



# Religion and Nationalism in the Arab World: Continuing or Temporary Intersection?

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## Abstract

Arab nationalism or Arabism in its contemporary concept is the belief that the Arab people are one people united by language, culture, history, geography and interests, and that a single Arab state will be established to unite the Arabs within its borders from the ocean to the Gulf. The Arabs' belief that they are a nation is ancient, and its beginnings may be difficult to know. Arab pride in their race appeared in Arabic poetry. During the era of Islam, nationalism was embodied by the Arabs' feeling that they were a distinct nation within Islam; for example, when Saad bin Abi Waqqas, the commander of the Islamic forces in Iraq, wanted to urge his men to great deeds, he resorted to inciting their pride in their Arabism (You are the faces of the Arabs, their notables, and the choice of every tribe, and you are the glory of those behind you). Moreover, this feeling increased during the Umayyad era. In the modern era, this idea was embodied by ideologies such as the Nasserist movement and the Baathist movement, which were most common in the Arab world, especially in the period of the mid-twentieth century until the end of the seventies, which was characterized by the establishment of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria and witnessed many other unitary attempts. This paper discusses the problem of religion and nationalism, explaining how it raises a torrent of questions, discussions, and controversy that reach the point of hostility and hatred among those who believe in Arab nationalism as the path to achieving identity, and those who call for Islam as an authentic and undisputed identity for the Arab person. Therefore, there is a division between the Arab current, which adopts the Arab Nationalism League, and the Islamic current, which adopts the Islamic League. This paper will explain the positions of both currents; it will clarify whether it is possible for religion and nationalism to coexist in Arab reality from the point of view of these two currents.

## Subject Areas

Politics

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## Keywords

Nationalism, Religion, Jahiliyyah, Populism, Identity

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### 1. Introduction

The phrase of the geographer Jamal Hamdan seems significant when he stated that the Arabs were not the masters of Islam, but rather its supporters (protectors). What is meant is that the non-Arabs were the ones who created the so-called Islamic civilization, while the Arabs built, defended and spread the Islamic call through conquests.

The Arabs did not know a state that united them into a single entity. Rather, they were a group of tribes that fought and raided each other; with the emergence of the modern state in the Western world, the call came to Arab nationalism or the Arab national project, as an attempt to define identity, so that all Arab countries that share a common language, culture, and destiny come together in unity, which is the ultimate goal of the national project. In light of the call for Arab nationalism that began in the second half of the nineteenth century, which included groups of non-Muslims who belonged to it, they found in this call what they desired as citizens of a modern state, not as Dhimmis, as was the case in the Ottoman Caliphate. The question is: Is the Islamic caliphate, or Islamic government in the modern sense, as called for by Abu al-Ala Maududi, an alternative to Arab unity that includes the Arab countries in one state?

From Al-Maududi to Sayyid Qutb, religion took on an influential political image that showed hostility to everything nationalistic, and even considered it a return to pre-Islamic times.

Some thinkers tried to find a consensual solution between Arab nationalism and the Islamic religion, especially after the fall of the nationalist project in the Nasserist era, after the defeat of 1967. However, with the coming of Sadat to rule Egypt, the way was opened for Islamic movements to regain extending their influence, and to oppose nationalism and consider it a departure from the Islamic religion. At its beginning, the claims of the Islamic movements were accepted by Arab rulers, and even supported, for fear of being included in an Arab unity that would pose a threat to their national sovereignty and turn them into followers of this unity instead of their independence in ruling their countries. But when the calls for the Caliphate and the possibility of an Islamic government turned into terrorist operations and extremist practices, the Arab governments abandoned their support for these calls, and even showed clear hostility to those calls and the Islamic movements that support them. Until now, the conflict between nationalism and religion continues to exist, with all attempts at coexistence between nationalism and the Islamic religion. The practices on the ground have shown the superiority of the religious trend, which has exhausted national sovereignty to the point of division. From Iraq and Syria to Yemen and Lebanon,

passing through the Palestinian issue located between Hamas, which has a religious tendency, and the Palestinian (Arab) state, and still in the third millennium, the relationship between religion and nationalism has not yet been resolved, which constitutes a grave danger to the establishment of the modern state with a secular conception, and the dismantling of the tribal heritage, which finds in religious inclinations as a justification for not melting and assimilating into a modern state.

As nationalist populism fades away, religious enthusiasm continues, that even if it is absent for a certain period, it will soon continue to grow, amid harsh economic conditions and authoritarian political practices, and the lack of awareness of the importance of having a strong state that believes in religious, cultural, and ethnic pluralism. Consequently, this leads to involvement in sectarian conflict and fighting, in which controversy and difference of opinion turn into fatal bullets for identity, before they are for individuals.

## 2. Nationalism in the Language and Terminology

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term “nationalism” refers to a sizable group of individuals who share a common history, culture, and language, and who reside in a specific territory governed by a single state. The word “nation” has its roots in the term “people,” which refers to a group of individuals who share common beliefs. The political connotation of “nation” denotes a group of people with a unique identity bound by various objective and spiritual connections, such as language, history, beliefs, interests, history, and civilization. [1] In the 1908 English dictionary, the term “nationalism” was defined as ethnic unity, but its meaning has recently evolved to represent political unity. Although people today consider nationalism a natural concept, it is a relatively new idea. It possibly originated with Jean Drake during the Hundred Years’ War, then lost its significance during the religious wars, and experienced a resurgence during the French Revolution era. [2] Nationalism is a political, social, and economic ideology that aims to advance the interests of a specific nation, with the ultimate objective of achieving full control over the homeland. It also aims to maintain a national identity based on shared characteristics such as culture, language, ethnicity, religion, and political aspirations actions. [3] George Orwell defines nationalism as a pursuit of power and influence for a country, often at the expense of individualism. [4] In his analysis of the collective and individual will, Rousseau posited that the former tends to be more virtuous as it reflects the perspectives of the group, which are typically not motivated by selfish or base impulses. The philosopher further contended that, much like an individual, a group cannot act without first engaging in thoughtful consideration. This process is guided by a general will that shapes the collective and imbues it with the capacity to advance and flourish. [5] Throughout history, humans have had various understandings of themselves. Some viewed humanity as one through universal monotheistic religions. However, it is a moral and philosophical puzzle that humans

tend to organize themselves into different forms of kinship, which can be divisive. [6] Nationalism differs from patriotism; Patriotism is limited to the feeling of belonging to the homeland and its land and people, while nationalism becomes affiliation to the nation, which may include several homelands (states).

### **2.1. The Emergence of the Idea of Nationalism**

In Europe, the Church had an influence on the cognitive life in general, as it monopolized scientific research, which led to the intensification of the conflict between the Church and science. The Church has a monopoly on understanding religious books and considers this one of its secrets. It even prohibits texts departing from the Latin language, which is a complex language to circulate among all European peoples. [7] For example, indulgences were promoted as a guarantee of the forgiveness of sins and the Church alone had the right to sell them; Martin Luther attacked the idea of indulgences as he believed that he was obligated as a professor of theology to teach the Bible as he found it, even if it contradicted the teachings of the Catholic Church. [8]

Christian calls for reform began to increase, and with it, the influence of the Church gradually diminished. Then Europe disintegrated and moved from the loyalty to the Holy Roman Empire to the manifestation of the principle of “people following the religion of their leaders.” So the kings had the right to decide the religious doctrine of the inhabitants of each kingdom, which produced new fanaticism. [7] When the “Age of Enlightenment” or “the Age of the Worship of Reason” came, that is when man felt his courage and the strength of his resolve and was able to use his mind, and he began to feel his ability to be liberated from all the stagnation and intellectual captivity he had inherited. [9] The most common explanations for the emergence of the nation-state are based on the idea of the dissolution of older organizations, such as feudalism, the church, or the state. Then it is argued that this decline was either the result of the continuing dominance of the centralized state determined to implement a comprehensive modernization program or the emergence of capitalism as a tool of homogeneous change across social and economic barriers. [10]

### **2.2. How Did Arab Nationalism Arise?**

For Arab nationalism, it is a national political movement that aims to achieve complete independence for the Arab people, revive the Arab civilization, and achieve unity among the Arab countries, to form the Arab nation as a single state that can contribute to human civilization and participate in building a world based on justice and freedom. This movement began at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its activity expanded in particular after the emergence of the State of Israel in 1948. This movement expresses the hopes and aspirations of the Arab people, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, to restore their original civilization identity and support liberation movements everywhere in the world. It differs from the Western chauvinistic nationalism which is based

on expansion, and colonization of peoples. [1]

Arab nationalism was associated with the Arab Socialist Baath Party and the Nasserist movement, and with the struggle for the rights of the broad political, social, and class masses. The Arab national feeling is the real, solid, and constant base of Arab solidarity at the mass level, which is sometimes reflected in a superficially and transient way in the positions of most Arab regimes. [1]

Michelle Aflaq believes that Arab nationalism is a product of the objective circumstances of a fragmented Arab nation. If we look at the Arabs in the past, we find that the basic driver at the time of the emergence of Islam was religion. At that time, the Arabs were called to believe in one God, and that belief led them to achieve the social and economic revolution they needed. Social reform was a branch and a result of deep belief in religion. As for the West, the main driver is the economy, because its nations have completed their national unity and independence, while the Arabs are still struggling for cultural renewal and national sovereignty. [10] We can conclude that Arab nationalism, as Dr. Saadoun Hammadi, says in this context, represented the tendency of the Arab entity to distinguish itself from the Ottoman entity, even if it varied in forms of expression. That expression, which in any case represented the awakening of conscience and a special sense of self, and the factors of that interaction that led to this feeling were Arab in their essence. They were not imported from abroad, that is, they were not quoted from other nations. [11]

Arab nationalism entered the movement stage after it was a belief when it resisted Ottoman tyranny and Western occupation. It was facing the two battles simultaneously; at the same time that Egypt, Tunisia, and Marrakesh were resisting British and French colonialism, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq were resisting the Ottoman tyranny, and the resistance to the Ottoman tyranny was the factor that brought Arab nationalism into the role of the movement by all mean of the word. The Ottoman tyranny dominated the Arab nation for four centuries, and this had its effect in freezing the Arabic language, Arab thinking, and Arab conscience from movement and interaction, but the Ottomans were unable to integrate the Arabs into their entity; moreover, the moral strength of the Arabs, existing in their natural and intellectual formation, prevented their integration into any other sexual formation. [12]

The national orientation was due to the policy of Turkification of the Arab countries, the imposition of the Turkish language on most Arab peoples, the consideration of the Turkish language as an official language, the pride that some Ottoman rulers demonstrated, and their arrogance in their dealings, the spread of Western education in the Levant, and the widespread corruption, and the feeling of the need for reform by many people. Thus, young people wanted to liberate their homeland from Turkish domination, and these young people were the students of al-Yaziji and al-Bustani. [13] Therefore, Arab nationalism aimed at liberating the Arab individual from the shackles that surround him and from oppression, exploitation, domination, and colonialism.

Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1903) was an important figure in the his-

tory of the Arab Renaissance in the era of Sultan Abd al-Hamid. His book *Umm Al-Qura* and *Nature of Despotism* had an important and influential role in deepening Arab awareness; in addition, the seminars he held with free Arabs fleeing to Egypt for fear of the tyranny of Abd al-Hamid, and with Egyptian intellectuals had a clear effect on alerting the Arabs and waking them up from the deep slumber that disrupted their march for hundreds of years. Al-Kawakibi went on to attack tyranny on the one hand, and to emphasize on the other hand the superiority of the Arabs and their special role in Islam, concluding that through the Arabs comes the revival and the unity of religion. Al-Kawakibi also saw that the domination of non-Arab groups was the beginning of the trend towards tyranny and ignorance, and the basis of apathy in Islamic societies. Thus, Lutsky considered Al-Kawakibi to be the founder of Arab nationalism. [13]

Consequently, it can be said that the awareness of the reality of Arab nationalism has existed since the Arabs became aware of their cause, but the Nasserite revolution awakened this awareness and deepened it and raised its voice loudly in the whole world and put clear components for it that make it differ from the calls for nationalism that appeared in the early nineteenth century which were based on governance or sex. Then it achieved steps on the path of great unity, so the United Arab Republic was established bearing the banner of Arab nationalism, and the cooperative socialist democratic society was established to achieve the concept of Arab nationalism in building a liberated society. [12]

The term Arab nationalism, in its use today, is a mixture of political ideas and trends linked to religion, history, identity, and language.

### 3. Does Nationalism Contradict Religion?

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all acknowledge a difference between life in the present and the afterlife. However, Islam has a unique approach as it strives to improve life in the present world based on the perception of the afterlife. The Islamic community is committed to this transformation by adhering to Islamic law. This is similar to ancient Judaism, where the Jews aimed to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 6:19) in this world. However, the Islamic community, referred to as the “Islamic nation,” is viewed as universal, unlike the sacred nature of the Jewish nation. [14] Janet explains that religion, according to articles on the psychology of faith, helps maintain social ties within a nation. Monotheism in Islam played a vital role in unifying warring tribes by promoting solidarity and cooperation. [5]

However, it should be noted that the emergence of Arab nationalist thought as an independent and distinct thought from Islamic reform thought was accompanied by the simple conclusion that building a modern state that inspires deep national loyalty and is based on constitutional and legal morality is not possible within the framework of adhering to the religious or human reference. And that national awareness and national policy can only develop within the scope of a nation-state, and from here stems the need to work on developing national awareness instead of religious awareness. Thus, alongside the slogan of the Is-

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lamic University, the slogan of the Arab or national state arose, at a time when Islamic reformist thought itself began to retreat from its global claims and rebuild itself in the field of emphasizing uniqueness or specificity. [15]

In fact, the emphasis on a specific model of national or religious legitimacy was associated in the minds of the people of that era with a specific model for exercising power and thus defining the values of existence and the politics itself. From this point of view, talking about Islamic legitimacy meant for many of those who believed in it and those who rejected it, the return of the Ottoman regime, while talking about national legitimacy coincided with the idea of independence and building the modern national state with its negative values and implications for some, and positive for others. Thus, two main currents crystallized in Arab societies, one of which feeds on the fear of what the idea of the caliphate entails, or what it has been associated with throughout history, in terms of a concept of governance based on the consecration of personal authority, tyranny, and the absence of a constitutional vision. The second, on the other hand, is nourished by the fear that abandoning the concept of the caliphate and the great Imamate poses a threat to the pillars of Islam and to the Arab community, whose collective identity and the basis of its personality and existence are constituted by Islam. [15]

Therefore, when we study the relationship between religion and nationalism in our Arab world, we find that there is a division between the Arab nationalist trend, which embraces Arab nationalism, and the Islamic trend, which embraces the Islamic League.

Below, as we discuss the Islamic trend, we will even notice different views regarding the relationship between Islam and nationalism. There are those who believe that the idea of Arab nationalism is a conspiracy against Islam and a colonial idea to destroy the unity of Islam and that it is an ignorant tendency. However, there are those who deny the contradiction between Islam and Arabism, and affirm the status of Islam as the eternal message that has given the Arab community the center of leadership.

Abu Al-Ala Al-Mawdudi points out that if a person takes the unity of blood as a basis for uniting into one race, then why does he not make the unity of blood that humanity inherited from its first parents a basis for building an inclusive unity? Why not attribute all humanity to one race? Why is humanity divided into Aryan, Sami, and others? Why does a person not say that I inhabit the earth and that the entire globe is my country, and that every human being who lives on it is a son of my country and a partner in it?

Al-Mawdudi says that gender, language, homeland, or color have no consideration whatsoever in the foundation and construction of Islamic nationalism. It is a global nationalism that spreads its wings over the entire globe, and the establishment and continuity of this structure depend in its foundation on the fact that all of its members, with different origins, different places, and shapes, forget their origins and their own races and turn their attention away from their places and their own homelands, and exit from one exit of truthfulness, and enter into



one entrance of truthfulness. Furthermore, just as it is impossible for a single state to include several states within it, it is impossible for several nationalities to exist in one nationalism. The combination of nationalities based on gender, nation, color, or language within Islamic nationalism is impossible. A Muslim who wants to remain a Muslim must believe in the invalidity of all other nationalities and not give importance to all ties of earth and blood. As for whoever wants to pay attention to these ties and connections, we must know that Islam has not mixed with his heart and soul, and that Jahiliyyah (ignorance) has captured his heart and mind and taken control of them, and that he will be separated from Islam and Islam will be separated from him sooner or later. [16]

### 3.1. Nationalism as a Jahily Concept

The word “nation” is one of the terms of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic times). The people of pre-Islamic times did not build nationalism on a purely intellectual basis, as love for their kindred people and the connections and bonds that had been transmitted from their ancestors, spread throughout the tissues of their minds and hearts. They were never even able to purify their national perceptions from their close connection to gender, lineage, and historical traditions. Thus, just as the Arabs in ancient times applied the word “Qaum” (people) in general to members of one tribe or one race, the word “nation” that prevails today also necessarily contains within it the concept of common descent. Since this contradicts the Islamic concept of gathering, the word “Qaum” was not used in the Qur’an as a term to refer to a group of Muslims. [16]

Al-Mawdudi says that the Qur’an has given the Muslim community the term “party” because “Qawm” (people) is based on gender and lineage, while the “party” is based on principle and method. Therefore, Muslims are a party, not a nation, because they are separated from the world and linked to each other on the basis of their belief in common principles and their following a single approach, and there is no affection between them and those who do not share their principles and methodology, even if they are the closest relatives to them. The Qur’an sees in all mankind only two parties, the first of which is the party of God, and the second is the party of Satan. Whatever the difference between those who make up the party of Satan, they are united under one party because their thinking and approach are not Islam. On the contrary, the members of Hezbollah, regardless of the differences between them in gender, homeland, language, and history; they became like those who have a close blood relationship with God Almighty. Moreover, joining Hezbollah also leads to a complete severing of relations and ties between them and Satan’s party. [16]

According to Al-Mawdudi, the second term used by the Qur’an that refers to Muslims with the same meaning as “party” is “umma”, and it has been used extensively in hadith, and it refers to the group united by something unified. The common origin among Muslims, on the basis of which they are said to be “umma”, is not their race, nation, or economic goals, but rather the mission of their lives and the principles and approach of their party. God says (And thus we have



made you a just umma that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.) [16] Consequently, Al-Mawdudi reminds Muslims that they are not a people like all other peoples that are linked to one history and one race, but rather they are in fact one group and that salvation lies in feeling within them the sense of the group.

Furthermore, the Islamic thinker Abdullah Alwan says that the idea of nationalism as a principle and belief contradicts the principles of Islam in that it is an imported idea that has no connection with Islamic belief and that Islam does not allow a Muslim under any circumstances to derive his belief from a belief other than the Islamic belief. Moreover, Islam considers every call to the bond of gender, lineage, clan, affinity, patriotism, or common interests, a blind ignorant call. In addition, Islam considers the bond of Islamic brotherhood above the bond of blood and kindred, as God Almighty says (The believers are nothing else than brothers) and makes the true balance of differentiation between races and colors to be piety and work (Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of God is the most pious of you). How unfair it would be to say that an Indian, Persian, Kurdish, Berber, or Indonesian Muslim are not among our people, and are not considered among our brothers because they do not belong to the Arabs? Further, Islam does not consider anyone who belongs to it to be a Muslim unless he firmly believes in the validity of the Sharia and its rule over time and days, then submits to its rule, submitting to its system at all times, and this is confirmed by many verses, including the Almighty's saying in Surah Al Imran (And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him) And his saying in Surah Al-Ma'idah (Then is it the judgment of ignorance they desire? But who is better than Allah in judgment for a people who are certain in faith). Therefore, by calling for nationalism, the nationalists are explicitly calling for secularism, which means the separation of religion from the state and the distancing of Islamic law from the reality of life. This is blasphemy itself, and clear misguidance. [17]

However, if we turn to the Islamic scholar Muhammad al-Ghazali, we will find him stating that Arabism has been associated with Islam for a long time in a single civilization and a common history, and the whole world has felt this strong and inclusive bond. Islam never deviates from Arabism, because destiny chose a specific language in which to reveal the Holy Qur'an, which is the Arabic language. By Arabs, I do not mean a special blood, but I mean every Arabic speaker. God says (And truly, this is a revelation from the Lord of the creatures, which the trustworthy Ruh (Jibril) has brought down upon your heart that you may be (one) of the warners, in the plain Arabic language.) Arabism is not, therefore, sexual fanaticism for a particular blood or color, nor is it fanaticism against a religion or sect. Islam depends for its establishment and survival on absolute freedom and it strives to prevent sedition, coercion, and tyranny and does not fight at all to support a belief or force anyone to embrace it. [18] Moreover, the leadership of Muslims is only suitable for Arabs, and no one should dispute it with them. Islam is based on two main pillars: the Qur'an and

the Sunnah; the Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and the Messenger is Arab. Only an expert in the literature of Arabism understands the truth of the revelation and the method of the message. By Arabism, we do not mean sex, rather, we mean the tongue; we do not mean close or distant lineage, rather, we mean all Arabs, whether of clear origin or those who have arabized. [18]

Additionally, Al-Ghazali indicates that the Messenger has attached the true Muslims to the Arabs, so he said according to what Ibn Katheer narrated on the authority of Muadh bin Jabal (but Arabic is the tongue, but Arabic is the tongue). That is why the souls of Muslims are blessed with this just Arab leadership, which does not see any superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab except through piety. [18] Thus, al-Ghazali says that the Prophet would be the first to place comprehensive Arab nationalism in the context of effective life and constructive, just rule. He explains that nationalism is a general historical, linguistic, cultural, and geographical reality for the people, while religion is a message and guidance that deals with life and directs people to the path of guidance and to the best. Moreover, God wanted the nationalities that were on the right path to get to know each other in the broad sense of getting to know each other, which requires good relations, consideration of the characteristics and advantages of each people, the exchange of benefits, the reconstruction of the universe, and the pursuit of the common good. Allah says (O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.) [18]

In addition, Al-Ghazali believes that the period of the Turkish leadership of Islam was a disaster for Islam and its great nation, and indicates the necessity of building the Islamic renaissance on purely Arab foundations. As for the humanitarian foundations that we require for Arab nationalism, Al-Ghazali believes that they are guaranteed by the principles of Islam.

For the Islamic thinker Muhammad Emara, he places nationalism under the umbrella of the Islamic nation; he says that the nation in Islam as it achieved its expansion and crystallized its civilization, has balanced between the private and the public. It also achieved the unity of the tribes without abolishing the tribe, but rather by making it a building block in the new building of the nation after it had been an independent entity. We found it establishing, through acquaintance, a unifying link between tribes and peoples, to the extent that it's comprehensive surroundings embraced the national islands, so it united them all with the threads of Islamic civilization, without denying their national distinction devoid of ethnic fanaticism and sexual narrow-mindedness. The concept of the nation in our civilizational thought, in our historical experience, and in our social inheritance defined the circles that start from the individual to the family to the people to the nation, in the national sense, to the Islamic university, with the unremitting effort to deepen the unifying bond and to extend its scope to a new horizon. Indeed, the Islamic circle has extended threads and relationships to the human circle. [19]

Therefore, we can conclude that there is a difference in dealing with the relationship between religion and nationalism among Islamic thinkers. There are those who reject entirely the idea of nationalism and consider it an ignorant idea that contradicts Islam; moreover, there are those who emphasize the idea of Arabism and that Islamic leadership must be Arab; finally, there are those who believe that nationalism falls under the umbrella of the Islamic nation.

Now, we will deal with the Arab nationalist trend, which believes that the relationship between the ideas of the Islamic League and Arab nationalism is one of contradiction and clash; this trend believes that the Arabs had a civilization before Islam and that the bond of Arabism is stronger than the bond of Islam. The nationalist thinker Satih al-Husari wonders how is it permissible for anyone to say that Muslim scholars must strive to achieve unity between the Arab, Iranian, Indian, and Turkish, while it is not permissible for them to work to achieve unity between the Shami, Egyptian, and Hejazi? How can anyone hope to form unity among Islamic countries that speak different languages, without forming unity among countries that speak one language, especially those that speak the language of the Qur'an?

Al-Husari says that the Islamic movement was an important historical event that created a dangerous revolutionary change in the conditions of the Arabs, and it also had a strong impact on the course of general history. This is a fact that every researcher can only acknowledge, whether Arab or non-Arab, Muslim or non-Muslim. However, the Islamic movement did not remain fully linked to Arab nationalism because some groups Arabized without converting to Islam, and on the contrary, some groups embraced the Islamic religion without becoming Arabized. [20]

Al-Husari points out that the history of the Arabs entered an important new phase with the emergence of Islam, but it is a mistake to think that the Arabs were a primitive nation deprived of civilization before Islam; the historical information collected by researchers leaves no room for doubt about this. Even if we leave this information aside and look closely at the Arabic language itself, we are forced to accept that it was not the language of a primitive people deprived of intellectual life because we find in the pre-Islamic poems and in the Holy Qur'an, which addressed the contemporaries of the Muhammadan message and had a profound influence on them, a large group of words which indicates very abstract meanings, and there is no room for doubt that mental abstraction reaching this level of progress cannot be achieved without an intense intellectual and contemplative life behind it. This is why we can confirm that denying the existence of civilization and intellectual life among Arabs before Islam is in no way consistent with scientific facts. [20]

According to Al-Husari, the Islamic religion played an important role in the progress and expansion of Arab nationalism because it was the driving force for the Arab conquests that spread the Arabic language and expanded the scope of Arab nationalism. And it became the realistic force that gave the Arabic language a kind of immunity against the factors of branching and fragmentation,

and thus preventing Arab nationalism from splitting during its long period of decline. However, this does not mean that Arab nationalism remained linked to the Islamic religion, because non-Arab Islamic nations were formed on the one hand, and non-Muslim Arab groups on the other hand. Therefore, the basis for the formation of the nation and the building of nationalism is the unity of language and the unity of history, because it is the unity in these two fields that leads to the unity of feelings and culture, and makes people feel that they are the children of one nation distinct from other nations. Moreover, neither religion nor the state nor economic life is among the basic elements of the nation. [20]

### 3.2. National or Religious Bond, Which Is Stronger?

Al-Husari explains from the point of view of domestic politics, that we must note that Islam was not the religion of all Egyptians, even if it was the religion of the majority of them, because nearly one and a half million people live in Egypt, followers of the Christian religion. It is known that they were not foreigners and intruders, but rather they were natives of the country like Muslims. They have the same rights as Muslims, and they have the same duties as Muslims. Therefore, Egypt must have a bond that unites its entire people, whether they are Muslims or Christians. It is natural that this bond is one of the patriotic and nationalistic feelings which all Egyptians share. [20]

Thus, Al-Husari indicates that modern times have witnessed many wars that broke out between countries belonging to one religion, and on the contrary, many agreements and alliances were concluded between countries belonging to different religions. Therefore, the unity of religion did not prevent the emergence of quarrels and wars between some countries and peoples, just as the difference in religion did not prevent some countries from allying and participating in wars against what they considered to be the common enemy. [21] Consequently, we can point out that Satih al-Husari believes that the only bond that can unite Arabs is the national bond, not the religious one. Therefore, religion cannot be compatible with nationalism according to al-Husari, given the multiplicity of races and sects.

In addition, if we turn to the Arab nationalist thinker Constantine Zurayk, we will find him asserting that if nationalism opposes anything, it is not religious spirituality, but rather destructive fanaticism that makes the sectarian bond stronger than the national bond, and refuses to dissolve in the unified nation, but often exploits innocent religious feeling for the sake of its own whims and partisan ambitions. As for true religion, it and nationalism stem from one source and aim for one goal. [22] Some may say that the religious bond at the time of the Prophet Muhammad prevailed over the national bond and that Islam was stronger than Arabic; Zurayk states that nothing other than that was possible at that time, whether in the Islamic East or the Christian West. [23]

Constantine Zurayk indicates that we know that nationalism, in its proper sense is a product of the modern era, but despite this, we find a strong Arab feeling even in the first era, when Islamic religious passion was at its highest

boiling point. The Muslims treated the Christians of Taghlib and other Arabs in a different way than they treated the non-Arab Christians and some of the Christian tribes participated in the first conquests and fought side by side with the Muslims. Yes, these manifestations of the national bond between the Arabs are insignificant when compared to the national feeling that has overwhelmed nations in the modern era, but if we take into account the conditions of intellectual life in the Middle Ages when religious sentiment dominated everything, we find in these manifestations valid seeds of Arab national life. Moreover, these seeds continued to grow throughout the ages until these countries woke up to the light of the modern era, where the national bond is above every other bond. This bond imposes on them that they are all the same, regardless of their religions and their differences, and today these Arabs turn to the past, and they find that the origin of their unity and the seed of their coalition were planted by the Arab leader Muhammad bin Abdullah. [23] Therefore, Constantine Zurayk believes that nationalism does not contradict religious spirituality, but contradicts religious fanaticism, which believes that the religious bond is stronger than the national bond.

### 3.3. Religion and Nationalism: Confrontation or Coexistence?

Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, he points out that the apparent contradiction between Islam and Arab nationalism, that contradiction that still exists in the minds of many people to this day, is due primarily to a misunderstanding, misconception, and misinterpretation that have afflicted both Islam and Arab nationalism alike. He says that we can confirm that modern Arab nationalism is based on language, history, literature, customs and characteristics. In general, the ties that bind individuals and make them a nation are moral and material ties. Moreover, if we take these components and examine them carefully and search for the position of Islam on each of them, we will find a complete rapprochement, and sometimes complete agreement, between what Arab nationalism calls for and what the Islamic religion approves of. Language is the first element of our national belief, and for our Arab nation, it is like the soul and manifestation of its life, and the nation that loses its language is doomed to disappear. Fortunately for the Arabs, their language is the language of Islam, and taking care of this language is not only a national duty but also a religious obligation. The impact of Islam on this language and its preservation and dissemination is very great. As for history, the Arabs have a glorious history before Islam, and it is brighter and more important after Islam. [22]

However, Al-Bazzaz argues that saying that Islam does not contradict Arab nationalism is one thing, and promoting Islamic unity is another. Islamic unity in its correct and precise sense is the formation of a comprehensive political system to which all Muslims are subject. Although this system is the wish of all religious Muslims, it is practically not possible for many reasons, some of which are geographical, some are political, and some are social. Even if we accept the definition of that unity and make it confined to the neighboring parts of the Islamic

homeland, and assuming that it is possible to unite these parts, unifying the parts that speak one language, taste one literature, and are united by one history is the most important and closest to reality. It is not natural for us to wait for Iraq to unite with Iran and Afghanistan before it unites with Syria and Jordan, and saying otherwise is nonsense that does not deserve a response. Accordingly, the call to unify the Arabs, which is the most important goal of Arab nationalism, is the practical step that must precede any call for Islamic unity. [22]

Therefore, Al-Bazzaz points out that there is no fundamental conflict or clear antagonism between Arab nationalism and Islam. This is a fact that the Arabs must realize and be proud of this great blessing, the blessing of not having a conflict between their nationality and their religion. He says that it should be noted that we must know that in our call for nationalism, there is nothing that may provoke non-Muslim Arabs, or diminish their rights as good citizens. Fanaticism in its various forms and manifestations is inconsistent with Arab nature, and non-Muslim Arabs enjoyed their full rights under the Arab state from ancient times. The sincere nationalists among the Christian Arabs understand this meaning and know that the Islamic religion and its accompanying civilization are an integral part of our national heritage, and they, as nationalists, must cherish it as their Muslim brothers cherish it. [22]

In addition, Michel Aflaq indicates that Islam originated in the heart of Arabism and went along with its history and mixed with it in its most glorious roles, so there can be no collision. Aflaq rejects the model of Western nationalism, in which nationalism is devoid of religion, due to his belief in the relationship between Islam and Arabism in the Arab nationalist model. [24]

For the Islamic thinker Yusuf al-Qaradawi, he indicates that man does not, in fact, have a single affiliation. A person's affiliations may be multiplied by various considerations, and we do not find any contradiction between them. A person belongs to his family, to his village, to his province, to his homeland, to his region, to his continent, to his religion, to his great umma and to the human family. There is no embarrassment or harm, as these affiliations are neither conflicting nor contradictory, but rather they express realities that already exist, and the relationship between them is that of the particular to the general. [25]

According to Ismat Seif al-Dawla, Islam is a relationship of belonging to a religion, while Arabism is a relationship of belonging to a nation; tribes, peoples, and nations may meet in a relationship of belonging to one religion; moreover, religious affiliation may multiply within the same nation without the multiplicity affecting the unity of the nation. In the Qur'an, there are dozens of verses that regulate the social relationship between those who belong to multiple religions in one nation. Islam began as a doctrine that united Muslims, but when it entered an element in the national structure of the Arab nation, it became a kind of life, which Muslims and non-Muslims contributed to building. We Arabs, whatever our religious beliefs, have not known in our history the crisis of freedom that Europe experienced in the Middle Ages. We did not need philosophers like Rousseau to develop theories justifying that people are equal before law. We did

not spend centuries recognizing women's right to property, nor did we fight wars to win political and civil liberties. [26]

Azmi Bishara points out that the Arabic language is the language of the Qur'an, and the Arabs are mostly Muslims and most of them are religious in different ways; there was never a crisis between religion and nationalism. In North Africa, in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, there is a congruence between nationalism and Islam because there are no other sects in these countries. Furthermore, he states that the crisis was in the politicization of religion, the introduction of a religious-political ideology to power, and repressive practices in the face of the opposition. [27]

Abed Al-Jabri says that the essence and spirit of religion is that it unites and does not divide, and the Islamic religion is the religion of monotheism in general, monotheism at the level of belief (one God), monotheism at the level of society (one nation) and monotheism at the level of understanding and practicing religion (Those who divided their religion and became sects, you are not one of them.) As for politics, its essence and spirit is that it divides. Politics arises where there is a difference; therefore, it is closer to being (the art of managing difference) than to anything else. Therefore, linking religion with politics necessarily leads to the introduction of the germ of difference into religion. The difference in religion, if its origin is political, leads necessarily to sectarianism and then to civil war. History, the present, and the past are witness to this, since the time of the Othman caliphate, that is, since the employment of religion in the Islamic society began in a political way, and the difference exists. [28]

Consequently, the relationship between Islam and Arab nationalism has formed one of the basic topics that preoccupied contemporary Arab political thought. The topic overlaps in formulating the prevailing ideologies in the Arab region, and the contemporary Islamic tide presents new dimensions to this relationship, related to its nature, content, and the policies resulting from it. [29]

#### **4. Religion and Nationalism: What Kind of Populism Would It Be?**

Populism is religious or nationalistic, as it adds the sacred to everything that is worldly, so political discourse in the name of God is enthusiastic and extremist in its tendencies according to religious populism. As for populism with its nationalist tendency, it imagines the popular will in its national, ethnic, or sectarian form as a sacred will to get rid of all the evils of the world that this tendency sees present in marginalized groups, whether ethnic or sectarian, and this is what was confirmed by the practical experience in Germany at the hands of the Nazis. In the beginning, populism was linked in its origins to leftist movements, but now it has invaded the right and the liberal left, which has become the largest political bloc in the West. [30] This experience has further reinforced the existence of racist practices across various regions of the world. It has also highlighted the differing perceptions of Amazigh, Sunni/Shiite, Muslim/Christian; this populism is characterized by the imaginary pursuit of achieving national



requirements and goals. [31] Therefore, for the sake of these alleged national goals, there are enemies to it, the first of whom is the elite, as political populism is linked to the will of the people and makes the world of politics based on the vertical opposition between two homogeneous and completely hostile groups: the people and the elite. Then a different judgment is issued to each group. The people are described as glorified, while the elite are condemned, and this conflict is depicted as a struggle between good and evil. Therefore, scholars of populism often resort to the word “Manichaeism,” which has a religious origin, to describe the centrality of this dualism in the populist vision of the world. [31]

Populism is a political trend that uses a discourse of hostility towards the institutions of the political system and societal elite. Politicians and parties use this tactic to attract the masses to gain power. [30] In the religious context, populism determines the religious status of the elite by accusing them of secularism; when extremist religious slogans or claims are challenged, populists respond decisively, accusing them not only of secularism but sometimes of apostasy. This behavior is led by influential leaders or clerics among the masses, as seen in the case of Faraj Fouda.

Third World societies formed fertile ground for populist discourse. In the case of populism, the trend turns into a dictatorship that is practiced against the people, to the point that Arab societies have become filled with populism and populists, as if it has become a political theology in our societies, and today populists have become Islamists, meaning that politicians give an Islamic character to their roles. [31] Mobilization among populists, whether religious or nationalist, is ready when the populist call is made against the elite, which is accused of hollow and worthless theorizing regarding the problems facing the nation and requiring their solution. Political populism in our Arab world often achieves success in light of the trends of the state, which is not secular in the modern sense. The constitution in Egypt in its various stages was liberal, and after July 1952, until the period of the faithful President Anwar Sadat, who unleashed religious populism to its extreme limits to assassinate him in the end. The constitutional stages that Egypt went through did not establish it as a modern secular state in the legislative sense, which left vacant spaces that could be filled populistly and in an accelerated and widespread manner.

Religious populism works specifically through religious or political actors and their associated electoral rules. It shares its conceptual center with populism, but it reproduces it in a specific religious way. Religious populism has two dimensions; the first is an explicit religious dimension, if we understand religion in the narrow sense as a relationship with the divine sphere, and the second dimension of religious populism, is a hidden religious dimension, related to the sanctification of politics in contemporary societies. This dimension is religious in the broadest sense of the word religion, as it is based above all on the experience of the sacred and the function it performs by distinguishing the group from others, as absolute transcendent power. [31]

The main starting point for Islamic religious populism was the politicization

of Shiism in the wake of the Iranian revolution in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini declared that the revolutionary issue was the issue of the disadvantaged versus the traditional elites. He made global jihad permissible, which is still within the broad framework of political Islam, as a contemporary form of religious populism. Therefore, to fully comprehend the symbolic and cultural aspects of populism, especially in relation to religion, it is imperative to recognize that it is more than just about economic benefits; we need to understand the cultural and symbolic aspects of interactions between populism and religion. [31] Populist claims, whether religious or nationalist, remain dependent on the logic of the masses, which is what is used in practice to consolidate populism, and this is what the Arab Spring revolutions demonstrated, as they paved the way for Islamic populist discourse makers, who had no role in launching popular protests. [32]

Political Islam groups have shone as indications of that populism, the existence of which the West has tried, through certain perceptions and in specific circumstances, to realistically certify as “the appropriate Islamic political structure for the Arab countries.” [32] This is the legitimacy that was given to the Muslim Brotherhood at the international level, as a political status that expresses the opinion of the masses and indicates the presence of populism in its religious context, just as the Arab masses attended as an indication of populism under the Arab national project. Therefore, the discourse of religious and nationalist in the Arab world creates a divide between the masses and elites, which may lead to more conflict and disagreement.

## 5. The Absent Identity

The problem of identity is raised very strongly in the Arab cultural and societal milieu, and is determined by the question: Is our identity Arab-Islamic, local, national, religious, or sectarian?

The rooting of the causes of the conflict between the nationalist movements and the Islamic fundamentalist movements began after the defeat of 1967. The Islamic popular cultural situation was the most influential because it was the most widespread, which helped the Islamic movements to exploit the state of Arab frustration resulting from the failure of the nationalist unitary experiments, or from the mistakes that were committed by the country’s national regimes. Identity is not a fixed, ready-made law, but rather an open, evolving project for the future, that is, intertwined with reality and history. In addition to this, it is not monolithic in structure, that is, it is not composed of a single element, which is the religious element alone, the class element alone, the ethnic-national element alone, the linguistic element alone, or the cultural, emotional, and moral element alone. Mostly, it is the result of the interaction of all of these elements, without neglecting the emergence or dominance of one of these elements in certain stages of development. [29]

This question about identity is not new to the region; it is a topic that is at least a hundred years old. The Islamic world began to be divided into states and entities after the end of the Ottoman era. But what happened during the twen-

tieth century proved the impossibility of separating in the Arab region between cultural Arabism and civilizational Islam. Arabism and religious faith are intertwined in the Arab region, and it is different from every relationship between religion and other nationalities in the Islamic world. Turkey had to move away from religion in order to adopt secularism and adhere to its Turkish nationalism, and this example that happened in Turkey made many Arabs who adhere to their Islamic religion believe that talking about Arabism also means abandoning their religion. [29]

In addition, it is a common mistake to understand Arab nationalism as if it were ideologies and political beliefs, while Arab nationalism is a framework of cultural identity regardless of political beliefs and ideas. Therefore, you can be a secular Arab nationalist, you can be an Islamic Arab nationalist, and you can be a liberal Arab nationalist, meaning that we can place any “ideological” content within the national framework. The misunderstanding came from the fact that most of the nationalist proposal was in a state of ignoring the role of religion in Arab life, in such a way that the call for Arab nationalism came to mean to some people atheism or distancing from religion, instead of presenting it as an identity or as a cultural framework that Arabs as a whole share, regardless of their ideological differences or intellectual and political affiliations. [29]

The Egyptian writer Fahmi Huwaidi indicates that our self has only two pillars: Islam and Arabism, and any project that is not based on these two pillars is doomed in advance to failure. All those who aspire to true liberation and progress must deal with it, whether they like it or not. Islam is a universal religion, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, was sent to all people, but that does not contradict the fact that Islam is essentially an Arab religion, and the Qur’an was revealed in a clear Arabic language, and the prophet was an Arab from the Banu Qahtan. The West addresses us as Muslims and Arabs, and we are still discussing and debating and asking: Who are we? It was the Arab Islamic self that rose up in Algeria to resist the French. Fighting was jihad for the sake of God, the fighters were mujahideen, and the newspaper speaking in the name of the revolution was “Mujahid”. The colonists did not realize this fact until they were surprised that the Algerians rejected French citizenship, which some in France thought was an honor that any Algerian would wish for. Many of them did not imagine that these backward Bedouins would refuse with great pride to become French, with all the progress and civilization that France represents. But the Algerian, with his Arab Islamic self, was convinced that he was superior to everything that France represented. [33]

The crisis of the advocates of nationalism remains that they neglected the role of Islam. To the same extent, part of the crisis of the Islamists is that they declared a war on nationalism. The result was that each group demanded that we run on the path of progress with one leg, and then each of them remained unable to express the true self of this nation. The Islam that fought ethnic fanaticism and considered it a form of ignorance and emphasized that all believers are brothers, and that there is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab except

through piety, is the same Islam that recognized the existence of national affiliations (and We made you into peoples and tribes); moreover, the early companions did not find any difficulty in dealing with that reality. Suhaib Al-Rumi, Salman Al-Farsi, and Bilal Al-Habashi remained at the forefront of this generation, and this did not prejudice in any way either their status or the sincerity of their faith. None of them was asked to give up his affiliation or his people, nor was it denied that any of them should remain a Roman, a Persian, or an Ethiopian. Rather, each of them was a living model that embodied the possibility of live interaction between religion and nationalism. However, as we approach the matter from the angle of identity and self, we must differentiate between Islam as a belief and Islam as a civilization and cultural and social background. [33]

Islam as a faith remains the concern of those addressed by the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. As for Islam as a civilization and cultural background, it is a reality that everyone lives in the Arab world in particular, mixed with the fabric of the mind and conscience at all, and with blood at times. In addition, the correct understanding of Islam deals with the human being as a human being, regardless of his religion or sect, providing him with a climate of creativity under the shade of justice and freedom. The bottom line is that when we call for Arab Islamic identity, this statement should not be taken in its Islamic aspect as an obligation for others to embrace Islam. Some narrow-minded and Islam-hating people are still promoting the idea that Islamic identity must be at the expense of people of other religions. I do not need to go on to present Islam's position on non-Muslims, contenting myself with the testimony of one of their people, the former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, who wrote: In "The Story of the Jews," he says that the Jews have not known a degree of prosperity and self-realization throughout all of history except twice: in the United States today, and in Islamic Andalusia centuries ago. [33]

Finally, Burhan Ghalioun says that belonging to the Islamic group as a culture and civilization was the subject of general consensus, even among what we came to call religious minorities. Nor was there an objection to the values and political concepts of the West, as Islamic thinkers did the impossible in order to demonstrate the harmony of Islamic teachings and values with the requirements of civilization and the rules of democratic and scientific thinking. [15]

## 6. Conclusions

There were many theories about the foundations of nationalism, and numerous debates arose around these foundations. Perhaps the most prominent subject of disagreement was gender and religion, and their place in nationalism.

With the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, two groups emerged: a group that believed that the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate was the fall of Islam itself, and a group that believed that the Ottoman Caliphate brought nothing but injustice and corruption to the Arab countries, and thus they called for Arab nationalism.

Advocates of Arab nationalism disagreed about the relationship of nationalism to Islam. Most nationalist thinkers believe that Islam as a religion and ritual

does not conflict at all with Arab nationalism, but it is considered a strong supporter of it, as Michel Aflaq saw. They argue that the problem lies in the politicization of religion in order to achieve political goals, as they believe that it is the trends of political Islam that are incompatible with nationalism, not Islam itself. While Islamists such as Maududi and Sayyid Qutb believe that the call for nationalism is an ignorant call, and that the idea of borders that separate countries from each other has no basis, as they argue that we are all children of Adam and therefore the entire world is our homeland. While other Islamic thinkers, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali and Muhammad Emara believe that Arabism is linked to Islam and that leadership in Islam must be Arab.

Finally, the issue of Arab nationalism is a complex and branching issue, and thinkers within each movement differ over it. Therefore, we do not see a consensus on dealing with the issue of Arab nationalism and its relationship with religion in the Arab world.

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