian and Ottoman intellectual bureaucrats resulted from their desire to overcome the perceived deprivation of the Islamic countries or the Ottoman Empire. They had direct contact with European civilization as a result of occupying positions of authority and responsibility in the governance of their polities. They were painfully aware that the European countries and the Christian Franks were far more advanced in civilization than the Muslim countries. They fervently wished to bring the Islamic countries up to the level of the West. Tahtawi, in describing the purpose of his book recording his sojourn in Paris, said, “I made it speak to stimulate the lands of Islam to investigate the foreign sciences, arts, and industries, for the perfection of that in the land of the Franks is a well-known certainty, and the truth deserves to be followed.” They believed that the progress of Europe was the result of patriotism, the love of the French, for example, of their fatherland. Patriotism thus was a source of progress and strength, a means to overcome the gap between the lands of Islam and Europe.

The perception of the Self as deprived relative to the Other often injures the self-view, and Arab and Turkish intellectuals and statesmen were no exception. Tahtawi followed his admission of the perfection in sciences, arts, and industries of the Franks with the exclamation, “By the Eternal God! During my stay in this country I was in pain because of its enjoyment of that [perfection] and its absence from the lands of Islam.” The pain caused by the invidious comparison was eased, as is commonly the case, by noting some virtues possessed by the Self and lacking in the Other and by finding hope for the future of the Self in its past. The Muslims were still blessed with the perfect religion, while the Franks, Christian in name only, relied on reason alone. Moreover, in the past Muslims had been the teachers of the Franks in the natural sciences, as some of the Franks admitted. Thus, the Muslims should borrow the Western sciences from the Franks and hold fast to the true religion. In doing so, it was thought, the gap would soon be closed.

Such defensive reaffirmations of the self-view were, as far as
it is possible to judge such matters, sincere personal expressions of grief for the present and hope for the future, of confidence in the worth of the authors and their fellow countrymen. At the same time, these ideas grew out of a division within the community. Ottoman and Egyptian advocates of Westernizing reform had rivals. The advocates were members of the government, but their opponents charged them with heresy and treason, of trafficking with the hostile alien, and countered with assertions of the adequacy of the community’s inherited beliefs, laws, and institutions. Despite such opposition, the reformers retained power in Egypt and the empire and continued their policies. As the second half of the nineteenth century began, the adequacy of both government and opposition ideologies was put in doubt. By this time, the failures of Egypt and the Ottoman state in comparison to Europe were too obvious. One could question the efficacy of both the reforms and the inherited culture, but there seemed to be no escape from adopting the ways of the West. This perception increased the injury to the self-view, which could no longer be eased by ideas like Tahtawi’s, which still composed the ideology of the establishment. Consequently, the opposition was able to advance an opposing self-view, the set of beliefs that later came to be known as Islamic modernism and revivalism. Perhaps the earliest exponents of the new view were the Young Ottomans, followers of Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the originator of the Tanzimat reforms that had been defended by thinkers like Tahtawi, who had fallen from power. Some of the crucial elements, whose similarity to earlier ideas is obvious, appeared in the Arabic works of Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi and Tahtawi in the late 1860s. The doctrine was given its fullest expression in Arabic by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abdulw of the Islamic past were recalled, and the reputed debt of European civilization to Islam was emphasized. In fact, it was declared, the modernity of Europe was of Islamic origin, borrowed from the Muslims and used to advantage, while the Muslims deviated from the original true Islam and consequently suffered stagnation and decline. Immediate blame for this sad situation was assigned to the reforming governments, which had knuckled under to the Europeans by the piecemeal borrowing of Western practices, which could only produce hybrids, Levantines. The correct path was to eliminate the corruptions in the heritage and return to true pristine Islam, which would establish constitutional representative government, freedom, etc., which were of Islamic origin even though their current best manifestation was in the West. In this way, Islam would recover its lost power and glory.

The Muslim Arab reaction to the West that culminated in ‘Abdulw’s Islamic modernism was shared by many Christian Arabs, including most of those commonly called the creators of secular Arab nationalism. Far from expressing feelings of kinship with the West, their writings show a marked defense of an injured self-view. Butrus al-Bustani, like many Eastern Christians, resented the perceived patronizing arrogance of Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries, and warned against borrowing Western blemishes and vices, as did Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq and Adib Ishaq. Criticism of excessive "Frankification" became a commonplace of Christian Arab writers. Finally, none of them were Arab nationalists. Bustani, Shidyaq, and Ishaq were Ottoman patriots, as were later luminaries, such as Sulayman al-Bustani, Shibli Shumayyl, and Farah Antun.13 Both Tibi and Sharabi at times acknowledge the Ottomanism of these intellectuals but cannot abandon belief in their Arabism. Both are ambiguous and inconsistent and provide few particulars, but they regard these Christian Arabs as the creators and propagators of a cultural Arab nationalism that outweighed their Ottomanism. There is no doubt that these Arabs did regard themselves as Arabs.14

Many, perhaps all, of the early Western-influenced intellectuals of the Ottoman territories and Egypt held overlapping self-views without any sense of contradiction. Bustani and, to a lesser extent, Ishaq did call themselves Arab and take pride in their Arab heritage. But so did Tahtawi. None of them, Chris-
tian or Muslim, attributed political consequences, or even ultimate cultural consequences, to Arabism. None expressed disloyalty to the Ottoman Empire, and the two Christians' political loyalties were decidedly Ottoman. Their cultural identities were also broader. Tahtawi was concerned with the revitalization of all Muslim lands; Bustani and Ishaq, like Shidyaq, fervently longed for the East's recovery of its lost glory. All talked about fatherland and patriotism, *watan* and *wataniyah*, but one person could have more than one *watan* and more than one nation (*umma*). Among some, the smaller *watan* sometimes seemed to be the most important center of loyalty. Tahtawi's Egyptianism has long been the subject of scholarly attention. Just as important was Bustani's Syrian patriotism. But, as already remarked, they did not subordinate the broader identities to the narrower. For some this was not true.

Arabism and regional patriotism were mingled and given predominance over Ottomanism by some in Syria and Lebanon. As early as 1868, Ibrahim al-Yaziji called for the Arabs to recover their lost ancient vitality and to throw off the yoke of the Turks. He also participated in a secret society that worked for this goal in the late 1870s and posted a few placards calling for rebellion in Beirut. During the same period there was a similar movement among Lebanese and Damascene notables, mostly Muslim but possibly with some Christian participation. Though both movements soon disappeared, one spoke almost entirely for Christian Arabs and aimed at an independent Lebanon, while the other was predominantly Muslim Arabs and sought an autonomous Syria that would retain some ties with the Ottoman state. Ibrahim al-Yaziji also spoke of Syria, and it is likely that ideas such as his contributed to the development of Lebanese and Syrian nationalism among the Christians of Lebanon, which had appeared by the end of the century.

By the first years of the twentieth century, Muslim Arabs had developed an Arab nationalist self-view that was to provide the nucleus of Arab nationalist ideology for the twentieth century. The new Arabism was an outgrowth of *Abdoh*'s Islamic modernism and revivalism. Islam was not intrinsically backward, the self-view held. The true Islam of the ancestors had bestowed rationality on mankind and created the essentials of modernity, which the West had borrowed. While Europe moved forward on the basis of these borrowings, the Muslims fell into error and corrupted and abandoned the true Islam. The cure for the present humiliation and abasement of the Muslims was to return to the true Islam of their ancestors. This done, the power and glory that Islam had lost to the Christian West would return to its rightful owners. That the true Islam was the Islam of their ancestors, and the ancestors were Arab, meant the revival of Arabism and the Arab culture and the restoration of the Arabs to their position of leadership among the Muslims. These ideas were developed by *Abdoh*'s followers, Muhammad Rashid Rida and *Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi. The former hesitated on the brink and refrained from advocating political autonomy, but the latter called for the establishment of a dual Arab and Turkish Ottoman Empire with the Arabs exercising religious and cultural leadership. This version of Islamic modernism was adopted by the earliest exponents of Arab nationalism. While there has not been any systematic study of their writings, enough is known about Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, *Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi (see Ahmed Tarabein's essay in this volume), Muhammad Kurd *Ali*, and *Abd al-Ghanal al-'Urayshi to justify classifying them as Islamic modernists who had become Arab nationalists.

Islamic modernism's relationship to Arabism has been variously interpreted. Sylvia G. Haim, perhaps the first scholar to investigate the subject, apparently does not derive Arab nationalist ideology from Islamic modernism. In her most recent study of the subject, she points to *Abdoh*'s implicit "glorification of Arab Islam and depreciation of Ottoman Islam," and calls Kawakibi "the first true intellectual precursor of modern secular Pan-Arabism," but considers their chief influence to have been, like that of Afghani and others, to "increase skepticism concerning Islam" among Muslims. Her interpretation is similar to that of Elie Kedourie, who depicts Arab nationalism as having been created by the spread of European theological and political doctrines that weakened the hold of Islam and Christianity. He believes that Arab nationalism was established by military officers installed in power by the British after World War I and spread by them, the British, and Egypt's King Farouq (Farouk) and his entourage. Haim also believes that true Arab nationalism was an importation from the West at the time of World War I, and that there was no "serious attempt to define its meaning" until the late 1930s. In order to survive, according
to Haim, the newly imported secular Arabism had to become “consonant with” Islam. 19

In similar fashion, Sharabi and Tibi deny Islamic modernism’s parentage of Arabism. The former distinguishes Islamic reformers (e.g., ʿAbduh) from Islamic secularists (e.g., Kawakibi) and regards the latter as having led the Arab nationalist movement from before 1914 until the end of the interwar period, when it collapsed in the face of the secular Arab nationalism that had been created by Lebanese Christians. The latter holds that Islamic modernism contributed to the formation of Arab nationalism, that Kawakibi was an “important pioneer of Arab nationalism,” but that Arab nationalism was a secular movement, originating with the Lebanese Christians, “which was eventually to destroy the Islamic revivalism movement,” even though Islam was not abandoned by the Arab nationalists. 20

Those who deny Arabism’s birth in Islamic modernism have not provided any specific identification of its ancestry. They write of Arab nationalism without Arab nationalists, of a movement without participants. In this, they unfortunately do not differ from most who have written about Arab nationalism. It has simply been assumed that Arab nationalism must have been imported from the West and is therefore secularist. There has been very little scholarly investigation of the writings of Arab nationalists, and the few who have been studied are late, virtually all post-1939, and there has been no demonstration that they were representative or influential.

There is convincing evidence that the prevailing ideology of Arab nationalists in the twentieth century was formed in the 1920s, at the latest, from Islamic modernist roots. It is impossible at present to determine first authorship and influences, but a number of Arab nationalist publications and authors can be identified. Among them are Amir Shakib Arslan, a postwar convert from Ottomanism to Arabism (but an Islamic modernist at all times), and two prewar Arabists, Muhammad Kurd ʿAli and Muhhibb al-din al Khatib. In their publications, the Islamic modernism of Kawakibi, Tahir al-Jaza’iri, and Mahmud Shukri al-Asa’i—who are the acknowledged masters—provides the basis for a conception of universal history that incorporates the Semitic wave theory as expressed in Breasted’s Ancient Times and, among some, certain semi-Marxist ideas. 21 These ideas were incorporated in a number of history textbooks by ʿUmār Salih al-Barghūthī and Khālid Tutay Tuta (Tota). 22 Muhammad ʿIzzat Darwaza, 23 and Darwish al-Miqdadī, 24 which appeared in repeated editions in the 1920s and 1930s. By 1931 a more or less standard formulation of the Arab self-view had received statement in these text books. The authors were associated with leading nationalist politicians in the Fertile Crescent, and their books were adopted in the schools of Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. From the late 1920s on, there was a growing use of the same ideas by Egyptian politicians and organizations. 25 Finally, the same ideas appear in the ideology incorporated in Nasserist and Ba’thist school textbooks in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. 26

Arab nationalist ideology was a development from Islamic modernism, but some Christian Arabs participated in the Arab nationalist movement.Sharabi offers Najīb ʿAzurī and Amin al- Rihānī as Arab nationalists, presumably among those unspecified Christians who created the secular Arab nationalism that, according to Sharabi, eliminated Islamic modernism. 27 That either had any influence is yet to be demonstrated. ʿAzurī’s curious career need not detain us. 28 Rihānī was a prominent man of letters and an Arab nationalist. His book Mutal al-ʿArab (Kings of the Arabs; 1924–25) was praised while his sketch of Syrian history, al-Nakbat (The Calamities; 1928), was excoriated by Kurd ʿAli. 29 Rihānī and his fellow Christian Arabists accepted the special place of Islam and Muhammad in the life of the Arab nation that had already been acknowledged by pre-1914 Christian Arabs. 30 The tradition had later expositors, notably Michel ʿAflaq. 31

The earliest Arab nationalists disseminated their doctrines by means of publications, usually in Egypt, and by personal communication. With the Young Turk revolution and the restoration of Parliament and the easing of restrictions on the press and political activity, the Arabists entered politics. The degree to which and the reasons why Arabism won adherents remain subject to dispute. Few accept Antonius’ view of seething Arab nationalism suppressed by Turkish barbarism. Zeine thinks that Arab nationalists were few in the nineteenth century and still a minority in 1914, but he gives no explicit evidence or argument. 32 In my view, Arab nationalism arose as the result of intra-Arab elite conflict, specifically (in the case of the territories later included in the Syrian Republic) being an opposition
movement of Syrian notables directed primarily against rival Syrian notables who were satisfied with and occupied positions in the Ottoman government, an opposition that remained a minority until 1913.\textsuperscript{33} Yibawi regards the Arabists as unimportant before the Young Turks period, probably still a minority in 1914.\textsuperscript{34} Sharabi considers the pre-1914 nationalists to be an elite minority, as do Tibi, Khalidi, and Hourani, who explicitly accept this part of my work.\textsuperscript{35} Zeine, Tibawi, Sharabi, Tibi, and Khalidi differ from my view in emphasizing Young Turk policy as a major cause of Arabism. They see Arabism arising as a reaction to the Turkish nationalism of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which was manifested in the press and in laws requiring the sole use of Turkish in the administration, the courts, and the schools.\textsuperscript{36} To this Khalidi adds Zionism. All believe that Arab nationalism was increasing in strength during the Young Turk period. Khalidi is ambiguous but seems to believe that Arabism was the major movement by 1914.\textsuperscript{37}

The belief that Arab nationalism was a rapidly growing movement in the Young Turk period and that CUP policy was the major cause stems from a tradition created by European diplomats (especially British) and Arab nationalists. Zeine and Khalidi have provided the most extensive documentation. The former's main source is the set of handbooks prepared by the British Foreign Office for use at the Paris Peace Conference. Khalidi has consulted the original sources in the contemporary British and French diplomatic reports and in the Arab nationalist literature, especially contemporary newspapers. The bias of the Arabists is self-evident. Most of both the British and French diplomats, contrary to their governments, favored supporting Arab separatism. The manifest bias of such testimony cannot be eliminated by repetition. Moreover, most of this testimony is limited to generalities; few particulars are given. When considering their claims about the extent of Arab anti-Ottoman sentiment, one should keep in mind the poor record of American journalists and other observers in predicting American elections and remember that the latter's technical competence for such judgments far exceeded that of the European diplomats. In short, the sources are highly suspect and are of no utility unless particulars are presented that can be examined in the light of other evidence.

In order to estimate the strength of Arab nationalism in 1914, one must identify Arab nationalists. I have done this in my work by identifying members of societies that were active before 1914 for Arab nationalist goals. Of the 126 persons identified, only 51 Syrians were subject to study because of the availability of biographical data.\textsuperscript{38} Khalidi thinks this number is too low and cites a French diplomatic document that said "at least" forty Arab officers at Constantinople were planning to create an Arab state extending from Egypt to Baghdad in case the empire collapsed; Amin Sa'id's assertion that 315 of 490 Arab officers in Istanbul in 1914 belonged to al-'Ahd; and Antonius' claim that al-Fatat had over two hundred members by 1914.\textsuperscript{39} The French document's description of the Arab officers could apply to loyal Ottomanists as well as Arabists. But all three statements cannot be checked because no names are given. Darwaza, the only source who was a leading participant in the Arab nationalist movement from before 1914 through the interwar years, says of Sa'id's assertion, "He does not mention a source. So, it is likely that the number is exaggerated. Apparently, the number of members of the party had reached a not-insignificant number when the First World War broke out."\textsuperscript{40} There is no need nowadays to discuss Antoniius' deficiencies as a source. There is no way of knowing the total number of adherents of Arabism before World War I. But it is clear that the incidence of known activists was greater in Syria than in Lebanon, Palestine, or Iraq. Some notion of the number of followers may be provided by the telegrams of support sent to the First Arab Congress in Paris in 1913. The names of seventy-nine Syrians appear on those telegrams, of whom twelve were members of the societies.\textsuperscript{41} It should not be assumed that these numbers reflect the importance of the Arabists in Ottoman Syria. The leaders were mostly notables with substantial followings of their own. They constituted a powerful political force.

Khalidi offers two other arguments for ascribing greater strength to the pre-1914 Arab nationalist movement. One is that Arabist newspapers greatly outnumbered Unionist papers. Although there has not been any thorough study of the press, this may well be true. But the press is a very poor index of political strength. In the United States since 1936, electoral success by presidential candidates and political parties has had a high inverse correlation with press support. Khalidi's other argument makes use of Arab activities in the Ottoman parliament.
(See Khalidi’s discussion of this topic in his essay in this volume.)

Arab nationalists’ participation in parliamentary politics may provide a measure for the extent of prewar Arabism. Khalidi broke new ground with an innovative investigation of parliamentary elections, and concludes that a majority of deputies from the Syrian provinces (including mandatory Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan) were Arab. His most recent statement is that of twenty-two Arab deputies from the Syrian provinces on the eve of elections in 1912, eighteen were members of the opposition, who joined the Entente Liberales. The opposition was sweeping the campaign, but the CUP cracked down, forced some of the Ententists to join the Unionists in the election, and managed the election by coercion. The result was that only six of the twenty-two Arabs elected during 1908 to 1912 were returned to Parliament. The implication is that, in free elections before 1912, Arabists won eighteen of twenty-two seats and most of these would have been won in 1912 if the elections had been free or if they had been willing to collaborate with the CUP.42

There are a number of problems. The only sources cited for the number of oppositionists are contemporary Arab anti-CUP newspapers; few names are listed. In Khalidi’s discussion, oppositionists and Ententists are implicitly counted as Arabists, which is not necessarily true and in some cases is known to be false. Specific details are provided for only a few individuals. The electoral data that Khalidi uses is incomplete and contains errors, but it can be partially corrected by Ahmad and Rustow’s study of the Young Turk parliaments.43 Of the twenty-two Arab deputies that provide the basis for Khalidi’s implication that eighteen Arab nationalists were elected before 1912 and defeated in 1912 by Unionist coercion, two had died before 1911, one had resigned, and one was a Turk who later was deputy from Antalya and much later a member of the Grand National Assembly. Considering those holding seats in 1912 and presumably possible candidates for reelection, there is no reason to believe that there was an anti-CUP or Arab nationalist landslide underway. A few uncertainties remain concerning the Arab membership of the Young Turk parliaments, but a highly probable account can be constructed. In 1912 there were twenty-three deputies, of whom two were Turks and one was Armenian.

Of the twenty Arab deputies, six were identifiable Arabists. These six and a non-Arab nationalist (Kamil al-As‘ad) entered the 1912 election as Ententists, but just before the balloting one of the Arabists and As‘ad shifted to the CUP. The two defectors won, but the remaining five Ententists—all Arab nationalists—were defeated. Of the twenty Arab deputies in 1912, five certainly, and possibly six or seven (including As‘ad and the defecting Arab nationalist), were reelected. But Khalidi’s conclusion that only six of those elected before 1912 collaborated with the CUP is not justified. In the 1914 elections, held when the Unionists were in their strongest position thus far, five who had been deputies in 1912 were elected (one, possibly two, of whom had been reelected in 1912). Thus, the Syrian Arab members of Parliament in 1912 who were reelected in 1912 or 1914 under CUP auspices numbered nine, or possibly ten (not six), as compared to six Arab nationalists, five of whom refused to cooperate with the Unionists. Nothing further on the careers of the remaining five or six deputies is known; they played no significant role in Syrian political life after 1912. Nine, possibly ten, out of twenty Arab members of the 1912 parliament collaborated with the CUP in 1912 or 1914. Only six can be identified as Arab nationalists, of whom five campaigned against the Unionists. So, in the last reputedly free Ottoman parliament, the Arab nationalists were a minority—an important minority, but still a minority.

The minority status of the Syrian Arab nationalists in Parliament evidently conformed to their status among Syrian notables as a whole. Direct evidence is lacking, but indirect evidence is provided by the participants in the Arab nationalist government and movement in Syria during 1919–20, when the General Syrian Congress (elected under the Ottoman electoral law) and a Syrian Cabinet (elected under the Ottoman electoral law) and a Syrian Cabinet proclaimed that the Syrian people were members of the Arab nation and societies espousing Arabism ruled political life. But these postwar Arab nationalist activities were dominated by newcomers to Arab nationalism. Of the members of these Arab nationalist bodies, 82 percent were not Arab nationalists before 1918, 85 percent before 1914. As the prewar Arabists were a minority in 1919–20, they are not likely to have been a majority before 1914. The Arab national revolution in Syria was carried out by latecomers to Arabism. There are grounds for believing that the
post-1918 Arab nationalists had been loyal Ottomanists before 1914 or 1918. The post-1918 nationalists had been more successful in holding state office than the pre-1914 Arabists (35 percent as compared to 16 percent). The same relation obtained for the fathers (73 percent as compared to 13 percent). Some evidence has long existed that the post-1918 nationalists had opposed the Arabists before the war or had served the Ottoman government until the war or even 1918. Since then, the new evidence that has become available supports both propositions. The prewar Arab movement in Syria was an opposition movement among the notables that remained a minority movement until the end of the war, when the majority, hitherto Ottomanist, converted to Arabism.

The postwar preponderance in Syria of newcomers to Arabism, many of whom held office or actively supported the CUP until 1914 or 1918, casts grave doubt on the Arab nationalist charge of anti-Arab bias on the part of the Young Turks, a policy that some consider to have been a major stimulus to the growth of Arabism. It is difficult to reconcile such a policy with the large number of officials among the post-1918 Arabists. The Young Turks dismissed many Arab officials, including two very prominent ones, but many other Arabs held office, including a secretary to the sultan and two grand viziers, an Iraqi and an Egyptian, who, in the words of Berkes, "was an ardent Islamist who wrote only in French and Arabic." Some important Syrian Arab notables during the Young Turk period opposed the government on Arab nationalist grounds, but the evidence strongly indicates that the majority cooperated with and held office in the Unionist government in Syria and the Syrian Arab nationalist movement long thereafter.

Arab nationalism remained a minority opposition movement until the end of World War I. The majority of the Arab notables remained loyal Ottomanists. Nevertheless, the Arab nationalists carried out a significant campaign against the Unionists. It may be the case that the Young Turk period provided the Arab nationalists a greater opportunity than did 'Abdulhamid's reign. Arabism was a visible movement before the Young Turk revolution, but there does seem to be a relative increase after 1908. It seems likely that the restoration of Parliament and the consequent flourishing of party activity and expansion of the press would have facilitated political debate and provided an opportunity for the Arabs to win recruits, as Khalidi has proposed, although the changes started in the Tanzimat. Another plausible source of Arabism's increase is an increase in the number of civil servants and military officers, teachers and journalists, as Khalidi suggests, although once again the process started over half a century earlier. As of now, there is no conclusive evidence of how such supposed new elements divided between Ottomanists and Arabists, or of their social origins. That they entered politics in the following of established notables, when not of notable origins themselves, is the most likely reading of some difficult evidence. The changes proposed by Hourani as causative factors in the development of Arab nationalism are of such vague or general character that their connection with that development is not readily discernible.

The Arab nationalists attacked the Young Turk government with specific charges. One charge was that the Young Turks supported Zionism. The other was that the Young Turks were Turkish nationalists who initiated a policy of Turkification. It has been suggested that these charges arose from new developments or policy changes peculiar to the period that stimulated the growth of Arab nationalism. (See Rashid Khalidi's discussion of this topic in his essay in this volume.)

Increasingly visible Zionist activity in Palestine became a political issue in the Young Turk period. Arab nationalists kept up a continuous attack on the CUP with allegations that it was supporting Zionism. In fact, Arab nationalist concern was no different from Unionist. The center of anti-Zionist agitation was Palestine. Here, deputies and journalists, CUP and opposition, opposed Zionism. Outside Palestine, Arab nationalists distinguished themselves in pointing to the Zionist peril. In Parliament, Arabist deputies from Damascus and Beirut joined the Palestinian deputies (who were Unionists), but other Syrian deputies took no active part. In similar fashion, all newspapers in Palestine were constantly calling attention to the Zionist danger, but outside Palestine most Arab nationalist papers raised the question with attacks on the government while most pro-CUP papers ignored the question. In fact, Unionist attitudes and policies toward Zionism were the same as those of the Ententists and the Arab nationalists. All of them welcomed Jewish immigrants (provided they brought money and expertise, settled in dispersion throughout the empire, and became
Ottoman nationals), and all engaged in virtually identical negotiations with the Zionists. The Unionists, occupying the government through most of the period, were caught. Their attempts to limit Zionist activities were frustrated by the European powers. With respect to Zionism, the Unionists were not guilty of the Arab nationalists' accusations, and the issue apparently had little effect on the Arab members of Parliament.

Contemporary European diplomatic reports and Arab nationalists charged the CUP with Turkish nationalism and with Turkification, specifically with enacting laws requiring the use of Turkish in the administration, the courts, and the schools. The charges have been widely accepted as true, and Arab nationalism has very frequently been seen as a reaction to these Young Turk innovations. Nevertheless, this interpretation is doubtful. In the first place, Arabist ideology, including a bitter anti-Turkism, was fully formulated long before the Young Turk revolution. In the second place, the Young Turks, according to present knowledge, were not guilty as charged.

While Turkish had its advocates before 1908, they were a decided minority and the ideology of the CUP before 1908 was Ottomanist, without any Turkish bias. (See Hanioglu's essay in this volume on this point.) The Unionists continued to be Ottomanists ideologically for a considerable time after 1908 while Arab nationalists were becoming increasingly outspoken. The most important Unionist ideologist, Ziya Gökalp, did not become an active advocate of Turkism until 1913 or so, and he remained a believer in Ottomanism until late in World War I. The Turkists increased their following beginning in 1911–1912, but there is no reason to believe that they captured the minds of the majority. Turkism was vigorously opposed by Westernists and Islamists, both of whom remained Ottomanists. The Turkish Islamists, indeed, drew heavily from the slate of the Egyptian modernists (including their glorification of the Arabs). One of them, Sa'id Halim, a member of the Egyptian khedival family, was grand vizier during 1913–1916. While in office, he published articles attacking ethnicity and nationalism as causing the Islamic decline, singling out the Mongols—and the Turkists implicitly—as the chief villain among the nationalities who had corrupted the pure Islam of the ancestors, meaning, of course, the Arabs. A prominent Turkish intellectual, Ahmed Naim, wrote glorifying the "Arab race, which every Muslim is under obligation to love." In this view, "the Arab race has to be praised by everyone, above any race, even above our own race, for their Islamic zeal, for their racial affinity to Muhammad, for their language being the language of the Qur'an (Koran), and for the sake of our gratitude to them for having brought Islam." It may well be that the debates of Islamists and Westernists, Ottomanists, Arabists, and Turkists occupied only a minority of the total population. These developments have seized the attention of observers and students so much that little attention has been paid to the writings of 'ulama', who were not themselves political activists. Fritz Steppat has shown that some of the leading 'ulama' in Syria and Egypt remained relatively unaffected by the new currents. They, and perhaps a majority of the population, continued to measure the legitimacy of the Ottoman state on traditional Islamic grounds, as was the case of the amir of Mecca, al-Husayn ibn-'Ali ibn-'Awn, the future leader of the Arab revolt. During the war, as Cleveland has shown, traditional Islamic legitimacy and solidarity was the basis for appeals to the Arab populace for support by both Husayn and the Unionist government. Talib Mushtaq, an Iraqi Arab bureaucrat-politician whose long career began in Ottoman times, said: "Were we really subjects of imperialism when Iraq was under Ottoman rule? Never! We were one nation, living under one flag. The bond of religion bound us in the firmest of ties. Islam united our hearts and our feelings, and made us one bloc, supporting each other, like a solid building."

The reputation of the CUP as Turkifiers appears to be undeserved. On the basis of the evidence presently available, the Young Turk period was not marked by any changes in the language of administration, the courts, or education. Turkish had always been the official language and the language of administration. The constitution of 1876 explicitly stated this to be the case and made knowledge of Turkish a requirement for public office and membership in the Parliament. An 1888 law specified the degree of competence in Turkish required for various offices. "The Ottoman language was the language adopted for all business in all departments of government," according to Yusuf al-Hakim, a Syrian Arab official who served before and after the Young Turk revolution. Presumably, Turkish was also the language of the nizami courts before 1908. The only provision in the law was Article 1825 of the Mecelle, which
required the presence of a reliable interpreter to translate the statements of any individual who did not know the language employed by the court. The practice, according to Heidborn, was that Turkish was used in the courts, with the necessary translators, but in the Arab provinces Arabic was permitted. According to Yusuf al-Hakim, Arabic was the usual language of court proceedings in the Arabic provinces, but the translator was necessary as judges often did not know Arabic well and transactions with higher courts were in Turkish.

Education was governed by an 1869 law that placed all schools under government supervision, a provision reaffirmed by the constitution. The law, by implication, required that instruction in the state schools be in Turkish except for the lower elementary schools for non-Muslims, where instruction was to be in the local language. In the upper primary, secondary, and advanced schools, where Turkish was the principal subject of study—and, by implication, the only language of instruction—Arabic, Persian, and (in schools for the non-Muslims) the local language were also to be taught. No state schools for non-Muslims were established, so in effect Turkish was the language of instruction in all the state schools. The available evidence indicates that in the Arab provinces Turkish was the principal language of instruction in all state schools. Yusuf al-Hakim says that the lower and upper primary schools taught Arabic and Turkish "without their reaching a great stage" and that in the lower secondary schools all instruction was in Turkish. The nonstate schools evidently were spared the application of the education law and the constitution until a decree of 1894 required them to teach Turkish, but compliance with this decree evidently was not universal.

The Young Turks did not make any radical changes with respect to the language of administration, education, or justice. The CUP programs, periodically set forth in party resolutions from 1908 to 1913, simply reaffirmed existing law. Turkish was declared to be the language of the state and of all official correspondence and petitions. Private schools were to be under the supervision of the state. Turkish was to be taught in all schools, including primary, and Turkish was the required language of instruction in schools above the lower primary level, but without interfering with the teaching of the language, beliefs, and literature of any nationality. In primary schools, instruction was to be in the local language. Evidently, the CUP legislation concerning schools did not change any of the provisions of existing law with respect to language, nor did the legislation concerning justice affect the language of the courts.

The Arab nationalists were not reacting to Young Turk innovations. Instead, they were continuing a campaign against a system that was established long before the Young Turks. The campaign against the Turks begun by Rida and Kawakibi was joined by intellectuals who blended with Islamic modernism's apologetics of Arabic some newer ideas, presumably of European origin, according to which a nation's vitality was inseparable from its language. Prominent among such writers was the Damascene Muhammad Kurd 'Ali. From the first volume of his monthly journal al-Muqtabas, he assigned a major portion of the blame for Arab and Islamic decline to the Turco-Tatars, especially the Ottomans. Their greatest sin was the imposition of the barbarous language of an uncivilized people on the Arabs. Kurd 'Ali was just as angry with his Arab compatriots in Syria as he was with the Turks. He bitterly accused them of preferring the state schools and Turkish to Arab national schools and Arab in order to gain government positions or for purposes of commerce. He leveled similar charges against those who attended the foreign missionary schools, or who preferred a European language to Arabic for materialistic gain. He was perhaps more critical of the missionary schools than the Ottoman schools. Kurd 'Ali's attack on the Ottoman schools was just as much an attack on fellow Arabs as on ruling Turks.

Arab nationalist ideology, like its nineteenth-century predecessors, was an accompaniment of political competition among the advantaged elements of Arab society. From Tahtawi to Kurd 'Ali, the successive statements of the self-view legitimized the claims of specific parties to hold or to acquire power and refuted claims of competitors. It may be that in all societies, including Arab society, social or political cleavage is the antecedent and cause of ideological contradiction. There is an immediate ring of verisimilitude to the words of a fourteenth-century Arab poet, "Verily, half the people are enemies of the one who has charge of the government; this, if he is just," which were considered an apposite quotation by an Arab statesman whose long career began under Abdulhamid II. In Arab society, as in many others, one can point to seemingly opportunistic
changes in ideology and to conflicts between clan or faction that appear to extend over generations as the only constants in a flux of ideological variations. But it may be that dissent and opposition arise from a human inability to agree on the just or the good.

In seeking place and its rewards, the intellectuals and politicians were also volunteering to assume responsibility for the problems of their community and polity. One problem gripped them all. From Tahtawi’s pain at the sight of the Franks in possession of values that were lacking in the Islamic lands to Kurd ‘Ali’s perception of his own people’s “inferiority” and “sick ideas” in comparison to the Westerners, experience of the West was wrenching. The resultant pain was eased and hope for the future was instilled by recalling the past glory of the Self in comparison to the present abasement of the Self and the past inferiority of the threatening Other. Return to the true Self of the glorious past was the remedy for this illness. And this subsequent governments set about doing, but each in turn was not successful in eliminating the possibility of the perceived deprivation of the Self in comparison with the threatening Other, and so did not eliminate the occasion for opposition and dissent. The Western problem remained the hub of politics, an insolvable problem that demanded solution. The impotence of the successive governments in the face of the universally perceived danger may well have caused some to oppose and dissent; it certainly could have legitimized opposition and dissent, whatever the cause.

The CUP government, like its predecessors, could not meet the requirement of its own ideology that clear progress be made in the contest with the West, the Ottoman Empire’s threatening Other. The Young Turks were no more the promoters of Zionism than were their opposition, but the CUP as the ruling party could not escape blame for the increasing visibility of the Zionists. Consequently, when possible, Unionist partisans ignored Zionism while opponents kept it to the fore. The issue apparently had no great effect outside Palestine, but there the impact was inescapable. Palestine provides an example of a manifest political conversion over a concrete public issue in the case of journalist Najib Nassar, a long-time Unionist and eternal anti-Zionist. The government’s failures with respect to this issue resulted in a change of allegiance. Similar Young Turk failures in the wars with Italy and the Balkan states could not have increased confidence in the Unionists and Ottomanism. Contemporary diplomatic reports and later Arab nationalist accounts give great weight to these military failures in stimulating Arab dissent and opposition.

Arab nationalism arose as an opposition movement in the Ottoman Empire. It was directed quite as much against Ottoman Arabs as against the Ottoman Turks themselves. The conflict was between elements of the Ottoman Arab elite who competed for office, a conflict of the sort that exists in every society and is the most likely starting point of politics everywhere. As in every society, the competitors offered themselves as the best qualified to realize the ideals of the society and ward off the dangers that threatened it. Throughout the nineteenth century, the contenders for office had to deal with the perceived inferiority of Islam or the East to the West. Various attempts to meet this problem had no satisfactory result. Arab nationalism arose out of the failure of its immediate predecessor and its ideological parent, Islamic modernist Ottomanism. The movement made progress before 1914, but it remained a minority movement until 1918, when the Arab revolt, the British agreement with the amir Husayn, and the British defeat of the Ottomans left the dominant faction of the Syrian and Iraqi Arab notables with no alternative to Arabism.

Notes

This paper owes much to research carried out when I was a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I also thank the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago and Bruce Craig. I, of course, am solely responsible for its contents.

1. Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought, p. 95 (quotation); and Hisham Sharabi, Arab Intellectuals, pp. 2–3, 5, 57, 59, 60.

2. Sharabi, Arab Intellectuals, pp. 2–3, 115, 128; and Bassam Tibi, Arab Nationalism, pp. 69–70, 71.

3. Sharabi, Arab Intellectuals, pp. 54–56; and Tibi, Arab Nationalism, pp. 74–75. Hourani’s statement, though asserting the Christians’ sympathy with the West, does not assign them and the missionary schools the same influence (Hourani, Arabic Thought, pp. 95–97, 245).


22. 'Umar Salih al-Barghuthi and Khalil Tuta (Tota), Tarikh filastin [The history of Palestine] (Jerusalem: 1923). The book was written for the Palestinian schools but, according to A. L. Tibawi, was banned at the insistence of Sir Herbert Samuel. However, the educational system in Palestine described by Tibawi and by Humphrey Bowman permitted considerable freedom in the production and adoption of history textbooks to Arab officials and teachers, who were nationalists to a man. Abdul Latif Tibawi, Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Study of Three Decades of British Administration (London: 1956), pp. 28–38, 95–97, 193–99; and Humphrey Ernest Bowman, Middle-East Window (New York, London, Toronto: 1942), pp. 310–14. For an ardent Arab nationalist who had a long and successful career in education, see Kedourie, The Chatham House Version, p. 341.
23. Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza, Mukhtasar tarikh al-'arab wal-islam [An abridged history of the Arabs and of Islam], 2 vols. (Cairo: [1924?]; 2d ed. [1343H/1924–1344H/1925]; 3d ed. [1344H/1925]. This was an elementary school textbook and was replaced by the author’s Durrus al-tarikh al-'arabi min aqdam al-azmina ila al-an [Lessons in Arab history from the earliest times until now]. Darwaza followed with other elementary school textbooks: Durrus al-tarikh al-qadim [Lessons in ancient history] (Cairo: 1350/1931); 2d ed. (Jerusalem: 1355/1936).
Darwaza’s textbooks, in view of their favorable reviews, their number and many editions, and their author’s prominent association with major Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi politicians throughout the interwar years, most likely were widely used in Palestine and Syria. According to Reeva Simon, some of them were used as teaching aids in the Arabic schools. M.M.I.A.D., 4 (1924): 428–29; 11 (1931): 704; Reeva S. Simon, “The Teaching of History in Iraq Before the Rashid Ali Coup of 1941,” Middle Eastern Studies 22 (1986): 42.

24. Darwish al-Miqdadi, Tarikh al-umma al-‘arabiyya [The history of the Arab nation] (Baghdad: 1350/1931); 2d ed. (1351/1932); 3d ed. (1353/1934); 4th ed. (Baghdad: 1355/1936); rev. ed. (Baghdad: 1939). The fourth edition has not been accessible. Information concerning it has been provided by Dr. Reeva Simon.
Miqdadi’s textbook was an officially adopted text in the Iraqi intermediate schools. Its prime importance is attested to by two prominent Arab historians and educators who were students during a prominent period, Nabil Amin Faris and Nicola Ziadah. According to the former, Miqdadi’s text “was selected as the text for the teaching of history in the secondary schools of Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, where it continued to be the standard text of Arab youth for several student generations.” In the judgment of the latter it was “the first history to deal with Arab history on national grounds.” Nabil Amin Faris, “The Arabs and Their History,” Middle East Journal 8 (1954): 156–57; Nicola A. Ziadah, “Recent Arabic Literature on Arabism,” Middle East Journal 6 (1952): 471.

40. Darwaza, *Hawla al-harakat al-‘arabiyya al-haditha* [Regarding the modern Arab movement], p. 133.


43. Khalidi’s list is in *British Policy*, between pp. 258 and 259; the only sources he gives for the reputed affiliations of the deputies are Arabic press reports ("The 1912 Election Campaign," pp. 461 n. 4, 463 nn. 8, 9). I have used Feroz Ahmad and Dankwart A. Rustow, "Ilkinci Mesrutiyet Döneminde Meclisler: 1908–1918," *Güney-Dogu Avrupa Arastirmaları Dergisi*, 5 (1976): 279–83 (supplemented by information provided by the authors personally).


54. Ibid., pp. 104–6, 115–19, 167–68.


57. For the debates of the Young Turk period, see Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 337–428; on the praise of the Arabs and the rejection of Turkism, see ibid., pp. 348–50, 353–55, 373–6; for the beginnings of these debates, see ibid., pp. 263–64, 297–99, and also David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism*, especially pp. 35–37, 61–80.


63. George Young, *Corps de droit Ottoman*, 1:20–21.


68. Young, *Corps de droit Ottoman*, 2:365–75; and Articles 15 and 16 of the constitution (Kili, *Turkish Constitutional Developments*, p. 151).


70. Kushner, *Rise of Turkish Nationalism*, pp. 91–95.

71. See the programs adopted by the annual CUP congresses and their implementation, *Revue de Monde Musulman*, 6, no. 11 (November 1908): 515–16; 9, no. 9 (September 1909): 167; 10, no. 2 (February 1910): 250; 15, nos. 7–8 (July–August 1911), 142–143; 22 (March 1913): 155–56; and Tarik Z. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler*, pp. 209, 211–12, 217–18 (Ronald Jennings has translated the relevant portions of these CUP programs for the author). A. L. Tihawi, *Islamic Education*, p. 67, evidently describing the Young Turk period, says that Turkish was the language of instruction from the upper elementary level (rüdzcî ye) on.