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From radical nationalism to post-nationalism?
the perceived failure of nationalism and the tacit return of a new liberal discourse

From Radical Nationalism to Post-Nationalism? The perceived failure of radicalism and the tacit return of a new liberal discourse[1]

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Silence of the sources: the seeming absence of Arab liberal thought (part 1)

For a historian, the silence of the sources is like a black hole in astrophysics. By definition, the force of gravity in a black hole is so strong that it withholds the light and with it all information. Therefore, no direct observation is ever possible. In *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking explains to the lay audience how he searched for antiparticles that escape the black whole's field of gravity thereby creating a gamma ray background radiation.[2] This radiation allows astrophysicists to obtain information by looking at the immediate environment of what cannot be observed directly. This paper argues that the seeming absence of liberal thought in the Arab world should not be a reason for despair but rather the occasion for a critical revision of our heuristic concepts and hermeneutic methods. Since the dearth of an Arab "liberalism" impedes direct observation, we have to focus instead on the "background radiation" of other discourses that do not seem to be "liberal" at first glance. In the following I will try to gauge in how far liberal thought can develop within the framework of the nationalist discourse.

Of course, historians are familiar with indirect observation. Since we cannot access the past directly, our only way to obtain knowledge is by sources – textual or material. The absence of sources, however, does not provide us any certainty about the non-existence of a certain phenomenon. Social realities and the production and preservation of texts are too complex to allow such a premature conclusion. The silence of the sources can have several reasons. Some

[2] London et al.: Bantam Press 1988, 100-113.

topics may have deemed to be too irrelevant to be written down, let alone being printed. When such issues suddenly appear in the archives at a later period of time, they leave us wondering why we have never read about this before. Other issues may have been seen as inappropriate. Social taboos, for instance, leave few textual traces in the archives unless a particular taboo is broken thus provoking a scandal. If such scandals proliferate, the binding force of the taboo is already about to vanish.

In the political sphere, censorship can enforce silence in the public media on a particular topic. However, this kind of silence has a limited reach. Intellectual techniques of circumventing censorship are as old as censorship itself: irony, allusions, ambiguous language, and, most importantly, the shift of focus to other eras and places. Contemporary readers of Voltaire, for instance, understood very well that his assaults on Muhammad and Islam were, in fact, directed at the Catholic Church.

Even more effective than direct censorship is the atmosphere of insecurity created by violence, political trials and orchestrated public rage against outspoken intellectuals. In this regard, the assassination of a critical writer like Samir Kassir in Lebanon – or more recently Hrant Dink in Turkey – is not only a heinous crime, but it is meant to set a whole community of intellectuals into a state of shock and awe. This effect is reinforced by the inability or, better to say, the unwillingness of the authorities to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators, let alone the networks behind them.

Public trials are another means to curtail and intimidate inconvenient intellectuals. During the last decade, this could be witnessed in quite a number of cases such as Hamid Abu Zaid and Saad Eddin Ibrahim in Egypt, or Riad Saif in Syria – for just mentioning a few names. Yet, in contrast to the heydays of authoritarianism, these critics and dissidents are not officially put to trial because of their ideas, but rather on charges concerning their personal behavior (tax evasion, corruption, acceptance of foreign funds) or because of their alleged assault of Islam like in the recent case of Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman, an Egyptian web blogger, who was

sentenced to a five-year prison term.[3] The personalized allegations of self-enrichment and religious unbelief aim at destroying the defendants' reputation and, thus, de-legitimize their causes effectively. Beyond this, it creates an agitated public mood that makes any rational debate impossible.

Beyond this, the insistence of the West on political change and democratization in the Arab world has not made the situation of liberal intellectuals easier. Since the late nineteenth century, liberal thought could be dismissed easily as an "inauthentic" adoption of Western ideas. In addition, liberal intellectuals could be accused of serving the Western goal of dominating the region. In a similar way, the left was accused of serving the interests of the Soviet Union, until its demise in 1990. In contrast with this, nationalism and Islamism could hardly be attributed to an extra-regional power – a fact that contributed to the enduring dominance of these two ideologies in the Arab world.

A last factor that aggravates the political standing of liberals in the Arab world lies in their inclination to criticize the political conditions of their own societies. In my further argumentation I contend that qualitative criticism of authoritarian structures and policies is *one* defining—probably the *most* defining—feature of liberal thought in the Arab world today, disregarding the political camp from where this criticism arises. I regard such a criticism as qualitative when it seeks to overcome the criticized structure rather than just de-legitimize and overthrow a particular regime. This self-criticism of liberals, however, gives their political opponents the welcome opportunity to accuse them of fouling the nest. Of course, self-criticism is not an exclusive domain of liberal thought. However, radical Islamism and nationalism tend to avoid the articulation of painful truths by shifting the thrust of their attacks toward a significant "other" – mainly Western imperialism and Zionism. In contrast to

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[3] Nabil is a former student of Al-Azhar and has blamed this institution of being "the university of terrorism". The Herald Tribune (February 23, 2007), 5; Sonja Zekri: "Der bessere Nahe Osten: Arabische Blogger gelten als Hoffnungsträger der Demokratie", Süddeutsche Zeitung, March 3/4, 2007, 13.

this, it seems to be another hallmark of Arab liberal thought today that the state of affairs at home has gained at least equal priority with the battle against foreign enemies.

In conclusion, liberal thought seems to be almost absent in the Arab world today, particularly with view to the prevailing dominance of nationalism and Islamism. However, any search for new liberal thought in the Arab world has to take the dire circumstances into account that liberals have to face when they express their ideas and criticisms in public. For this reason, the heuristic approach cannot confine itself to stating the absence of liberal thought, but must rather sharpen its view for liberal conclusions and ideas that are reached in a seemingly illiberal environment. In other words, historians of political ideas must look out for the "antiparticles" that escape the gravity of silence rather than staring directly into the black whole thereby diving into the melancholy of absence.

Silence in the literature: the seeming absence of Arab liberal thought (part 2)

Secondary literature on liberal thought in the Arab world is not totally absent but remarkably scarce in comparison with the abundance of publications on both nationalism and Islamism. This bias has a variety of reasons. The paucity of sources, which was described above, is certainly one of them. Silence of the sources, one could argue, creates an absence of literature – unless, however, a new heuristic approach attempts to break this silence.

On the epistemological level, the dearth of Western literature on liberal thought in the Arab world confirms the enduring cliché that has set "rational" Europe against "fanatic" Muslims in the period of colonialism and, today, puts the "liberal and democratic" West against the "violent and authoritarian" Arab world. At this point, one should not underestimate the epistemic power of clichés. Like other clichés, these ones were not invented or taken out of the blue. They rather evolved and took roots in a long history of unequal confrontation and

interaction between the Arab world and the West.[4] The self-declared "war on terror", suggests the liberal outlook of the West or the United States, even though the applied methods and the chosen coalition partners often belie this pretension. Militant Islamists, on the other hand, still like to draw on similarly stereotypical slogans like "You love life and we love death!"[5] Arab liberals have problems to situate themselves within this framework of hostile interaction by stereotypical self-description and othering. Scholars, on the other hand, face the demands of a book market that prefers catchy titles drawing on existing fears rather than sober announcements. I wonder, for instance, whether Harvard University Press would have been willing to sell Raymond Baker's book *Islam without Fear* under the title "Moderate Muslims in Egypt."[6]

Besides the lack of liberal sources, research on liberal thought is impeded by the difficulty to establish the relevance of the topic. Liberal thought doesn't vie for the attention of the readers (and researchers) as loudly as revolutionary ideologies do. Liberal thought produces, if at all, paper trails. Impressive public actions such as general strikes, armed struggles, and mass demonstrations are seldom a consequence of liberal thought. In addition, there is a remarkable reluctance of movements, parties or organizations to identify with the notion "liberal". This reluctance converges with the fact that there is not even a genuine Arabic word or, at least, a loan translation for the English word "liberal". While the neologism *ishtirakiyya* became the generally accepted equivalent of "socialism", *shuyu'iyya* of "communism", and *qawmiyya* of "nationalism", the word "liberal" is still simply being transliterated in Arabic as *libirali*.[7]

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[4] Almut Höfert and Armando Salvatore (eds.): Between Europe and Islam. Shaping Modernity in a Transcultural Space, Brussels et al.: PIE Lang 2000.

[5] The slogan was apparently part of the propaganda video produced by the perpetrators of the train bombings in Madrid of March 11, 2004. This slogan provides, again, the title for the following book: Bruno Schirra: Ihr liebt das Leben, wir lieben den Tod! Die Menschen im Herzen des Islamismus, Freiburg: Herder 2007.

[6] Raymond William Baker: Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2003.

[7] This lack of name creates a void in the encyclopedias. There is no entry on "liberalism" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*" or the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*. Cf., however, the *EI* on "Ishtirakiyya" (IV, 123-6), "Shuyu'iyya" (IX, 517-24), "Kawmiyya" (IV, 781-194), and "Wataniyya" (XI, 175f) and the *Oxford Encyclopedia* on "Socialism and Islam" (IV, 81-86), "Arab Nationalism" (I, 113-6), "Arab Socialism" (I, 116-8), and "Communism and Islam" (I, 304-08).

Taking this into account, it is seemingly easy to identify "nationalists", "Islamists" and "communists" by taking simply their self-declared ideological affiliations at face value – even though this can be misleading, too, as I will argue below. If we confine the study of Arab liberal thought to groups that are self-declared "liberals", the resulting story will be predictably short and fragmentary.

The most serious heuristic impediment for a new approach to Arab liberal thought is the tendency of historians and political scientists to reify political ideologies, i.e. to treat them as clearly distinguishable "objects". Islamism, for instance, is usually discussed independently from nationalism and both are treated separately from socialism/communism. These differences seem so evident that there is no further need for justification. In addition, this complies, again, with the marketing strategies of the publishing houses as well as the consumption habits of the reading public. "Arab nationalism" and "Islamism" are established topics on the book market. Yet, this reification shapes our perception of "ideologies" considerably thereby impeding also our understanding of liberal thought in three important ways.

(1) First, reification of ideologies implies that the objects of investigation can be signified adequately by one particular name. Nationalisms are studied by using their self-declared identities. The term "Arab nationalism" (*al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya*) was not invented by scholars but by the nationalists themselves. However, the scholarly adoption of the self-declared identity of an ideology implies leaving the definition of its content to the leading ideologues. In consequence, there is a seemingly self-evident corpus of texts that explain the "meaning" of Arab nationalism and therefore must to be discussed – at least partly – in every comprehensive study on Arab nationalism: Constantine Zurayk, Sati' al-Husri, Michel 'Aflaq, Zaki al-Arsuzi, and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir. It is remarkable that the productive writing period of these nationalists covered a rather brief period during the 1940s and '50s. Scholars of Arab

nationalism are tempted to misunderstand the out-put of these 20 years as defining and representative for the contents of Arab nationalism *per se*![8]

Applied to "Islamism", the same methodological approach of naming an ideology by its self-declared identity is thornier. Notions like "Islamism", "Islamic fundamentalism", "radical Islam" or "political Islam" are widespread in scholarship,[9] but rarely used as for self-description by the groups under investigation. With regard to "liberalism", Albert Hourani suffered from the same problem, when he named his book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (not "Liberal Thought in the Arab World"!).[10] In his preface to the 1983 reissue, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the chosen title arguing that the ideas he "loosely" referred to as liberal "were not only ideas about democratic institutions or individual rights, but also about national strength and unity and the power of governments." It is even more obvious that the intellectuals Hourani discusses in his book such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh or Rashid Rida did not refer to themselves as "Arab liberals".[11] It would be interesting, of course, to know the role of Oxford University Press in helping to choose this particular title that shaped our understanding of the described era so profoundly.

(2) Once an ideological phenomenon is established as an "object" of research by giving it a name, it is concluded that this ideology has a somehow coherent set of ideas. Since this is seldom the case, in fact, scholars highlight one particular aspect of the ideology as defining. Here, again, the case of nationalism seems to be self-evident. Arab nationalists – particularly during the 1940s and '50s – agree that an Arab nation exists which needs to be unified in a

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[8] Youssef M. Choueiri: Arab Nationalism: A History, Essex: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 101-165; Bassam Tibi's critical enquiry in Arab nationalism is, in fact, only a study on Sati' al-Husri. Idem: Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry, New York 1990. Adeed Dawish refers also mainly to Husri when he sketches the theory of Arab nationalism. Adeed Dawisha: Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003, 49-74.

[9] E.g. Youssef Choueiri: Islamic Fundamentalism, London: Pinter Publishers 1990; Graham E. Fuller: The Future of Political Islam, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004; Oliver Roy: The Failure of Political Islam, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001; Emmanuel Sivan: Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics, New Haven: Yale University Press 1985.

[10] Albert Hourani: Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939, Cambridge 1983, iv.

[11] The observation applies to the sourcebook Liberal Islam, edited by Charles Kurzman, which brings a number of authors together, who would be fairly surprised to find themselves being featured in such a context: Ali Shariati, Yousuf al-Qaradawi, Rashid Ghannoushi.

nation-state and strengthened by policies that follow the "national interest". In accordance, studies on nationalism have a dominant focus on the emergence of a "national Arab identity". Other aspects of political concern such as social justice, institutional arrangements and international policies are, implicitly, treated as being of minor importance. In the case of Islamism, there are two ways to define an "essential" core doctrine: on the one hand, the vague allegation that Islam is a comprehensive "system" that comprises all aspects of life, which is shared not only by Islamists but also by many conservative Muslims, and, on the other hand, the alleged contradiction between the sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of God, which is not shared anymore by many moderate Islamists.

In order to define liberal thought it is even more difficult to focus on one particular aspect as the example of Albert Hourani has shown above. Liberal thought has a number of crucial ideas, which are loosely connected to one another without, however, having a clear center or hierarchy: limited government, division of powers, free market economy, progress by evolution, representative government, rule of the law, equality of citizens, human rights, contract theory, etc. An intellectual who propagates one of these ideas is not necessarily a liberal, while there are few liberals in the Arab world who promote all of these ideas at the same time and with the same fervor.

(3) Once an ideology is named and conceptualized as a consistent phenomenon, it becomes easier to construct its "history". In the case of Arab nationalism, earlier studies have chosen the narrative plot of the "drama" with emphasis on the "birth" and "rise" such as *The Arab Awakening* by George Antonius.[12] More recent works have chosen the plot of a tragedy, instead, thereby ending their stories with "decline", "despair", and "death". Olivier Roy, for instance, has diagnosed the "failure of political Islam",[13] while Adeed Dawisha even spoke a

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[12] London 1938.
[13] Oliver Roy: The Failure of Political Islam, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001.

"postmortem" on the grave of Arab nationalism.[14] This anthropomorphism is both striking and misleading. The conception that ideologies have an "origin" and an "end" is problematic for heuristic and political reasons.

In searching for the intellectual origins of Arab ideologies, some trajectories have become widely accepted in the scholarship.[15] Accordingly, nationalism goes back to one of the two competing European models, "ethnic German" or "republican French" nationalism; Arab liberalism seems to be rooted in Anglo-Saxon contract theories such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke;[16] and Islamism in Salafist reformism or, further back, in the writings of certain Hanbalite theologians and polygraphs such Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. From this retrospect perspective, Arab political thought seems to be bi-furcated into one Western and one Islamic tradition. On this basis, Islamists accuse their ideological opponents of being "unauthentic" and "westernized". Most nationalist intellectuals are aware of this problem and, therefore, downplay their reliance on European ideas. In a similar way, Arab liberals try to ward off the impression that their ideas are western in origin and therefore "alien" to Arab and Muslim culture.

Once an intellectual "tradition" is accepted in scholarship, some further conclusions seem to be self-evident. One, for example, is the assumption that the authoritarianism of radical Arab nationalism resulted from the reception of ethnic German nationalism rather than the republican French version. Bassam Tibi, for instance, has shown convincingly that Sati' al-Husri admired the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and, at the same time, refuted Ernest Renan. Departing from this observation, Adeed Dawisha holds the "authoritarian and coercive

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[14] Adeed Dawisha: Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003, 283-313. Cf. Fouad Ajami: The Endo of Pan-Arabism, in: Tawfic E. Farah (ed.): Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate, Boulder and London: Westview Press 1987, 96–114.

[15] Israel Gershoni has critically reviewed this approach as "Old Narrative" in his "Rethinking the Formation of Arab Natinalism in the Middle East, 1920–1945: Old and New Narratives", in: James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni: Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East, New York: Columbia University Press 1997, 3–25, particularly 5–11. Nevertheless, Youssef Choueiri and Adeed Dawisha have recently tried rejuvenating this "Old Narrative".

[16] Larbi Sadiki wants to solve this problem of origines by a „de-foundationalization" of democracy in the Arab world. Idem: The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter Discourses. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

streak in the tenets of German cultural nationalism" responsible for the authoritarian inclinations of Arab nationalists such as Sati' al-Husri and his most influential admirer, Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir.[17] The assumption, however, that the French concept of nation is liberal and democratic, because it is voluntaristic, while the German idea of nation is illiberal and authoritarian, because it is deterministic, is premature. Applying the same logic, one could also argue that, despite its ethnic foundation, German nationalism has a long tradition of federalism which is rooted in the regional, cultural, confessional and dialectical diversity of German culture.[18] In addition, Bismarck's Prussia was no nation-state itself and, therefore, did not pursue cultural assimilation policies for most of the time. In contrast to this, French republican nationalism has a deep rooted tradition of centralization. The policy of assimilation and forced homogenization, for instance, is longer in France than in the German empire.[19] The endeavor of radical Arab nationalists to "nationalize" school education as well as their goal of creating a unitarian nation-state is either a complete misunderstanding of Bismarck's *Kaiserreich* or it is the result from the merger of the German concept of ethnic nationalism with the French concept of centralized republicanism.

A similar case is Antun Sa'ada's concept of Syrian nationalism. With regard to the fascist symbolism of his Syrian Social Nationalist Party, one could conclude that Sa'ada must have been strongly influenced by German nationalism. In fact, the contrary is true. Relying on the French school of national geography, primarily Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918), Sa'ada argues that the emergence of nations results from social interaction within a clearly definable national territory. Accordingly, he refutes late nineteenth century German theories of racial nationalism with reference to the German-Jewish scholar Friedrich Hertz (1878-1964).

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[17] Ibid., 64–74; 298. In contrast to him, Choueiri emphasizes the Husri's eclecticism concerning Fichte. Choueiri, Arab Nationalism, 116–7.

[18] German federalism was eliminated by the Nazi regime in 1933. It remained to be suspended in the former German Democratic Republic.

[19] Cf. Eugen Weber: Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914, 303–338; Theodor Schieder: Das Deutsche Kaiserreich von 1871 als Nationalstaat, 2nd ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1992, 18–30.

According to Sa'ada, the big melting-pot of geography dissolves racial difference thus breeding the nation as a social reality.[20]

It is tempting to complete the history of an ideology by stretching the narrative from its beginnings to the alleged end. So, communism was declared dead after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. A second glance, however, shows a different reality. A number of communist regimes are still in power, particularly in Asia, a few more neo-communist governments have gained power recently in Latin America, and the remaining leftist organization have joined the anti-globalization movement in the West. In the Arab world, leftist ideologies hibernate mainly in the labor unions. Hence, wherever one looks, leftist ideologies have been weakened but, by metamorphosing, they have survived.

The same is true of nationalism and Islamism. Of course Arab nationalists have failed utterly to realize their grand goal of complete Arab unity. It is also obvious that Arab Islamists have not succeeded to overthrow a single regime nor were they able to establish a single *shari'a*-based state. Nevertheless, Arab nationalism and Islamism are still the two dominant ideologies in the Arab world. References to Arab nationalism and Islam(ism) can be found in the legitimization strategies of all Arab regimes – with different emphases according to the context, of course. The language of both ideologies dominates the educational systems, public and private media, and the promulgation of political organizations. One can almost speak of a discursive hegemony of Islamism and nationalism in the Arab world that leaves little room for the articulation of leftist and liberal ideas. However, Islamism and nationalism have transformed one another considerably. The articulation of Arab nationalism includes more references to Islam than ever. Islamism, on the other hand, has become largely "nationalized." Hamas, Hizbullah, the Algerian FIS, and the Muslim Brothers have become national-Islamist

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[20] Christoph Schumann: Symbolische Aneignungen: Antun Sa'ada's Radikalnationalismus in der Epoche des Faschismus, in: Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien, René Wildangel (eds.): Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 2004, 155-189

movements, leaving small internationalist breakaways such as al-Qaeda or Hizb ul-Tahrir behind.

Hence, nationalism and Islamism have not failed. It is only the radical versions of them that did so. Both ideologies went through a period of radicalization which lasted about two or three decades. As I have argued before, radical Arab nationalism was most prolific intellectually during the 1940s and '50s. The same was the case with Islamism during the 1960s and '70s (e.g. Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, Baqir Sadr, and Ruhollah Khomeini). Western scholars have studied the intellectual works that have been produced during these two eras intensively. However, they should not misperceive the discourses of these peculiar periods as defining for each ideology. In other words, the "success" or "failure" of Arab nationalism today should not be measured against the claims formulated in the 1940s and '50s. Neither can the state of Islamism today be gauged by the goals formulated once by Mawdudi and Qutb. Since the heydays of radicalization, Arab nationalism and Islamism have metamorphosed into something different – despite the fact that we still call them by the same names!

The discourse(s) of Arab nationalism(s) and liberal thought

In the following section I analyze the interrelation between nationalism and liberal thought while using the theoretical approach of discourse analysis. In line with my previous criticism of reification, my approach bases on two main contentions. First, my focus is on "nationalism in the Arab world" rather than "Arab nationalism" (as opposed to "Syrian", "Palestinian" or "Lebanese nationalism"). Second, my analysis questions the perception of nationalism as a distinct and consistent system of ideology. On the contrary, I argue that one major reason for the success of nationalism lies in its ability to borrow extensively from other ideological currents particularly liberalism, socialism, and fascism.

The discourse of nationalism can be divided analytically into a "superstructure" and a "substructure". The superstructure of nationalism can be summarized by three simple doctrines: First, humanity is divided into nations. Second, the only legitimate order of a nation is the nation-state. Third, policy should comply with the national interest. The discursive substructure comprises social and political ideas about modernity, the equality of citizens, institutional arrangements, and policies of nation-building. All of these ideas are only very loosely connected to the key doctrines of the superstructure.

a) The superstructure of the nationalist discourse

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the political elites of the Arab East embraced nationalism, because they understood from Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of January 1918 that this discourse had become the internationally accepted language of the struggle against colonialism and foreign intervention as well as for independence and self-determination.[21] By then, there was no urgent need for clear-cut definitions of the multi-vocal notions "nation" (*umma*) and "national territory" (*watan*). Both remained open for ambiguous and even conflicting interpretations, while the ingredients of these interpretations included Arab culture, language and history, Islamic religion, and an imaginative geography such as the abstract ideas of "Palestine", "Lebanon", or "Syria".[22] Throughout the twentieth century, the term "Lebanese fatherland" (*al-watan al-lubnani*) could refer to the Greater Lebanon established in 1922 or to the Smaller Lebanon of Mount Lebanon and Beirut, depending on the context. The "Syrian fatherland" (*al-watan al-suri*) could refer to the Syrian Arab Republic or to the area of Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*). The theorist of pan-Syrianism, Antun Saʿada, even added Cyprus, Kuwait, and Iraq to his concept of "Syria" in the late

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[21] Keith D. Watenpaugh: Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2006, 134–159.

[22] Cf. Thomas Philipp, Christoph Schumann (eds.): From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon (Beiruter Texte und Studien, Bd. 96), Beirut 2004; Rashid Khalidi: Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, New York: Columbia University Press 1997.

1940s. Except from Cyprus, Arab nationalists claimed all these countries for the wider "Arab fatherland" (*al-watan al-'arabi*). But also this concept changed over time. In the early twentieth century, it was confined to the Mashrek and the Arab Peninsular. It expanded to Egypt and the Maghrib not until the 1940s and '50s.

This ambiguity makes it difficult to draw a clear line between the two Arabic notions for nationalism, *wataniyya* and *qawmiyya*, even though many scholars have tried to do – most recently Adeed Dawisha.[23] Yet, the discursive history of these two notions is too complex to be reduced to a single distinction. In fact, there are at least three main distinctions which intersect in the meaning of these words. (1) Linguistically, *qawmiyya* refers to an ethnic entity (*qawm*), while *wataniyya* refers to a territorial unit or a "fatherland" (*watan*). However, a nation that aims at establishing a nation-state can hardly be imagined without a territory. Hence, despite its ethnic foundation, Arab nationalism refers constantly to the Arab homeland. The Arab Ba'th Party has even a map included in its party symbol.

(2) After the emergence of the Westphalian state system in the Arab world, *wataniyya* has become to signify nationalism defined by state interests in contrast to *qawmiyya* as a pan-nationalism (pan-Arab or pan-Syrian) that seeks to overcome the existing states.[24] However, this difference should not be overestimated since the tension between localism and pan-Arabism has always been a very part of Arab nationalism (as well as of pan-Syrianism).[25] Particularly the notion of the "national interest" (in Arabic both *al-maslaha al-qawmiyya* and *al-maslaha al-wataniyya*!) remained always ambivalent on whether domestic reform had priority over Arab unification or vice versa. Nowadays, the grand goal of Arab unification has been suspended indefinitely, but it has never been abrogated officially. However, the Arab states still draw a part of their legitimacy from belonging to the wider Arab nation (*al-umma*

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[23] Dawisha: Arab Nationalism, 219–21, 245–7, 286–7. Bernard Lewis argues similarly in The Shaping of the Modern Middle East, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994, 71–98.

[24] Fred H. Lawson: Constructing International Relations in the Arab World, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2006.

[25] Adeed Dawisha: Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003.

al-'arabiyya) and the Arab fatherland (*al-watan al-'arabi*). All Arab states legitimize themselves as "fatherlands" (*watan*), but none of them claims to constitute a nation (*umma*) of its own. They also continue to use the language of "Arabism" and "Arab solidarity" (*'uruba*) for the articulation of their "national interests".[26]

(3) Third, and most important in the context of this paper, the appearance of the word *qawmiyya* in nationalist discourses during the 1930s indicated a new understanding of nationalism. This new understanding crystallized in the course of an elite-conflict between the ruling upper class "nationalists" (*wataniyyun*) and the upward orientated, young professional middle class "nationalists" (*qawmiyyun*). The latter wanted to set their nationalism apart from the traditional one by new styles (shirts, badges, organized demonstrations),[27] new discursive forms (hence the inclination to theorize nationalism between the 1930s and '50s), and a more ostentatious radicalism. During the 1930s and '40s, the unification schemes of the traditional National Bloc did not differ much from its radical opponents such as the League of Nationalist Action or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. The ideological difference was much more obvious with regard to the ideas of the *qawmiyyin* on how the future national society should look like.

Today, *wataniyya*, in the sense of a "nationalism based on state sovereignty"[28] is generally accepted throughout the political camps – including liberals, socialists, moderate Islamists, and even former pan-nationalists.[29] Yet, the question on how tightly the national interest (*al-maslaha al-wataniyya*) should be connected to the Arab nation (*al-umma al-'arabiyya*) and the broader Arab homeland (*al-watan al-'arabi*) remains an unresolved matter of

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[26] I am not aware whether there is an equivalent notion in Arabic for the German word "Staatsräson" (reasons of state).

[27] Christoph Schumann: "The Experience of Organized Nationalism: Radical Discourse and Political Socialization in Syria and Lebanon," in: Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (eds.): From the Syrian Land to the State of Syria, 343-358; Keith D. Watenpaugh: Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2006, 255-298.

[28] Dawisha, 219–21.

[29] The only critics are few stubborn pan-nationalists and some internationalist Islamists.

controversy.[30] Within this general mainstream, proponents of *qawmiyya*-nationalism, both Syrian and Arab, distinguish themselves by their views on issues like democracy, social justice, gender-equality, secularism, educational policies, modernization, etc. – issues which belong to the substructure of the nationalist discourse as I will argue below. In other words, *qawmiyya*-nationalism is not dead as Adeed Dawisha claims. It has merely slipped away from his attention because Dawisha reduces Arab nationalism to pan-Arabism thus ignoring other political, economic, and social goals – apart from Arab unity.

b) The substructure of the nationalist discourse

Theorists of nationalism have focused mainly on the superstructure of nationalism.[31] Concordantly, scholars of Middle Eastern nationalisms have discussed the emergence and development of "national identities" thus sidelining nationalist ideas about issues like modernization, progress, social justice, equality of citizens, and economic prosperity. Maybe the reason for this negligence is the stunning diversity of nationalist discourses. The key doctrines of "nation", "nation-state" and the "national interest" are too vague to determine concrete policies in fields like education, health, fiscal policies, etc. Therefore, the nationalist discourse is more than just open to borrowing from other ideologies. It rather must adopt political programs that it cannot develop from its thin dogmatic superstructure.

During the 1920s and '30s, nationalist discourses had a liberal outlook that was shaped by the social and political concerns of the urban notables and the cultural and religious ideas of a small stratum of modern educated intellectuals.[32] From this perspective, nationalism provided not only the language of independence and self-determination, but also underpinned the claim

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[30] Raymond Hinnebusch: The International Politics of the Middle East, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 64.
[31] E.g. Anthony Smith, Benedict Anderson, and Ernest Gellner.
[32] Keith D. Watenpaugh: Middle-Class Modernity and the Persistence of the Politics of the Notables in Inter-war Syria, in: IJMES 35 (2003), no. 2, 257-286.

to the nation's equal participation in a universal civilization of human society.[33] There was a general agreement about the necessity of social change combined with the hope that change would stimulate "progress". Change, however, was thought as gradualist, i.e. enacted by reforms and education rather than revolution or an overthrow (*inqilab*) of the old order. For obvious reasons, property rights and the rule of the law belonged to the key values of the upper class of land-owners and tradespersons. For this reason, the preferred academic education of their offspring was law.[34] Besides, the local connectedness of the elites reinforced their dislike of centralization and grand unification schemes. Nationalists of the interwar period demanded a modification of the colonial borders and a closer cooperation of the Arab states, but not complete unity. Their domestic interest was served best by a constitutional order and representative government. Conflicts with the French mandate authorities did seldom revolve around institutional issues but rather around national issues like borders and national sovereignty.[35]

The radical nationalist discourse that emerged during the 1930s and '40s established itself as a social and a political "counter-discourse". A "new generation" (*jil jadid*) of self-declared "intellectuals" (*muthaqqafun*) contested the political prerogative of the upper class. They were proud of the fact that their social position was acquired by education rather than inherited. The nationalistic "teacher-leaders" such as Antun Sa'ada, Zaki al-Arsuzi, or Michel 'Aflaq drew their limited political power from their ability to address the romantic imaginations of their young followers and to reinforce their hope of belonging to a future elite of the

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[33] Christoph Schumann: Nationalism, Diaspora and "Civilizational Mission": The Case of Syrian Nationalism in Latin America between WWI and WWII, in: Nations and Nationalism 10 (2004), no. 4, 599-617. Keith D. Watenpaugh: Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2006.

[34] Donald M. Reid: Lawyers and Politics in the Arab World, 1880-1960 (Studies in Middle Eastern History, Bd. 5), Minneapolis – Chicago (Bibliotheca Islamica) 1981.

[35] Eyal Zisser: Writing a Constitution – Constitutional Debates in Syria and Lebanon in the Mandate Period, in: Christoph Schumann: The Roots of Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean, forthcoming 2008.

"educated".[36] According to their academic education, they distanced themselves from the poorly integrated liberal and national outlook of notables while presenting "comprehensive" worldviews and clear-cut definitions instead. It is from this period onward that nationalism became an "ideology" in the Arab world with two major goals: (1) replacing the colonial order of territorial states by a unitary nation-state and (2) the comprehensive transformation of society by revolutionary reforms. The political centralism inherent in the radical nationalist discourse reflected the local uprootedness of the new intelligenzia and their fascination with the idea that society can be completely re-made from an Archimedean Point. Hence their inclination to borrow from ideologies like fascism or socialism that claim to be based on science and thereby confirm the leading role of a political vanguard educated in "sciences" like philosophy, sociology, history or education.

Once radical nationalist intellectuals and officers had taken power in one Arab country, they faced an unavoidable clash of their two leading goals. The so-called "Unionists" (*al-wahdawiyyun*) wanted to pursue unity by revolutionizing the neighboring Arab states, while the "Regionalists" (*al-qutriyyun*) preferred to revolutionize their own society, first, in the name of a unification that ought to come at some point in the future. Once the Arab Ba'th Party gained power in Syria and Iraq, it followed consistently the strategy of power consolidation and domestic reforms, disregarding whether the leadership claimed to be "regionalist" (*qutri*) or "nationalist" (*qawmi*).[37] The legacy of the peculiar mixture of nationalist and socialist ideas of the 1960s and '70s still dominates the social and political realities of many Arab countries for the better or worse: inflated bureaucracies, large and mostly outdated industrial sectors, over-sized armies, a strong emphasis on the Arabic language in education and, resulting from this, conflicts with cultural minorities, and last, but

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[36] Theoretical: Anthony D. Smith: The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World, Cambridge 1981, 108–33. Empirical: Christoph Schumann: Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon. Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung, 1930-1958 (Schriften des Deutschen Orient-Instituts), Hamburg 2001.
[37] Eberhard Kienle: Ba'th vs. Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989, London 1990; Volker Perthes: The Political Economy of Syria under Asad, London – New York: Tauris 1995.

not least, the remnants of secularism together with the enduring fervor of the Islamist opposition to deconstruct it.

By embarking on a reformist policy, even though a radical one at times, the ruling nationalists lost their revolutionary nimbus. After they had imprisoned their former allies – above all the nationalists of dissident organizations and the Communists – the Islamists took over the torch of revolution in the 1970s. While the language of the Islamists sounded drastically different then, the twin goals of Arab revolutionary thought remained the same: a new order of states on the regional plane and social justice on the domestic plane. As I have already pointed out before, the Islamists have adopted increasingly parts of the nationalist discourse particularly the key concepts of "fatherland" and the "national interest". The ruling Arab nationalists, on the other hand, gave Islam a greater importance in education and legislation. Nevertheless, despite this rapprochement, the nationalist and the Islamist elites remained strictly separated from one another up until today. Beyond this, they are eager to accentuate this difference by their public appearances (beard vs. moustache; suit vs. galabiyya) and their slogans ("Islam is the solution!"). Yet apart from the conflicts over power, material resources, and symbols, some irreconcilable ideological differences still exist. Most important among them seems to me the notion of citizenship. The Arab nationalist concept of citizenship, which is based on culture rather than religions, may raise opposition among non-Arab minorities, but it draws considerable support from the religious minorities and particularly from the non-Sunni Muslims. In contrast to this, the Islamists raise anxieties particularly among religious minorities by their demand for *shari'a*-rule. From this perspective, the slogan, "The religion for God and the fatherland for all!", (*al-din li-l-llah wa-l-watan li-l-jami'*) seems to be the most enduring and most powerful promise nationalists still have to make today.

Post-radicalism into liberal thought?

Although nationalism and Islamism are still the two dominant ideological currents in the Arab world today, they have both passed the climax of their radicalism already. Of course, the ruthless violence of small Jihadist groups like al-Qaeda attracts much public attention, but it has failed to produce mass support. Today, most nationalists and Islamists prefer a (gradual) liberalization and democratization, albeit each camp by its own terms. Nationalists and Islamists still balk at giving up their claim of being the only "true" representative of the nation (*umma*) – be it Islamic or Arab. Both ideologies have similar problems to perceive of themselves as one political camp among others *within* the "nation" rather than identifying themselves *with* the "nation." Liberals and socialists usually do not have this problem. Putting the ideological truth claims into perspective would be therefore the most important step towards the acceptance of majority votes by the electorate – except from the actual readiness of the ruling elite to accept the eventual result.

In the following section, I will analyze the "failure" of radical nationalism from the perspective of those who have played an active role in it. How do they explain this failure and what kind of lessons do they draw from it? For this purpose, I will analyze the autobiographies of five nationalists who have been active in radical organizations and came to a critical assessment of this period at a later point of time: Riyad al-Maliki (Syrian and former Ba'th-member), Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim (Syrian and former Ba'th-member), Jamal al-Sha'ir (Jordanian, former SSNP and Ba'th-member), Hisham Sharabi (Palestinian and former SSNP-member), and Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir (Lebanese and former SSNP-member).[38]

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[38] Riyad al-Maliki: Dhikrayat: 'ala darb al-kifah wa-l-hazima, Damascus: Matb 'at al-Thabat 1972; Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim: Hisad: sinin khasiba wa-thimar murra, Beirut: Bisan li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi' 1994; Jamal al-Sha'ir: Siyasi yatadhakkar: tajriba fi l-'amal al-siyasi, London: Riad El-Rayyes Books 1987; Hisham Sharabi: al-Jamr wa-l-ramad: dhikrayat muthaqqaf 'arabi, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a 1988 (1st ed. 1978); idem: Suwar al-madi: sira dhatiyya, Beirut: Dar Nelson 1993; Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir: Ayyam wa-qadiyya: min mu'ayanat muthaqqaf 'arabi, Beirut: Mu'assasat Fikr li-l-abhath wa-l-nashr 1982.

Since the 1980s, an astonishing wave of political autobiographies has been published, particularly in Syria and Lebanon.[39] A great number among these books contain a rather obvious political message, while obviously avoid to speak critically of the period after the take-over of the Ba'th Party in Syria and the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975. Instead, they direct their criticism at the period of the 1950s and early '60s. Some reasons for this shift of attention from a recent to a more detached period have been discussed in the first part of this paper. In general, autobiographies of formerly active nationalists have four interesting commonalities. (1) In the introductory statements, authors usually deemphasize the importance of their individual life experiences.[40] They rather claim that their story is a part of the nation's history and that it provides a lesson for the subsequent generation. In other words, most authors use their personal life stories as a means to narrate the national history and, beyond this, present a very peculiar interpretation of it – sometimes in open defiance of the official historiography.[41] This 'auto-historiographical' discourse is part of a democratized form of historiography that includes the public struggle over meanings and interpretations.

(2) There is a striking tendency of the authors to express their disappointment and disillusionment upfront in the titles of their books. Four books of the sample analyzed here have such a clearly negative tilt in their titles: Hisham Sharabi's *Embers and Ashes (!)* (al-Jamr wa-l-ramad), Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir's *Days and a Cause. On the Sufferings (!) of an Arab Intellectual* (Ayyam wa-qadiyya: min mu'ayanat muthaqqaf 'arabi), Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim's *Harvest: Fruitful Years and Bitter (!) Fruits* (Hisad: Sinin khasiba wa-thimar murra), and Riyad al-Maliki's *Reminiscences on the Path of Struggle and Defeat (!)* (Dhikrayat 'ala darb al-kifah wa-l-hazima).[42] In addition, Bashir al-'Azma should be mentioned, who

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[39] Cf. Christoph Schumann: Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon. Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung, 1930-1958, Hamburg: German Orient-Institute 2001.

[40] Cf. Susanne Enderwitz: "The Mission of the Palestinian Autobiographer," in: Stephan Guth, Priska Furrer, and Johann Christoph Bürgel (eds.): Conscious Voices: Concepts of Writing in the Middle East: Proceedings of the Berne Symposium July 1997, Beirut 1999. Schumann: Radikalnationalismus, 35–48.

[41] This is very obvious in the case of the Druze lawyer Sa'id Abu l-Husn: Niran 'ala l-qimam: Sira dhatiyya, Damascus 1994.

[42] See fn. 38.

summarized these feelings in the blatant title of his autobiography, *Generation of Defeat* (Jil al-hazima).[43] Although the specific reasons for the bitterness of each author may differ, they all have in common that they had started as young nationalists with "broad hopes" concerning the imminent resurgence of their nation (*nahda, yaqza, ba'th*) and, tightly intertwined with it, they believed in the good prospects for their professional careers.[44] Accordingly, they measure the perceived failure against the yardstick of their earlier hopes.

(3) The main part of the radical nationalists, who have been active between the 1930s and '60s, belonged to the new educated middle classes. In other words, most came from the lower middle classes and acquired their improved social status by education. Only few of them, such as Riyad al-Maliki and Hisham Sharabi in my text sample, belong to the upper classes. During that era, the secondary schools, universities, and military academies were not only places of learning but also of intensive political socialization. Yet, particularly members of the lower classes had to experience that the expected upward mobility did not materialize soon after their graduation. Instead, social connections still proved to be essential for a professional career – particularly in the field of law. Yet, in defiance of this disappointment, the autobiographers emphasize the importance of their education and profession for the future of the whole nation. They also claim that their political ideas – according to their academic and "scientific" education – would not reflect their personal interests but rather the "objective" needs of the society. In contrast to this, they suggest that the ruling class would lack of these competences and insights into the necessities. The power of the upper class, so the authors still argue, was based only on personal connections and property, while their goals only suited their families' interests.

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[43] Bashir al-'Azma: Jil al-hazima: bayna al-wahda wa-l-infisal, London: Riyad El-Rayyes Books 1991.
[44] Quotation is taken from Jamal al-Sha'ir who calls his generation "the generation of broad hopes" (jil al-amal al-'arida). Sha'ir, 51. Cf. my "The Generation of Broad Expectations: Nationalism, Education, and Autobiography in Syria and Lebanon, 1930-1958," in: Welt des Islam 41 (2001), 174-205.

(4) Mainly on the basis of these similarities, nationalist autobiographers perceived and still perceive of themselves as part of one generation.[45] Accordingly, the notion of "generation" (*jil*) has several aspects. During the authors' period of nationalist activism, the titles like "the new generation" and "the generation of youth" for political publications expressed the self-assertiveness of the young party members and their high expectations. At the same time, they were used to distance the young nationalists socially and politically from the established class of ruling politicians who supposedly belonged to an "earlier" generation with "out-dated" views and strategies. Bashir al-Azma's *Generation of Defeat* corresponds self-critically to this earlier use of the notion "generation" with its connotation of middle class consciousness, intellectual elitism, and broad expectations. While each organization claimed to represent this "new" and "young" generation during the 1930s, '40s and '50s, some autobiographers acknowledge in retrospect that this "imagined" generation transcended in fact ideological lines. Compared with the similarities in the patterns of self-perception, intellectual elitism, and political expectations, the ideological differences between the communists, the Arab nationalists and the Syrian nationalists appear rather small – in retrospect.

In conclusion it can be said that the remarkable number of autobiographies that have been published during the last decades is not merely the sum of individual efforts in coming to terms with biographical experiences. It is rather part of a wider endeavor to interpret the contemporary history of the region, to reassess the ideological commitments, and to convey lessons for next generation. In the following section, I will analyze the earlier radical nationalist convictions of the autobiographers and their later critique of it in some more depth.

Riyad al-Maliki: the constitutional order and the separation of powers

The historical importance of Riyad al-Maliki is overshadowed by his older brother, the slain officer 'Adnan al-Maliki. Riyad al-Maliki was born in 1922 as the eighth of ten siblings to a

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[45] Schumann: "The Generation of Broad Expectations"; cf. the Iraqi case: Peter Wien: Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations, 1932–41, Oxon: Routledge 2006, 14–51.

respected Damascene family.[46] He describes the social status of his family as modest. His father was a "farmer" (*muzari'*) who was able to adapt the modern methods of agriculture and, therefore, became the president of the Damascene Chamber of Agriculture. According to Maliki, the political orientation of his family was Arab nationalist as long as he could remember. Nevertheless, he depicts the fierce discussions between his father and his brothers on political issues at length. His father had been already a critic of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 which he blamed as a foreign conspiracy to weaken the Caliphate. Later, during the French mandate, he warned from a rush towards independence with view to the tremendous burdens. During the late 1940s, his father was outraged by Husni al-Zaim's coup against the constitutional government, whereas he warned that this could start a whole series of military interventions into politics. In contrast to this, Riyad admits his and his brother's opposing views and their political impatience: "Our generation was zealous to realize their national goals (*ahdafahu al-wataniyya*)."[47] At that time, however, Riyad's brother 'Adnan had not (yet) been in a position of political influence within the military.

Riyad's political zeal was strengthened during his education in the French-Arab Institute (al-Ma'had al-'Arabi al-Fransi) where he learned more about the Arab nation and its historical mission from his history teacher, Michel 'Aflaq. Riyad al-Maliki remembers vividly how 'Aflaq, despite "his subdued and slow voice", was able to "spark joy and happiness in our young souls and yearning for the knowledge of the honorable heritage of our nation and the long history of its civilization."[48] He mentions only in passing that he had entered the Ba'th Party in 1950 and that he was at odds with the party leadership when he ran successfully for a parliamentary seat as an independent in 1957.[49] He confines himself to the remark that it would be worth writing another book on the Ba'th Party, but he never realized this project to

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[46] 'Adnan al-Maliki was assassinated in 1955 by a young activist of the SSNP. A quarter in the new city of Damascus was named after him. Cf. Patrick Seale: The Struggle for Syria. A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-58, New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1965, 238–246.
[47] Maliki, 20.
[48] Ibid., 44.
[49] Ibid., 197f.

my knowledge.[50] Although Maliki became the minister of education in the "northern region" (i.e. Syria) of the United Arab Republic under Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, he highlights mostly his political activities as a lawyer in the national and international syndicates in his book. In his view, the profession of a lawyer has a rather political mission:

> If a lawyer turns to political work, his profession gains weight and his responsibility becomes greater. He becomes not only responsible for the rights of his clients, but also for the rights of his fatherland, for the interest of the compatriots as well as for their freedoms and their honors against the transgression of the unjust despots, the arbitrariness of the tyrants and the power of the dictators.[51]

Maliki knows what he is talking about. In 1952, during the late days of Adib al-Shishakli's military rule, he and his brother 'Adnan were put to prison. In the most touching passages of his book, he describes the hardships of prison life and the torture and humiliation he suffered from the hands of his fellow Syrians.[52]

His criticism of contemporary Syria and his liberal values must be understood against the backdrop of this personal experience. In the foreword, Riyad al-Maliki declares that it was neither his aim to give just an "historical account", nor did he want to be a social and political critic. Referring to the historical example of 'Umar al-Khattab, he wants to be loyal when the leadership is "honorable and sincere", and he wants to give critical advice when the good intentions and the morals of the leadership are questionable. Such a critical self-inspection, Maliki argues in the closing chapter of his book, was more than necessary after the crushing defeat in the war of June 1967.[53] "Reality confirms", he states plainly, "that we have produced the defeat ourselves."[54] He strings together a long list of reasons for this failure: the inclination of the rulers to give more importance to refined speeches than political or military

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[50] Ibid., and 305.
[51] Ibid., 103.
[52] Ibid., 103-172.
[53] Ibid., 307–17.
[54] Ibid., 309.

action despite the inherent dangers; the inability to build and defend a functioning political life and a constitutional order; the tyranny of individuals over society; the "law of the jungle" that gives torturers absolute might over their prisoners; the media that distribute propaganda for the rulers; the opportunistic intellectuals who are unable to withstand the lure of the powerful; the military dictators who trample down the law and the constitution; the military leaders who turn their backs against the enemy and rather use their weapons to control domestic institutions; and, last but not least, the silence of all of us in the face of tyranny.[55]

In order to overcome this deplorable state of affairs, Maliki calls for a "revolution" based on the "struggle of the soul, the confrontation of the mistakes, and the revision of the accounts." Maliki's political vision for a just society is clearest in juridical questions: powers must remain separated, the constitution must be respected, and the individual rights of the defendant must be sacred. He calls upon the Arabs to abandon their unrealistic dreams and rather follow the example of Western Europe on its way to overcome centuries of violence. However, the ultimate goal, Maliki closes, is the reinvigorated "struggle" (*jihad*) against the Zionist enemy.[56]

Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim: the separation between military and politics

Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim was born in 1927 to a small land-owning family in the Syrian province of Hawran. He graduated from the First Preparatory School in Damascus, the famous al-Tajhiz al-Ula, and entered the War Academy in Homs in 1946, the year of independence. His father struggled hard to make ends meet financially for the education of his son, because every helping hand was needed for the work at home and in the fields. The general level of education in the village was low and the only literature available was of religious kind.[57] For 'Abd al-Karim, this changed drastically when he experienced the nationalist atmosphere in his

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[55] My paraphrase; my selection. Ibid., 309.
[56] Ibid., 319.
[57] 'Abd al-Karim, 34.

school in Damascus where he also joined the circles of Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. He admired the role of his teachers in the "preparation, carrying out and leadership of demonstrations" at that time.[58] Of course, he recalls, people got arrested by the French authorities, but he rejects the word "suppression" for this because, then, he had not heard anything "comparable to the torture and injustice that happens apparently today in the prisons of the intelligence services of the Arab countries after their independence and, without exception, under military rule."[59]

The admission to the Military Academy offered him the opportunity to realize the "dream of many young men to become an officer in order to defend the independence of their young country (*balad*)"[60] while avoiding strains on the tight budget of his family. 'Abd al-Karim was excited about the esprit de corps among the officer cadets. Most came from the middle classes and had taken part in the struggle and demonstrations against the French while they were in the secondary schools.[61] The predominant attitude among them was "the deep belief in the fatherland and the Arab nation" (*al-iman al-'amiq bi-l-watan wa-l-umma al-'arabiyya*).[62] Their only problem was, he admits, the acceptance of the strict military rules and the authority of the superiors. At that time, 'Abd al-Karim was personally convinced that, "by virtue of his membership in the Ba'th Party and his position as an officer, he belonged to the first line of the fighting vanguard (*al-tali'a al-nidaliyya*) of our people."[63]

In fact, 'Abd al-Karim climbed up the social ladder quickly. After he had joined briefly the fighting of the Arab-Israeli war, he was invited to join the section of reconnaissance in the Deuxième Bureau. In 1951, he joined the Priemière Bureau, i.e. the internal military intelligence.[64] He stayed in the intelligence section throughout the volatile period of the

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[58] Ibid., 69.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 75.
[61] Ibid. 93.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 102.
[64] Ibid. 221.

military coups and, hence, was drawn closer and closer to the center of power in Damascus, particularly under the rule of Adib al-Shishakli. During the confrontation between the Ba'th leadership and Shishakli, 'Abd al-Karim supported the latter. After Shishakli's fall in 1952, 'Abd al-Karim suffered a brief set-back by being removed to a Bedouins unit near al-Hasaka in 1954.[65] Yet, after some more years, he was able to use the unification talks with Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir as an opportunity for exchanging his military career with politics. He became the minister of agricultural affairs in Cairo, thus joining the cabinet with Riyad al-Maliki.[66] It is unclear from the accounts of both men whether they had met before, albeit under completely different circumstances! Maliki describes in his autobiography how much he was shocked when he realized that one of the "torturers" (*jallad*) who had questioned him in jail was supposed to be his colleague in Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir's cabinet.[67] 'Abd al-Karim fiercely refutes this allegation in his autobiography as "inaccurate information", stating that interrogations were not part of his "responsibilities".[68]

Of course, it is beyond the scope of this paper to verify the truth behind these contradicting narratives. In any case, Ahmad 'Abd al-Karim withdrew from his post as a minister because of disagreements on policies in May 1960, after the active Ba'th members had already withdrawn from the government.[69] After the secessionist coup, he ran successfully for a parliamentary seat of the province of Hawran and became, once more, minister of social affairs and agricultural reforms, this time based in Damascus. After the take-over of the Ba'th Party in March 1963, he was jailed for some time in the notorious Mezzeh Prison. He claims that his release was a concession of the Ba'th Party to Nasir during the resumed unification talks. 'Abd al-Karim ends his book with this episode which he depicts as more bizarre than bitter. More important for the change of his political attitudes was, according the author, his

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[65] Ibid., 295.
[66] And Bashir al-Azma.
[67] Maliki, 225f.
[68] Abd al-Karim, 202 and 309; here 309, fn. 9.
[69] Ibid., 405ff; see his letter of resignation to Nasir, p. 409.

direct involvement in the military regimes and the lessons he drew from this in the years between 1952 and '54. Commenting the fall of Adib al-Shishakli, he refrains explicitly from any criticism of Shishakli's personality which he describes as "open, mild, and flexible".[70] From a general perspective, however, he derives at the following conclusion:

> Military coups are not capable of solving the problems of backwardness nor do they evolve into social and political revolutions. For this reason, I decided to cut any relationship with the system from the political side[71] […] and to avoid any military adventure (*al-mughamara al-'askariyya*) in the future, even if this would force me to withdraw from some of my comrades and friends in the army.[72]

Even more than the inability of the military to solve the political problems of the country, 'Abd al-Karim had thoroughly understood that the army's incursions into politics threatened the military itself. Precisely for this reason, he argues, he had quit the Ba'th Party in 1950 because he was afraid that "the party membership would endanger the unity, efficiency, and discipline of the armed forces."[73] For him, *"hizbiyya"* or the struggle between the parties was the greatest danger to the military leadership. In this context he praises the virtue of the democratic-parliamentarian system, particularly the government of Shukri al-Quwwatli because, at that time, he argues, military promotion was still independent from party affiliation. In contrast to this, the one-party-system of today would measure the citizens only by their "loyalty to the party" and would insist on the principle of the "ideological army" – an unmistakable reference to contemporary Syria.[74]

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[70] Ibid., 223.
[71] I.e. he wanted to refrain himself from any political activities in the army. At that time, he had not changed yet to politics.
[72] Ibid., 226.
[73] Ibid., 204.
[74] Ibid., 290.

Jamal al-Sha'ir: the praise of political pragmatism

Jamal al-Sha'ir, a physician and professional politician was born in 1930 in the Jordanian city al-Salt.[75] Al-Sha'ir does not want his book be misunderstood as "memoirs" (*mudhakkirat*) or an effort to defend and praise himself nor as a comprehensive ideological account but rather as an "explanation of the events and the deductions drawn from them for the concept of political work with regard to its goal and style."[76] Sha'ir tells his readers nothing about his family's background but he describes at length his early political socialization in the Arab nationalist atmosphere of the secondary school in al-Salt. He highlights particularly the political and intellectual influence of his teacher, Wasfi al-Tall, who did not only preach modern ideas such as the equality between men and women, but also lived them – in contrast to some Ba'thist intellectuals like Michel 'Aflaq who was shedding social events where men and women could mix, as Sha'ir points out.[77]

When Sha'ir came to Beirut in 1944 to study medicine at the American University of Beirut, he was overwhelmed by the political activism of the students and the diversity of ideological orientations.[78] In the beginning, he joined the Syrian Social Nationalist Party which was dominated, then, by the "Lebanon-first" wing of Ni'ma Thabit, while the Leader, Antun Sa'ada was still in exile. When Sa'ada returned from Argentina, Sha'ir was impressed by the charisma of this man who drew "hundreds of cars and thousands of people" to the airport to welcome him back, while they almost looked at him as if he was a "supernatural being".[79] However, it did not take too long until Sha'ir became disillusioned by Sa'ada's authoritarianism. After some initial hesitation, he changed his affiliation from Syrian nationalism to Arab nationalism and became a member of the Ba'th Party. Of course, both nationalisms see one another as incompatible in theory. In practice, however, the similar style

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[75] For the political background of this era see Betty S. Anderson: Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 2005.
[76] Sha'ir, 7.
[77] Ibid., 19.
[78] Ibid., 34.
[79] Ibid., 37.

of discourse makes the shift of loyalties not too unusual as can be seen with regard to the biographies of Akram al-Hawrani, Adib al-Shishakli, or, more recent, Mustafa Tlas. Jamal al-Sha'ir did not see any contradiction either:

> My entry into the Arab Ba'th Party was neither unusual nor difficult with view to the educational culture I have witnessed in al-Salt, my experience in the Syrian [Social] Nationalist Party, the events of 1948, and the political climate at the American University, and in Beirut or Damascus. The generation of broad hopes as expressed by the Ba'th Party found it natural to join and support this party. […]
>
> The dreams of unity, democracy, and progress in all their meanings and dimensions occupied the minds of our generation. […] There were general statements [in the constitution of the Ba'th Party] about the struggles for the national independence all over the Arab world (*al-watan al-'arabi*) as well as the important role of the people in deciding its own affairs without, however, giving any explanation on how this should be done in praxis. As for the talk about socialism, it was nothing but an expression of dislike for the Arab rulers.[80]

Jamal al-Sha'ir's estrangement from the theory and even more the praxis of the Ba'th Party grew after 1958 when the party complied with Nasir who demanded the dissolution of all political parities as a prerequisite for the unity between Syria and Egypt.[81] From this time onward, the party was non-existent officially and yet remained to be active in several countries particularly Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Sha'ir concludes that this had a negative impact on the political practice of the Ba'th Party. The transnational organization turned out to be a burden rather than an asset. Wherever one regional party branch participated in a government, it tried to downplay its ties with the leadership outside of the country. Salah al-Din al-Bitar, for instance, complained about his fellow Ba'thist and state minister of foreign

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[80] Ibid., 51; cf. also 67f.
[81] Ibid., 79.

affairs in Amman, ʿAbdallah al-Rimawy, who did not even bother to pay him a visit when in was in Damascus in 1956.[82]

Yet, more harmful, Shaʿir continues, was the growing tendency of the party to cover its activities in a cloud of secrecy. In its early days, "the membership of the Baʿth Party was not difficult to gain, because the party was more like a missionary movement (*haraka tabshiriyya*) with its complete doctrine and limited political program."[83] He remembers how Salah al-Din al-Bitar urged him and his fellow student activists at the AUB during a visit in Damascus to build good relations with sympathizers and friends beyond the organization of the party. However, the political circumstances in some states such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan in addition to the activities of Great Britain and France in the region helped to shape a completely different style of political practice. Shaʿir remembers that the Baʿth Party, and particularly its Iraqi branch, was profoundly influenced by the Communist Party, albeit more by its political practice rather than its theory.[84] Membership became more exclusive and the party's activities and organizational structure were secret – a development that became most significant among the officers.

Eventually, Shaʿir became a victim of the tensions within the party between those like him who favored an open and democratic strategy and the others who preferred secrecy and putschism. In the context of a coup planned by Nasserists, Baʿthists, and members of the Arab Nationalist Movement, Jamal al-Shaʿir was arrested and held in the Al-Jafr Prison for five months in 1963. He describes his experience of solitary confinement and of being questioned by the Mukhabarat as "very rich" (*ghaniy jiddan*) and a "useful period for completing the experience necessary for the political practice".[85] Yet, he observed that the security agents

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[82] Ibid., 54.
[83] Ibid., 56.
[84] Ibid., 58.
[85] Ibid., 98.

treated members of the party leadership "tenderly" (*na'im*) in stark contrast to the rank-and-file activists.[86]

One of Sha'ir's most important conclusions he derived from his "experience in political practice" – so the sub-title of his book – is his rejection of clandestine politics in favor of an open (*'alani*) approach.[87] Discussion cannot be confined to the circles of the party members and supporters, but must be accessible to "all citizens" (*jami' al-muwatinin*).[88] In any case, he adds on this, the political leadership of the party must feel responsible for the results of its strategic choices, particularly with regard to the ordinary party members. In his outlook to the future on the last pages of his book, he pleas for a "pragmatic view" (*nazara brajmatikiyya*) that liberates itself from the shackles of determinism.[89] The times when Arab nationalists looked upon the existence of Jordan as "transitional or a temporary stage" have definitely passed. However, Sha'ir criticizes "the internationalist and the religious school of thought" emphasizing that "the inner-Arab relations" (*al-'alaqat al-'arabiyya*) were essential for "the Jordanian homeland" (*al-watan al-urdunni*) because of the "Arab reality of Jordan" – a country that is made up of "its leadership, its native people (*ahluhu al-asliyyin*), and the descendants of Palestine (*abna' filastin*)."[90] From this regard, Sha'ir argues, democracy was not just an abstract principle but a way to ensure the existence of the "national Jordanian entity" (*al-kiyan al-watani al-urdunni*) in pursuit of "common nationalist causes" (*al-qadaya al-qawmiyya al-mushtaraka*) and, first of all, the question of Palestine.[91]

Hisham Sharabi: the criticism of neo-patriarchy

Of all the authors presented in this paper Hisham Sharabi is probably known best among scholars thanks to his work as a philosopher and political scientist at the University of

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., and 61.
[88] Ibid., 61.
[89] Ibid., 344.
[90] Ibid., 345.
[91] Ibid.

Georgetown. He is the only former nationalist activist – to my knowledge – who has described his life in *two* autobiographies, the first published in 1978 and the second one in 1993 – both in Arabic.[92] The main difference between the two books is the focus of the narratives. In his first account, *Embers and Ashes*, Sharabi concentrates on his academic education at the American University of Beirut and the University of Chicago next to his political activism in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and particularly his personal relationship with the party's leader, Antun Saʿada. In the second book, he included a more detailed description of his childhood in Palestine, his present situation in the United States, and portraits of fellow Arab intellectuals particularly Charles Malik and Michail Nuʿayma. Hisham Sharabi was born in 1927 and grew up in the two Palestinian cities of Jaffa and Acre where his parents and grandparents resided, respectively. He describes his social environment as an educated well-to-do family. As a young boy, his parents sent him to the Friends' School in Ramallah and after the Great Revolt of 1936 they enrolled him in the International College in Beirut, followed by the American University of Beirut (AUB). Sharabi describes his family as patriotic, but he adds critically that the "nationalist consciousness" (*al-waʿi al-qawmi*) he acquired during his childhood „did not connect our life and work with the reality of our people and its life. Independence meant getting away with the foreigners who occupied the positions of power in our country thus hindering us from enjoying them ourselves."[93] Later in his book, he calls this kind of consciousness the "traditional nationalist idea of the *previous generation*".[94] Sharabi's stay in Beirut until 1949 was a period of intensive soul-searching – spiritually, personally, and politically. No one understood and addressed his yearning better than Antun Saʿada. Saʿada saw Sharabi's intellectual talent and encouraged his studies

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[92] Sharabi al-Jamr wa-l-ramad und Suwar al-madi. On Palestinian autobiographies see Susanne Enderwitz: Unsere Situation schuf unsere Erinnerung: Palästinensische Autobiographien zwischen 1967 und 2000, Literaturen im Kontext: arabisch – persisch – türkisch 10, Berlin 2002.
[93] Sharabi, al-Jamr wa-l-ramad, 19.
[94] Ibid., 69. My emphasis.

arguing that the party was in need for "experts" (*mutakhassisin*) for its doctrine.[95] Sharabi's personal attachment – maybe combined with a personal feeling of guilt – becomes most obvious by the fact that he ends both "auto"-biographies with the violent death of the "*Za'im*"[96] (the Leader) in 1949 and his own subsequent departure to the United States in order to pursue his studies.

Yet, before Sharabi joined the SSNP, he was actually a member of a small Arab nationalist group at his university which, later on, merged with the Movement of Arab Nationalists. In retrospect, Sharabi is stunned by this ideological shift and feels almost "unable to explain it"[97]:

> I moved intellectually from the center of Arab nationalism to its utmost contrary, Syrian nationalism. And yet, the intellectual and emotional atmosphere, which I moved to, did not differ from the atmosphere of Arabism I was in before. The values, the sayings, and the meanings remained the same. Only the contents differed in some aspects.[98]

When Sharabi composed his first autobiography, he had switched again his ideological affiliation – this time to Marxism. From this latter perspective, he can hardly understand the problems he was so concerned with during his youth: "The concept of nation, what does it mean to me today? Whether the history of the nation or its civilization is Arab or Syrian – what difference does it make?"[99]

Yet, despite his education as a political scientist and his conviction as a Marxist, Hisham Sharabi does not even feel tempted to review the ideology and public appearance of the SSNP critically.[100] He admits that he was "completely overwhelmed by the personality of Sa'ada" to

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[95] Sharabi, Suwar al-madi, 188.
[96] In his first autobiography, he still speaks of Sa'ada respectfully as *al-Za'im*. In his second book, he calls him mostly by his full personal name. I capitalize the word in transcription because, according to the ideology of the SSNP, there is only one *za'im*, Antun Sa'ada.
[97] Sharabi, al-Jamar wa-l-ramad, 72.
[98] Ibid., 71f.
[99] Ibid., 72.
[100] Sharabi only wonders what Saada would think today of issues like democracy and pluralism. He admits that he has no idea how Sa'ada's The Emergence of Nations (Nushu' al-umam) was received outside the party. Sharabi, Suwar al-madi, 196ff.

the point that he could not influence the debates started by some young and well educated party members such as Fayiz Sayegh, Ghassan Tuweini and Karim 'Azqul on ideological and organizational issues.[101] Sharabi mentions Labib Z. Yamak several times as a fellow party member and fellow student in the United States, but he ignores his critical study on the SSNP completely.[102] Instead, he ponders the reasons for the failure of the party at length. On the one hand, he thinks that the party could have avoided its course of confrontation. On the other hand, he thinks by himself: "There was no other solution (*mahrab*). It was not our fault that we tried to make a revolution, but only that we did not prepare ourselves sufficiently – with regard to the theory and with regard to the weapons."[103]

While Sharabi's account of his youthful activism in the SSNP lacks any distance, his description of his academic instruction at the AUB is much more critical. Sharabi measures his experiences in Beirut against the yardstick of his later education in the United States. Sharabi recalls that the atmosphere at the AUB was dominated by the bourgeoisie and the upper classes. Hence, critical thought was no pedagogical goal at all and scientific methodology was only taught in the Chemistry classes, and only by the fact that some experiments succeeded – and some other did not.[104] The "freedom" of the AUB students was completely overstated, Sharabi continues:

> Our life at the AUB was subjected to two powers (*sultatayn*)[105] that we could not overcome by any means: the power of the administration and the power of the professor. The power of the administration was like the power of the state over its citizens: comprehensive and complete. We did not know where it began and where it

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[101] Sharabi, al-Jamar wa-l-ramad, 82.
[102] Labib Zuwiyya Yamak: The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis. Cambridge 1966. Yamak argues that the ideology of the SSNP is "totalitarian" in some aspects. In his study, he does not mention that he was a party member himself.
[103] Sharabi, al-Jamar wa-l-ramad, 202.
[104] Ibid., 25ff.
[105] The Arabic word *sulta* can mean both "power" and "authority". In this quotation, both meanings are intertwined.

ended. Yet, the power of the professor was like the power of the father over his sons. It

is imposed from above, and it accepts neither opposition nor criticism.[106]

Sharabi concludes that this kind of education aimed at creating "obedience and psychological submission of the students". As a result, the Arab students were ready to accept anything printed as authority, particularly if it was of Western origin. He describes at length how he realized his own incapability of critical and analytical thought when he came to Chicago. There, it was mainly the German political scientist Arnold Bergsträsser who convinced him that he should not try to overcome his personal problems by searching for a theory that claims absolute and comprehensive truth.[107]

For Sharabi, the former AUB professor, Charles Malik, was the incarnation of the "patriarchal personality" as he described it in his theoretical book *Neopatriarchy*.[108] In his view, Malik was conservative, commanding, and eager to praise anything "Christian" or "Western". Sharabi admired his teaching skills, but he wonders whether he had actually read more than the five books he quoted constantly in his seminars.[109] For him, Antun Sa'ada was the utmost opposite of Charles Malik because of his ability to develop his own form of a "creative civilization" which challenged the Western civilization and, simultaneously, is critical with regard to its own tradition.[110] After all, Sharabi's contribution to Arab political thought remained within the confines of criticizing what he calls "Neopatriarchy". Beyond this criticism, he was hesitant to develop any political values – be it from his political experiences or his philosophical work.

Even Marxism ceased to be of major importance in his second autobiography. Under the impression of severe health problems, Sharabi shifted the focus of his recollections to the homelands of his childhood. In doing so, he emphasizes his deep attachment to the "earth" of

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[106] Sharabi, al-Jamr wa-l-ramad, 26.
[107] Ibid., 119.
[108] Sharabi, Suwar al-Madi, 155; idem: *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, Oxford 1988.
[109] Ibid., 154.
[110] Sharabi, al-Jamr wa-l-ramad, 195.

Palestine and Lebanon. He compares his forty years of residence in America with Antun Sa'ada's "forced exile" in Latin America.[111] Although Sharabi had left Palestine deliberately in 1949 in order to pursue his studies abroad, he could not return, later on:

> I have left the country in 1949, but I have actually not emigrated. Emigration means uprooting and the beginning of a new life. Yet, I have neither been uprooted from my homeland (*watani*) nor have I started a new life in a different homeland. My roots remained firmly attached to the land (*ard*) despite the distance.[112]

Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir: the failure of radicalism and the return of liberal democracy

Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir was born in 1922 as a son of a butcher in the Lebanese town of Baalbak. His grandfather had sold his plot of land in a little village and realized a modest social ascent by opening the butcher shop. 'Abd al-Satir met the highest expectations of his grandfather when he struggled his way up through the secondary school in 'Aley, the French Lycée and eventually graduated from the Damascus Law Academy. When he returned to Lebanon, he hoped that his diploma would pay out immediately and grant him a secure middle class lifestyle in Beirut.[113] In addition, he was convinced that lawyers, in general, should play a significant role in society:

> Lawyers belong by the nature of their profession to the first class of the educated elite of the society. The work of the lawyer requires not only a high culture in all branches of jurisprudence but also in the social sciences, in medicine, engineering and the technical sciences, philosophy, finance and trade, etc. […] Since the legal profession is connected to the state apparatus, it brings its practitioner into a steady contact with the milieus of government and therefore pushes him toward political activities.[114]

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[111] Sa'ada left Lebanon in 1939 for an inspection tour of party branches in Europe and America. When the war began, he was not allowed to return until 1947. During this period, he stayed in Buenos Aires.
[112] Sharabi, Suwar al-madi, 21.
[113] 'Abd al-Satir, 26.
[114] Ibid., 64ff.

Yet, realities differed from what he expected when he searched for a job in 1946. The law firms did not offer him employment but rather demanded from him a significant price in return for accepting him as a member.[115] In the course of his further life, his professional and financial success remained modest, while he suffered even severe set-backs, at times. His eventual disappointment shapes his narrative significantly and is reflected in the subtitle of the book: "the sufferings of an Arab intellectual".[116]

'Abd al-Satir describes the political atmosphere in his family as a "simple patriotic environment" (*muhit watani basit*). His family was not directly involved in politics. For them, "patriotism" meant very generally the "end of colonialism and the return to the unity of Syria", while Arabism (*al-'uruba*) was an unquestioned part of this belief.[117] "So, I grew up," 'Abd al-Satir recalls, "in a natural enthusiasm for everything Syrian and everything Arab, in the natural belief (*bi-iman fitri*) that we are Syrian Arabs."[118]

'Abd al-Satir came into contact with party politics while he was a student in a secondary school in 'Aley. At that time, i.e. after 1936, the Syrian [Social] Nationalist Party began to challenge the dominance of the Arab nationalist League of Nationalist Action among the pupils. An aura of determination and revolutionary activity surrounded the SSNP since its secret existence was disclosed by the mandate authorities and its leaders were put to trial in 1936. Also 'Abd al-Satir and his comrades felt attracted by this "revolutionary appearance", more than by the exact contents of the party's doctrine:

> It was the revolutionism (*al-thawriyya*) that attracted us. Everything else was secondary,
> even the Syrian nationalism was for us only one particular shape of the political unity that
> other national groups demanded as well (such as the National Bloc in Syria or some
> personalities in Lebanon like Riyad al-Solh and 'Abd al-Hamid Karami). It must be
> clearly stated that the revolutionism was […] the basis (*al-asas*), while all other issues

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[115] Ibid., 57.
[116] 'Abd al-Satir echoes the sub-title of Sharabi's first autobiography "Reminiscences of an Arab intellectual".
[117] Ibid., 38.
[118] Ibid.

were merely appendages (*umur lahiqa*). […] In my opinion, the "Syria" of the SSNP did

not even for one day contradict Arabism or was separated from it.[119]

Yet this very "revolutionism" did, at times, conflict with the social ambitions of the author.

During his studies in Damascus, 'Abd al-Satir refrained himself from political activities and

even criticized the "mentality of the negative struggle" *('aqliyyat al-nidal al-salbi*) among the

students that led to many strikes which, again, had a negative effect on the quality of the

education. Likewise, many professors were deeply involved in politics and, for this reason,

stayed away from their teaching duties. Later, when 'Abd al-Satir was the representative of

the SSNP in the Baalbak region, he felt the consequences of the party's "revolutionism" more

directly. In 1949, after the failed "first Social-Nationalist Revolution", he was arrested for the

first time. In the course of the violent clashes of 1958, his house and office were looted. After

the failed coup of 1961, 'Abd al-Satir was arrested again, put to trial, and sentenced to a

prison term. In 1975, at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, his house was ransacked

again – this time by the militia of the party. The authors says that he withdrew from his party

after his trial in 1962, but he emphasizes simultaneously that he had always remained faithful

to the Syrian Social Nationalist ideology, albeit to his own interpretation of it.

'Abd al-Satir hints at his changed understanding of nationalism already in the introduction to

his book where he quotes from his statement at the military court in Beirut, on June 26,

1962.[120] Then, he stated that he had understood now that the "political entities (*al-kiyanat al-*

siyasiyya) alone as well as forms and political orders don't mean anything by themselves.

They are not the essential and primary question (*al-amr al-jawhari al-awwal*)." The essential

and basic task was rather to raise society to social unity in sentiment and practice. This unity

required the creation of an honest belief in the "unity of the shared vital interests, the unity of

its existence, and a common destiny."[121] In other words, 'Abd al-Satir still regards the society

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[119] Ibid., 44f.
[120] Ibid., 14ff.
[121] Ibid., 15.

of Lebanon as part of the Greater Syrian nation, but he wants to shift the political thrust of nationalism from toppling the existing political entities to the construction of a common national sentiment and the pursuit of the general weal.

The author uses the last third of his autobiography to sketch the political lessons he has drawn from his political experiences as a party activist. One key question 'Abd al-Satir is concerned with is the legitimacy of violence in political struggles. In spite of his earlier "revolutionism" he became convinced that the end does not justify the means.[122] He admits that the history of the SSNP is steeped in blood and violence, but he argues that the party reacted mostly in defence. In general, he adds, there was a fundamental difference between the peaceful struggle against social injustices and the violent struggle of the nation against its enemies such as Zionism in the case of the Syrian nation. Violence within societies, he argues, is always caused by a lack of freedom. For this reason, the struggle between the diverse ideologies should be conducted peacefully. He sees no principle obstacle for such a peaceful co-existence since the three former arch enemies, communism, Arab nationalism and Syrian Social Nationalism, had re-approached one another significantly, after they had fought each other ruthlessly for decades.[123] The negative experience of violence and the basic similarity of the ideological parties in Lebanon were most important for 'Abd al-Satir's re-evaluation of democracy:

> The harsh circumstances I went through so frequently pushed me towards the disbelief (*al-kufr*) in democracy and the desire for violence and a dictatorial system according to the silly principle of a "just tyrant". Yet, these views were revolutionary surges under specific circumstances. Most of the times I returned to the saying, whose author I don't know: Democracy, your faults shall be forgiven![124]

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[122] Ibid., 208.
[123] Ibid., 213 a. 223.
[124] Ibid., 180.

'Abd al-Satir's idea of a nationalist democracy differs quite significantly from the democratic realities in Lebanon. The elected leaders in Lebanon, he argues, would pursue primarily their own interests of increasing their power and wealth. The electorate, on the other hand, was only concerned with its local needs without giving consideration to necessities and needs of the nation to develop.[125] Only parties based on political programs or ideologies would be really concerned with the common weal. In this regard, the goal of the nationalist party was the general betterment for all citizens, a just distribution of the wealth, the overcoming of sectarianism and the struggle against Zionism. For all of these reasons, 'Abd al-Satir cannot understand Hisham Sharabi's turn from nationalism to Marxism. He quotes extensively from Sharabi's first autobiography *Embers and Ashes*, while stating that Sharabi's self-declared siding with the "tormented people" (*al-sha'b al-mu'adhdhab*) was exactly what Sa'ada had expressed in his famous *10 Lectures* – already in 1948. For 'Abd al-Satir, the highest goal of Syrian Social Nationalism was the material and spiritual "happiness" (*sa'ada*) of the "social man" (*al-insan al-mujtama'*). Of course, this wellbeing could not be reached by the total submission of the individual to the collective like in the "materialist totalitarian systems" but rather by carefully balancing the individual and collective interests.[126]

In addition, 'Abd al-Satir continues, it was impossible to speak of *one* single "tormented people" or *the* "suppressed masses" as Sharabi suggests. Even Sharabi himself would not mean the American people or the Jewish masses. Sharabi's idea of a single human society was a purely theoretical abstraction and the happiness of mankind was an issue of eschatology rather than politics.[127] Contrary to this, it was a fact, 'Abd al-Satir argues, that humanity was not united but divided into multiple human unites (*muttahadat bashariyya muta'addida*). With reference to Antun Sa'ada's theoretical writings he explains that the most perennial unites are nations in the sense of socially and economically integrated communities. The basic

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[125] Ibid., 156ff.
[126] Ibid., 236.
[127] Ibid., 231.

prerequisite for a nation to realize its potentials was a piece of land (*buq'at min al-ard*) or a fatherland (*watan*).[128] For this reason, the enmity of Zionism cannot be explained with categories like "the masses" or "the people". It is rather a conflict between two nations over one territory.[129] Yet, despite all political and theoretical differences between Hisham Sharabi and Mustafa 'Abd al-Satir, the latter ends his autobiography in a similar tone like Sharabi. In a small poem on the last pages, the author declares his everlasting love to the land of his people:

I will never emigrate from you; oh land of misfortunes, oh my homeland![130]

Conclusion

The silence of liberal thought in the Arab world as well as the silence of Western literature on Arab liberal thought has several reasons. On the one hand, the political circumstances in the Arab world thwart a public debate on liberal values. In addition, intellectuals are hesitant to identify themselves as "liberals" because they do not want to be seen as advocates of Western interests. Western scholars, on the other hand, have an inclination to focus primarily on the identity-centered and eye-catching ideologies such as nationalism and Islamism. In doing so, they tend to take the pretension of ideologues like Sati' al-Husri, Antun Sa'ada or Michel 'Aflaq at face value. Hence, they assume that Arab nationalism can be clearly distinguished from other nationalisms, that there is a clear definition of the Arab nation, and that unification is the primary goal of Arab nationalism.

Of course, the reality of the nationalist discourse in the Arab world is quite different from this. Even within the nationalist organizations, the definition of the nation always remained ambiguous, contradictory and contested. In this context, the concepts of *wataniyya* and *qawmiyya* were not two opposed trends of nationalism but rather two sides of the same coin.

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[128] Ibid., 233.
[129] Ibid., 235.
[130] Ibid., 266.

While nationalists have developed political ideas on nearly all political, social and economic fields, the goal of pan-nationalist unification policies only gained priority during a relatively short period between the 1940s and '60s. In consequence, some Western scholars such as Adeed Dawisha and Fouad Ajami have been quick to conclude the failure of Arab nationalism from the failure of these unification policies. It is true that also former activists speak of a failure and defeat. However, the reasons they have in mind transcend a mono-causal explanation but rather include the disappointment about the failure of nationalism to modernize, democratize and unite Arab societies in the face of the challenges ahead.

Nonetheless, this perceived "failure" does not mean the end of nationalism but rather the collapse of its radical version. A closer analysis of the nationalist discourse shows that it has little "essential" political contents except from the 'trinity' of nation, nation-state, and the national interest. Apart from this dogma, nationalists have extensively borrowed from other ideologies, primarily liberalism, communism, socialism, fascism, and even Islamism – according to time and circumstances. For this reason, the failure of radical nationalism may open the debate on the reconciliation between liberal values and nationalist ideas. In any case, the concepts of "nation", "national interest", and the "fatherland" – despite the ambiguities of their meanings – will remain to be the basic framework for discussion of these issues in the Arab world, even though pan-nationalism is hardly an issue anymore.

In my five case studies, I have shown how (former) nationalists became radicalized, first, and then reconsidered their former ideas thus drawing rather liberal conclusions from their criticism of the recent history. The young, educated and upward-orientated middle class was attracted more by the radical forms of nationalism than by concrete contents, definitions, and dogmas. Their "broad expectations" concerning their personal futures seemed to coincide with the revolutionary destiny of their nation. Despite some initial successes, most experienced the negative sides of radicalism in one way or another: violence, torture, civil strife, authoritarianism, exile, etc. It is remarkable that they are all most aware of these

aberrations in the fields of their own professions. For an officer like Ahmad ʿAbd al-Karim, the politicization of the army became a burden for military efficiency. For a lawyer like Riyad al-Maliki, the separation between the powers and the basic rights of the defendants were essential professional prerequisites. For party politicians like Mustafa ʿAbd al-Satir and Jamal al-Shaʿir, a functioning electoral system and a plurality of parties were the basis for political work. For a philosopher and political scientist like Hisham Sharabi, the main task remains criticism, even though he knows that those in power are not keen on advice.[131] None of them becomes a "liberal" in the American or European sense of the word. All remain, more or less, the discursive and ideological framework of nationalism, but their nationalism gained a less authoritarian and more liberal face.

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[131] Sharabi: Suwar al-madi, 23, 26.

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