

#10 - Paul Salem
The Ideology of Arab Nationalism: The Contributions of
Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq

As mentioned earlier, the Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s went well beyond the Arabism of the interwar period. The latter was understood as a simple pride in the Arab heritage and a preference for Arab self-rule over domination by Turks or Europeans. It proposed no radical change in social or political values. Arab nationalism as it emerged after World War II, however, proposed a deep transformation of political and cultural life based on secularism, state socialism, and devotion to the nation in the spirit of modern Western nationalism. Of the two central formulators of the ideology, Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq, the former laid the foundations for a culturally based secular nationalism and the latter grafted onto that nationalism, a philosophy of social, economic, and cultural renewal that gave it deeper intellectual and popular appeal. A more comprehensive study would examine the work of Constantine Zurayq, Zaki al-Arsouzi, Nadiem al-Bitar, Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, Edmond Rabbath, and others. Considerations of scope and space prevent me from doing so here.

Sati' al-Husri: Laying the Foundations

Sati' Khaldun al-Husri was born to a Syrian family in Yemen in 1882 where his father served as chief Ottoman *qadi* (religious judge). He received a largely secular education at a number of Ottoman insti-

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tutions, majored in the natural sciences, and eventually visited France, Switzerland, and Belgium where he pursued studies in education (Tibi 1981, 92). Turkish was his first language, French his second, and Arabic only his third, although by his middle thirties he had developed it to fluency. He started his career in the Ottoman educational system and soon acquired a reputation as an ambitious modernizing reformer. He rose to prominence after the 1908 coup under the patronage of the Young Turk regime. His first fling with the nationalist idea found expression in his championing of Ottoman nationalism as the sole means of preserving the Ottoman empire and resisting the threat from the thoroughly nationalized European world. His sympathies for Arab nationalism grew, however, as the Istanbul regime began to pursue a highly centralized policy of Turkification that clashed harshly with Arab political and cultural aspirations. He also had contact with several of the public and secret Arab organizations that were forming in the fetid prewar atmosphere.

In 1919, after the collapse of the empire, Husri traveled to British-occupied, Arab-governed Syria where he began a long and vital career as a champion of Arab nationalism in the Arab world. The bulk of his career was spent in Iraq where between 1921 and 1941 he served in many high educational posts, among them, his six-year stint as director-general of Education. Troubles with the British in 1941 forced him to leave Iraq for Beirut where he stayed till he was called to Damascus by the newly independent government there in 1944. After engineering a number of important educational reforms, Syrian opposition groups forced his ouster from Syria, at which point he returned to Lebanon and then to Cairo where he served as senior advisor to the Cultural Committee of the Arab League. He retired in 1957 after a long and vigorous career, returned to Beirut and eventually to Baghdad where he died in 1968.

Husri's thought was influenced most strongly by that of the German nationalist philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte who insisted on the central role of education in disseminating the nationalist spirit and bringing about the ultimate political unity to which nationalism naturally yearned. What Fichte proposed was "a total change of the existing system of education . . . as the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation" (Fichte 1922, 13). What Husri

undertook was to transform radically the educational programs in Arab countries in order to inculcate into the young that sense of national identity, pride, and allegiance that would provide the motive force for national unification at a later date. He sought to do this by educational reforms, the many lectures he gave, and articles he wrote, all of which were directed, as were those of Fichte, to "the educated classes" (Fichte 1922, 17). Husri summed up his emphasis on education in the nationalist struggle in the following terms: Assume me of unity of education, and I will guarantee all other aspects of unity.

The strength of Husri's influence on subsequent generations of Arab nationalists derives from the simplicity and clarity of his message and the singleminded tirelessness with which he pursued its dissemination. He marshaled reasonable arguments to show that the Arabs comprised one national unit shaped by language and history and that they, therefore, should and could form one political entity as had the Germans and Italians. He was convinced that the nationalist imperatives that had transformed Europe would similarly and inexorably culminate in the national unification of the Arab people, and he saw his role as that of the precursor and the herald who would help plant the nationalist idea and foster its transformation of Arab society in preparation for the final nationalist act of fusion.

I have opted to devote considerable space to an exposition of the views of Husri and Aflaq, and those of other central ideologues in succeeding chapters, in order to present the content of their thought within the complete structure of their worldviews. A brief paraphrasing would sum up their views, but, in the process, it would mask the complexity, power, and attractiveness of their ideologies.

Following the lead of another German thinker on nationalism, Johann G. von Herder, Husri assumed a cultural approach to politics that contrasted sharply with the social contract and natural law tradition developed in England and France. For Husri, as for Herder, "the proper foundation for a sense of collective political identity is not the acceptance of a common sovereign power (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau), but the sharing of a common culture" (Barnard 1969, 7). This understanding of political identity fit nicely with the predicament of Arab political society in which a culture was widely shared but politi-

cal sovereignty was deeply fragmented. This philosophy, therefore, could assert the existence of an Arab nation despite the absence of a unified Arab state—an assertion that could not have been made under the contractarian philosophies of the French and the English. It was in establishing the reality of the Arab nation in this way that Husri made his most seminal contribution to Arab nationalist thought.

As he considered culture the foundation of nationhood, so Husri understood language to be the principal source of culture. Hence, his definition of nationhood, as with many German thinkers that followed Herder, was based first and foremost on the dominance and dissemination of a common language. Indeed, for Husri, language was the living soul of a nation: "If a nation loses its language, and comes to use another language, that nation has lost its life, and has become totally dissolved in the nation from which it adopted its new language" (Husri 1944, 27). To document his convictions, Husri cited the example of the Germans and Italians whose linguistic heritage overcame their political fragmentation in defining and realizing their nationhood. He cited also the national revolutions of the Greeks, Slavs, and other Balkan linguistic groups. Understandably, Husri's emphasis on the importance of language dictated a dedication to the development and use of the Arabic language to the exclusion of all foreign languages at all levels of education and in all domains—journalistic, literary, and scientific. Although some earlier Arab nationalists had occasionally expressed their nationalist sentiments in French (e.g., Negib Azouy, *Le reveil de la nation Arabe*, 1906), with Husri, the Arab Nationalist message became inextricably bound up with the use of the Arabic language itself. Concomitantly, it became infused with Arabic's own stock of emotion and evocative power.

In Husri's understanding of nationalism, history followed language as a source of political identity and community. Whereas language was the soul and life of a nation, history was the source of its sentiment and self-consciousness. "Every nation gains a sense of itself and develops its personality through its own peculiar past" (Husri 1944, 28). This commonly held past "generates a commonality of emotions and outlooks; it leads to a homogeneity in the remembrance of past glories and past calamities and a similarity in attitudes toward the present and hopes for the future" (*ibid.*, 28). Husri was quick to point

out, however, that what was most important about history in this respect was not those facts and figures recorded in books and buried between the yellowed pages of aging manuscripts, but that living past, that imperfect but powerful remembrance of things past, that abides in the minds of people and quietly shapes their personality and behavior. He would not discount the importance of actual historical events in delimiting the boundaries of community and giving rise to a common language and a shared identity, but in his reference to history as the second source of national political identity, Husri was highlighting its subjective psychological side—the image of the past reflected in the present. As such, Husri's insistence on the importance of history was not a call to dispassionate historiographers but an appeal to gifted mythmakers who could construct from the debris of the past a grand and glittering edifice to serve as a source of confidence and inspiration for the entire nation.

In his less than scientific attitude toward history—especially the teaching of history—Husri echoed the thinking of the French philosopher Ernest Renan who argued that "forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are essential factors in the formation of any nation" (Renan 1882, 7). Husri defended his position by arguing that history was filled with an infinite array of events and processes; to teach it, one must perforce summarize and omit. Husri only asked that such summarization and omission be carried out in accordance with the interests of strengthening national consciousness (Husri 1944, 21). Although he himself shrank from the task of elaborating a monumental account of Arab history, the principle that such a history was needed and the conviction that, in some sense, it *must* exist was taken seriously by later historians in the Arab nationalist movement. Although Husri had warned that a nation that loses its language ceases to exist, he warned that a nation that has forgotten its past, although still alive, is inert and unconscious. Although the loss of language ended finally in death, the incapacitation brought about by the loss of one's history could be repaired through a resurrection and reconstruction of that past. He opposed the use of foreign history textbooks in Arab classrooms and called on Arab historians to provide the nation with its own nationalist history as the European nations had each provided for their young.

Throughout his career, Husri would hold to the view that language and history, in that order of importance, were the two primary factors in the constitution of nations. This conviction was very much in the German nationalist tradition and went on to characterize the mainstream of Arab nationalist thought in later decades. Husri, however, did not deny the influence of other secondary factors, for example, religion. Similarly to language and history, religion tended to generate a commonality of feeling and belief that might serve as a potent social adhesive. Husri warned, however, that the effects of religion in the realm of politics were not all of one pattern. First, different religions had different political tendencies. Second, religion played different political roles in different political epochs. Among religions, Husri distinguished between national and universal religions. The former was confined to a nation as determined linguistically and historically; it was closed to other nations and, hence, joined language and history as a reinforcing pillar of national identity and nationalist esprit. Among such religions, he listed the Judaism of the Hebrews and the pagan, state, or tribal religions of ancient times. Universal religions, however, like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, overstepped national boundaries to reach people of all nations and to establish bonds higher and more comprehensive than those of language and history. In so doing, universal religions undermined national distinctions and undercut the value and belief systems on which nationalism rested. In this struggle between nationalism and universal religions for the organization of societies, Husri argued that nationalism had emerged triumphant. For even though Christianity and Islam both succeeded in temporarily maintaining multinational religious empires, neither was able, despite their utmost efforts, to replace language and history as the fundamental bases for political community. Both religious empires eventually broke down into their national components.

Although language would always overcome religion in the long run as the basis of community, the influence of geography, Husri pointed out, might not be so surmountable. Geography could play a potent and permanent disintegrative role, for if a nation, a people sharing a common language and history, came to be spread across a formidable geophysical obstacle, an ocean or a high mountain range, the language and history they initially shared in common might evolve in di-

vergent directions and eventuate in the articulation of two distinct nationalities. Such was the effect of the Atlantic Ocean on the English who developed an American nation in North America or the Spaniards and Portuguese who developed distinct nationalities in South America. Unlike some other nationalist thinkers, Husri downplayed all but such extreme influences of geography in the formation of nations. Except where geography physically separated a people for centuries, its influence was subordinate to that of language and history. The physical was subordinate to the phenomenal: nature, subordinate to culture. Such a view was essential to the reinforcement of an Arab nationalist perspective because, unlike France, England, or Germany, the Arab nation inhabited lands as diverse as the dry deserts of Nejd, the fertile basins of the Nile and Euphrates, and the high mountaintops of Lebanon.

The alternative principles of nationality that Husri sought most ardently to refute, however, even more than religion or geography, were those based on race and individual will. The former would fragment the racially heterogeneous Arab nation; the latter would deny that such a nation existed on the simple evidence that people said so. The idea of race, descent from a common ancestry, has never been too far from any popular concept of nationality because people naturally yearn to recreate the familiar biological bonds of family in the larger political community. German nationalist thought, however, beginning in the racial romanticism of Fichte and Arndt and culminating in the grand distortions of Nazism, had elevated the notion of race to Olympian heights. Because Arab sentiment was quite favorable toward the Germans after the duplicity of the French and British in World War I, the racial theories of the German neonationalists were given widespread exposure. Most importantly, they were being championed quite forcefully in the ideology of the Syrian Social Nationalist party that Antun Sa'adeh had founded in the mid-1930s. Husri, however, rejected these theories, arguing simply that none of the European nations, Germany included, were racially pure, but that, quite to the contrary, they were composed of several different racial strains. Husri's criticism of racial theories was made easier by the antiracial ideological attitude impressed upon society by Islam.

The principles of contract, consent, and free will that had woven themselves into the fabric of French, English, and American national-

ism could be accepted only equivocally by the early Arab nationalists. Because Husri's role was that of a preacher among skeptics, he had to prove the soundness of his message from sources other than the disposition of his audience. Husri's antipathy toward the free will and contractarian approaches to nationalism mirrored the German position in which, before 1870, evidence had to be provided for the existence of a German nation without a clear manifestation of comprehensive collective will in that direction. In the Arab world, Husri also had to combat divergent nationalisms, such as Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian nationalisms, and alternative forms of political community, such as the confessional sectarianism of the Levant and the tribalism of the Arabian Peninsula.

In arguing against the primacy of free will in the determination of nationality, Husri was responding to the view popularized by Renan in his *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* "L'existence d'une nation est (pardonnez-moi cette métaphore) un plébiscite de tous les jours" (Renan 1882, 27). Husri raised a number of objections to this view. The collective or general will could not be ascertained except through voting, but voting was vulnerable to outside influence and propaganda and was, hence, very changeable. Was the nation then little different from a political party whose fortunes ebbed and flowed with the tide of popular sentiment? "If we accept the proposition that 'the nation is a group of people who want to live together and want to constitute an independent nation' we must also ask: what are the reasons and factors that generate such a desire among certain groups?" (Husri 1944, 41), which brings one back to original causes—unity of language and history. Husri also marshaled historical evidence to bolster his view: Does one consider the United States two nations because the South wanted to secede from the Union? (ibid., 41) Does one have to be sure of an Egyptian's views before ascertaining that he is an Egyptian? (Husri 1951a, 45)

No, Husri concluded. Arabs were Arabs for linguistic and historical reasons beyond their control. Every person whose native tongue was Arabic was an Arab. If anyone denied or was unaware of his or her Arab identity, one must search for the cause of this peculiar self-deception: "If it stems from ignorance, we must enlighten him; if it stems from a sluggish sensibility, we must awaken him; if it stems

from excessive selfishness, we must discipline him . . . [But] he is an Arab, whether we will it or not, whether he admits it or not" (ibid., 45). Like the Germans, Husri had established the existence of the nation in categories detached from contemporary political conditions. Even if it could not be seen on the surface of things, the nation was immanent and would gradually manifest itself in a natural inexorable unfolding.

Husri never questioned the assumption that a nation naturally yearned to express itself in the establishment of an independent self-governing national state. He pointed out that the French, having lived for so long in a unified national state, had lost the distinction between nation and state, referring to membership in either or both with the word *nationalité*. The Germans, on the other hand, had grown painfully aware of the difference, labeling membership in a state, *Nationalität*, and in a nation, *Volksstum*. The path from nation to national state, Husri was well aware, was a long and difficult one. The Arab nation was still taking its very first steps in a long march. What was needed for the journey, Husri believed, was a healthy store of faith and confidence to get it through its long formative years—conviction in the existence of the Arab nation, pride in its past, and faith in its ultimate triumph. He likened the nationalist struggle to a military campaign in which troop morale is a critical element of victory. A dispirited nation would easily falter and fail; a proud nation would refuse defeat and continue the struggle till the end was secured. To inculcate this pride into the population was a task for educational institutions and would be aimed at society's most malleable stratum—youth.

Of the feeble esprit of the young generation of Arab nationalists, Husri often spoke disparagingly. They expected quick and easy victories, he charged, and when such victories were not gained, they surrendered to pessimism and despair (Husri 1944, 51). Husri concluded that this weakness derived from an ill-conceived approach to Arab history and an unfamiliarity with the history of other national awakenings (ibid., 52). Belief in a triumphant future, Husri argued, was derived principally from an immersion in the glories of the past, which naturally fostered the conviction that such glories could come to the nation once again. But a student who was ceaselessly exposed to the seamy sides of Arab history—the epochs of decline, the dynastic

wars, the corruption—would come away with little pride in his nation and scant conviction that it could ever rise from its sorry state. Similarly, youth with little understanding of the victorious eruptions of other nations would have little concept of what a national awakening meant and where it might lead. In pedagogical terms, to foment the awakening of the Arab nation Husri urged the intensive immersion of students in a selective glorified account of the Arab past along with a more objective account of other nationalist movements, especially the German and Italian, but also the French and several of the Balkan movements.

Husri forwarded this call for the teaching of selective Arab history boldly and without apologies. What was desirable in science, he argued, the unfettered search for truth, might not be desirable in education where the prime business was the molding of children into adults with the character, values, and self-confidence to serve as leading members of society. In the midst of a nationalist struggle, the need to direct education was especially acute, and to overlook the early sources of defiance or despair—in the school classroom—would be to compromise the interests of the nation and its members, both born and unborn. True to his word, Husri devoted the bulk of his career to reforming educational curricula along these lines first in Iraq, then in Syria, and soon more generally through his affiliation with the agencies of the Arab League.

Husri was not unaware that actual political unification would require political and, perhaps, military initiatives beyond his educational purview, but what was essential to him was that the idea of nationalism be disseminated in Arab society so that a future Arab Bismarck or Gandhi would find a ready and responsive nation. Indeed, Husri rarely spoke of how he thought Arab unity would eventually come about or what political form it would take once it did. He felt it distracting and divisive to so prematurely debate such complex issues. For him, the task at hand was simply to prepare the community for the idea of national unity. How unity would ultimately come about and what form it would assume were still distant issues. On the one hand, the vagueness of the programmatic aspects of Husri's nationalism helped protect it from criticism and political conflict and went a long way in allowing the nationalist idea to thrive in politics where,

had programmatic been declared, bitter dispute would likely have arisen. On the other hand, this vagueness drove nationalist thinking into a romanticism that was emotionally very attractive but which provided little political guidance once Arab nationalist groups came to political power in the 1950s and 1960s. Beyond his strategy for education, Husri did not provide a strategy for securing unified statehood once the populace had been won over to nationalism, nor did he specify how Arab nationalists should proceed if and when they came to power.

Satf al-Husri, philosopher and educator, was the first major thinker of modern Arab nationalism. Drawing on the German nationalist tradition, he established the existence of the Arab nation on facts of language, culture, and history. His goal was to convince the Arab intelligentsia of the reality of the Arab nation and to spread faith in its ultimate triumph. He clung to a minimalist understanding of nationalism, describing it simply as a movement toward political unity. He avoided outlining a strategy for the establishment of a unified Arab state or a blueprint for its internal organization. Similarly, he avoided delineating the role of Islam within a unified Arab state. His was a pure and simple nationalism. It could be accepted by many, but it left many questions unanswered. His importance in the Arab nationalist movement itself was immense. In the words of Bassam Tibi,

the significance of Satf al-Husri's work lies first of all in the fact that it faithfully reflects an important phase in modern Arab history and the political thought which accompanied it, and secondly in that his writings themselves had a considerable impact on political developments in the Middle East. al-Husri's ideas became part of an obligatory political ideology in those Arab states which were formed out of the process of decolonization after the Second World War. They were also taken as the guiding principles of the nationalist parties and organizations which represented the Arab national movement in their period. (Tibi 1981, 173)

Michel Aflaq: Arabism as a Radical Sociopolitical Program

To work its effect on society, ideology must go through a sentimental and emotive process by which a group of ideas becomes a highly charged and motivating set of beliefs, slogans, and symbols. As Daniel Bell noted, "Ideology . . . is a secular religion" (Bell 1960,

394), and religion is first and foremost, faith and passion. In a role similar to that of the architect in construction, an artist must come along to breathe life and beauty into the cold lines and angles of intellectual constructions. For the idea of nationalism, "the outcome of the process is that a nationalist theology of intellectuals becomes a nationalist mythology for the masses" (Hayes 1960, 168). Foremost among his contemporaries, the young Syrian historian Michel Aflaq helped transform the dry nationalist concepts first developed by Husri into a vibrant and compelling ideology. It was in the ringing slogans and romantic symbols that Aflaq and his colleagues draped over the nakedness of the nationalist idea that Arab nationalism found its way into the hearts of an entire generation and provoked intense ideological upheaval in the Arab world. The spiritual and romantic aspects of nationalism deemed so necessary by Husri, yet handled so clumsily by him for whom Arabic was only a third language, were highlighted by Aflaq and the Ba'ath party. Although the contribution of Arsouzi, Bitar, and others was significant, Aflaq's thought dominated the Ba'ath party from its establishment until the mid-1950s in Syria and the early 1960s in Iraq; in that period, the ideology of the Ba'ath was essentially "Michel Aflaq writ large" (Batautu 1978, 730).

Poetic vision was by no means Aflaq's only contribution to the nationalist movement. In intellectual terms, he recast the Arab nationalist idea to reflect a strong, progressive revolutionary attitude consonant with the rising intranational class tensions of the postcolonial Arab Middle East, insisting on the overthrow of the ruling class and socialism as pillars of the new nationalism. He also more boldly delineated the separation of Islam from politics and the equidistance of Arab nationalism from both East and West. More than Husri, he gave meaning to Arab authenticity and insisted that the Arab nation had a unique spiritual mission to fulfill after its first contribution of Islam in the seventh century. Some of these ideas were not original to Aflaq but were adopted and arranged by him into a compelling and attractive tableau. Finally, Aflaq was a dedicated cabalist whose efforts gave birth to a political party whose explosive growth pushed it to the forefront of Arab politics and carried it to power in the central Arab lands of Syria and Iraq.

Michel Aflaq was born in 1910 to a middle-class Christian family in Damascus. A strong high school record took him to the Sorbonne from which he returned in 1933 to teach history in Syrian government schools. His association with French Leftists and his disaffection with the Syrian government and ruling class led him into the Syrian Communist party. Disgruntled with the party's support of the stillborn Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936 and disappointed with the colonial policies of the ostensibly leftist Leon Blum government of France, Aflaq left the Communist party disillusioned but not uninfluenced by its ideology and organization, much of which would find its way into the Ba'ath party. He was also impressed by the ideology and organization of the Syrian Social Nationalist party of Antun Saadeh which had just been established and was quickly becoming very powerful. As mentioned earlier, Aflaq cofounded the Arab Ba'ath party in the early 1940s and led it to positions of political prominence in Syria and Iraq. Aflaq was forced out of Syria in the mid-1960s by the new Alawi-dominated military wing of the party there, which staged a coup against the party's old guard and embarked on a more leftist policy course. Aflaq spent most of his remaining years in Baghdad under the protection of the Ba'ath regime that had reclaimed power in 1968. He remained the titular head of the party but had lost any real influence over party or political affairs. Upon his death in the summer of 1989, the Iraqi government announced that he had converted to Islam before his passing. Whether this was actually true, or whether the regime merely declared it to shore up its sagging legitimacy in a period of Islamic revivalism, is not yet clear. Nevertheless, this small, mild-mannered school teacher died a national hero, the spiritual godfather of two Arab states and a much wider pan-Arab movement.

Aflaq insisted that "thought in itself is an immeasurable revolutionary force in history" (Aflaq 1959, 109). If one is to gauge by the meteoric rise of his small band of unprepossessing intellectuals, Aflaq could not be too far wrong. What then were the ideas that were found so appealing by a generation of Arabs?

The existence of the Arab nation, a proposition that Husri struggled hard to establish, could be taken for granted by Aflaq. "In itself, Arab nationalism for us Ba'athists is a self-evident reality not in need of

special investigation or affirmation, but the meaning and content of this nationalism are in dire need of clarification, elaboration, and struggle . . . in other words, it is not our business to debate whether we are or are not Arabs—for it is evident that we are—but rather to discern and delineate the content of our Arabness at this historical juncture of our Arab nation.” (ibid., 102)

Following Husri’s definition of nationhood, Aflaq affirmed that language was the principal unifying factor in the Arab nation in that unity of language promoted with it unity of thought, norms, and ideals (ibid., 103). Like Husri also, history, for Aflaq, followed language in the determination of nationhood as the “fertile ground in which our consciousness took shape” (ibid., 103).

Aflaq’s nationalist ideology, however, was couched primarily in the philosophic concept of national cultural *inbi‘ath*, or *ba‘th*, i.e., renaissance, or flowering. Aflaq considered the heart of his message to be a call for a general Arab renaissance that would transform Arab civilization in all its aspects—political, economic, intellectual, and moral—and which would provide a unique and historic contribution to humanity and world civilization. This renaissance would be a reiteration inasmuch as it would resemble the spiritual and moral upheaval that accompanied the forging of Islam in the seventh century, but it would also be innovative in that it would express itself freely in a unique unprecedented system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and symbols inspired by the Arab nation’s contemporaneous economic, political, cultural, moral, and religious conditions. Islam had been the Arab nation’s seventh-century contribution to humanity; the Arab nation of the twentieth century in the crucible of its acute contemporaneous suffering would forge the elements of a new message for humanity. This philosophy was summarized by Aflaq in the Bath party’s primary slogan and rallying cry: One Nation, Bearing an Eternal Message.

The means for promoting this renaissance get closer to the heart of his nationalist program. The groundwork for the Arab renaissance would be laid by the revolutionary transformation of Arab society toward the goals of unity, liberty, and socialism.

For Aflaq, all nations were either in a state of growth or in a state of decline. There was no middle course. Strong nations were like

healthy bodies in that their natural progress was toward continued health. Nations in a state of decline, such as the Arab nation, were like ill bodies in that their natural progress was toward a progressive worsening of the illness (ibid., 78). The maledictions of the Arab nation, “feudalism, sectarianism, regionalism, intellectual reactionism,” could not be eased without a revolutionary reversal (Aflaq 1958, 10). Any compromising reformism would only cloud the issues and allow further decline and deterioration.

The success of the revolution depended on the intensity and purity of the struggle between two minorities, a reactionary minority that clung to the Arab status quo claiming that the Arabs could achieve no more and a progressive minority that believed the status quo veiled the true potential of the Arab nation and choked its vitality. The former was in league with the colonial powers and enemies of the Arab nation and supported corruption, tyranny, and backwardness, whereas the latter had the interests of the nation at heart (ibid., 26). To succeed, the progressives, represented by the Bath party, had to hold religiously to their uncompromising revolutionary path (Aflaq 1959, 175). They could brook no compromise with the reactionaries lest the purity of their message be contaminated by the voracious corruption of their opponents (ibid., 166). Ideological stability and coherence were essential for the success of the struggle. In the end, change would come about as a dialectical result of the intensifying tension between progressives and reactionaries.

As in the Communist example, the success of the nationalist revolution depended on the creation of a vanguard party to spearhead the struggle, for the nationalist revolution was not a predetermined inevitable outcome. It was a goal that required great commitment and prolonged struggle. The Bath party was the vanguard party. Its first aim would be to create within itself the New Arab—one born of the contemporary deterioration but representing its absolute antithesis (ibid., 72). The task was to bring about the Arab of tomorrow to defeat the Arab of yesterday. Aflaq found the most fertile ground among youth. Unlike the old, youth had the most vital appetite and capacity for virtue and heroism and possessed a pure and necessary innocence unswayed by politics, private interest, and old outlooks (ibid., 37, 21). The young generation of Aflaq’s contemporary Arab

environment was especially ripe for enlightenment because "it had been driven to considering and questioning by the mistakes and hyperbole of the politicians" (ibid., 29).

The danger, however, was that the disillusionment of youth would promote an abandonment of civic and national virtues for an increasing obsession with individual gain and personal pleasure as Aflaq saw all around him. Such individualistic behavior made sense in healthy nations where individual and national interests had been brought into harmony by the nationalist revolution, but in regressive nations, like the Arab nation, individual and national interests were, for this prerevolutionary period, in deep conflict. Progress for the Arab nation, which meant revolution, required great sacrifice from the individual, and sacrifice required deep commitment and burning faith. Thus, the task of the party was to provide for the young generation a vivid image of the ideal society in which their true interests lay and for which they should struggle (ibid., 73). This vision must serve as a guide and a standard for action and commitment because the contemporary environment was too rife with corruption, compromise, and confusion to provide little short of dejection and despair. The party must bring forth a new self-confident generation of Arabs. And if the nation could produce this new Arab who had risen above the squalid reality, then surely the nation had the means to rise above itself (ibid., 74). The new generation's faith in the nation's potential would be derived from the very fact that the nation had created them.

As for the party itself, its organization must be determined by the general task of awakening more and more members of the nation to the new nationalist philosophy and challenging the elements of reaction and backwardness in the society (ibid., 186-91). In essence, the party was to constitute the nucleus of the future society. It expressed what was best and most essential in the Arab nation, and it served as the picture and model of its future (ibid., 154). In the beginning, the masses were left out of the party's domain of proselytization. Like the German nationalists of the early nineteenth century, Aflaq felt that the message must first be addressed to and absorbed by the educated elite and, preferably, the young among them. As the moment of confrontation with the status quo forces approached, however, the

need for the gathering of sufficient political and economic influence loomed large. At that point, popular support was crucial. Furthermore, the success of the revolution depended on the vanguard's ability to unseat the old classes from their positions of political control. What was a general political, social, economic, moral, and spiritual movement would be narrowed down at the moment of decision to a political revolution; hence, the party, although allegedly concerned with social and cultural renaissance, was first and foremost a "political" party. As Aflaq explained, although politics was only "a means . . . [it] is the most serious of matters at this present stage" (ibid., 302).

In Communist revolutionary thought, the purpose of seizing power was to bring about the political and material conditions that would provide the basis for the emergence of Communist people and Communist society; in Ba'athist thought, the purpose of seizing power was to bring about the political and material conditions that would provide the basis for the emergence of new Arabs and the expression of the Arab spirit in an exuberant renaissance that would enlighten all of humanity. The conditions for this renaissance, which, taken together, represented the essential characteristics of the Ba'athist vision of the politico-economic future, were: unity, liberty, and socialism.

By the late 1930s and early 1940s the idea of Arab unity had accumulated a definite history in Aflaq's Syria from its beginnings in the 1916 Arab revolt through the agitation of the dominant Syrian elite against the French. Aflaq's main task, therefore, was to reinterpret the notion of Arab unity, strip it of its ruling class affiliations, and cast it in a progressive and revolutionary mold. He railed against the "illusions of kings and feudal lords who understood unity as gathering of backwardness to backwardness, exploitation to exploitation and numbers to numbers like sheep" (Aflaq 1958, 175). Indeed, it was the reactionary understanding of Arab unity, argued Aflaq, which had left the "struggle for unity without blood and nerve" (ibid., 175). Aflaq even went so far as to disparage the German example of national unification that had been central to much of Arab nationalist thought in the Germanophile interwar years pointing out that Bismarck had united Germany under the control of the reactionary and feudal classes, which only intensified the subjugation of the German people and gave rise to the harshest tyranny and oppression the modern age

had seen. Were the Arab nation to follow that example, the dominance of the reactionary classes would only be enhanced and the slavery of the Arab mind and spirit further deepened (ibid., 41).

The vital potential of the nation, argued Aflaq, lay in *progressive* revolution; unity and the struggle for unity were integral parts of this revolution. To separate the struggle for unity from the social revolution was to weaken both movements. Arab unity and social revolution could only be fulfilled together, for the reactionary Arab ruling class, interested as it was in the status quo, would be hostile to the politico-economic transformation that true Arab unity would bring about, and the social revolution could not achieve its furthest stages unless the entire Arab nation was participating in it. Regional revolutions in one or another Arab state could secure some revolutionary headway but would be constrained by small populations, meager resources, and a hostile environment in which they were surrounded by enemies of progress across every border. To achieve its fullest potential, the Arab nation must live and breathe as a unitary organic whole. In a sense, Arab unity would be both a cause and an effect of the progressive nationalist revolution (Aflaq 1959, 231).

This radical understanding of Arab unity was evinced in Aflaq's critical attitude toward the Arab League, established in 1945, an institution which, Aflaq charged, consolidated regional interests and the influence of the reactionary ruling classes, thus, intensifying the problems of the Arab nation (Aflaq 1958, 20). In an Arab world populated in the majority by reactionary regimes, Aflaq was forced to sanction a piecemeal approach to Arab unity. Those Arab regions that had overthrown their reactionary classes would unite; as other regions shook free of reactionary control, they, too, would join the progressive unified state. All the while the liberated regions would be helping the other regions toward liberation knowing full well that true progress could not be realized until all populations were free and the Arab nation could seek out its future with the health and vitality of an organic whole.

The notion of liberty was close to the heart of Aflaq's nationalist philosophy. The realization and articulation of the nation's spiritual potential could only be realized through the unfettered development and interaction of individuals. Culture and values could not be dic-

tated from above but could only grow in a climate of liberty and freedom. Political domination in the form of imperialism or local tyranny was an enemy of progress as was the moral or spiritual domination of religion and outdated value systems. The goal of the party was to interpose itself not only between the nation and its foreign oppressors, but also between the people and their tyrants, and between the individual and the oppressive rule of religion, custom, and tradition. The purpose was to salvage the spirit from coercion as "a means to release our high talents and creative forces, so we can realize our purpose, and the purpose of every human being, complete humanity" (Aflaq 1959, 206). "Liberty is not a luxury in the life of the nation but its basis and its essence and its meaning" (ibid., 319).

Aflaq, however, hesitated to clarify what arrangement of political institutions would best ensure this individual liberty. He was committed to an activist revolutionary party of the Leninist type which would spearhead the revolutionary struggle and seize political power to continue the revolutionary transformation of society by transforming the socio-economic and cultural foundations of society from above. The party had a vanguard activist role to play; hence, until such time as society had developed sufficiently, the party, although comprising only a numerical minority, would have to act on its own authority even if its policies met with opposition from the majority. As in the Communist model, the party supposedly knew the "true" interests of the people and had them deepest at heart, whereas the people, manipulated by oppressors and deluded by falsehoods and ignorance, often were the unwitting agents of their own misery. Liberty, it was assumed, would not be secured by institutional means vulnerable to the pernicious influence of reactionaries and exploiters but by the preeminence of the party for which liberty would be a de-liberate positive policy. In a sense, liberty would not come about, it would be established by fiat of the party.

In short, Aflaq's concept of liberty under Ba'athist rule was not the common liberal concept of a set of established rights and duties under a democratic political system but an authoritarian form of political rule in which liberties of thought, expression, press, and so forth, would, presumably, be vigilantly protected by the government, but the liberty to contest political power would be conspicuously ab-

sent. The vulnerability of liberty in such an authoritarian political system is quite obvious; Aflaq never adequately addressed this risk.

Aflaq had been deeply impressed by the Marxist message. At the philosophic level, he regarded the Marxist insistence on the importance of material economic conditions in political life to be one of the great discoveries of the modern age (ibid., 8). At the practical political level he had seen the headway that the Communists and Socialists had made in the political arena by siding with the lower classes. Tomorrow belonged not to the ruling upper class but to the rising lower classes; therefore, for nationalism to succeed, it would have to tie itself into that unfolding dialectic. Aflaq admits as much, saying, "We did not adopt socialism out of books, abstractions, humanism, or pity, but rather out of need," for "the Arab working class . . . is the mover of history in this period" (ibid., 116). Aflaq conceded that Marx was right in arguing that classes were a central force in history (ibid., 222), but he diverged from the Marxist line toward a nationalist formulation by arguing that in the Arab world it was virtually the entire nation with all its classes that was struggling for advancement against the capitalist domination of foreign powers. Local capitalist industry was almost nonexistent, and the whole nation was held in economic subjection to the industrialized West. What in Europe was a struggle of classes was for the Arab world a struggle of an entire nation for economic and political independence. For the Arab, therefore, socialist and nationalist revolutions were one and the same (ibid., 203).

Aflaq's critique of Marxist socialism went further than that, however. While socialism justly emphasized the importance of material elements in political and moral life, Aflaq charged that Marx exaggerated his discovery by heralding it as the first and last truth of social life. To be heard, Marxism reduced life to only one of its dimensions—it announced a philosophy of materialism (ibid., 87). In doing so, it ignored the spiritual elements of human existence, and it failed to acknowledge the most potent, social spiritual force of the modern age, nationalism. Like all spiritual forces, true nationalism was a positive and uplifting force; by ignoring it, Marxism sank into a hateful, vengeful, and negative spiritual outlook. Aflaq accepted the possibility that lesser nations with weak national identities or less-vivid

histories might follow the Marxist line because they had little to lose in the way of national spirit, but the Arabs had too grand a heritage for them to abandon it and follow a materialist internationalist philosophy (ibid., 197).

Like unity and liberty, socialism in Aflaq's philosophy was first and foremost a means to promote the ultimate *inbi'ath*, or renaissance. While unity provided organic wholeness to the nation and liberty provided the freedom necessary for renaissance, socialism provided the economic conditions that made political and cultural liberty meaningful. As Aflaq saw in Syria, constitutional democracy meant little in a country where pseudo-feudalism was the dominant form of economic organization. The peasant's economic bondage overshadowed and nullified his supposed political liberty. Liberty meant little for a population shackled by poverty and ignorance. Hence, socialism became a means to free the individual and to unleash the enslaved vitality of the nation. "What I seek through socialism is not to augment the bounty of factories but the bounty of life. It is not my ultimate goal that food is distributed equally but that every individual may be able to unleash his talents and powers" (ibid., 25). Socialism was "a means to satisfy the animal needs of man so he can be free to pursue his duties as a human being" (ibid., 26). By establishing economic equality it would "eliminate all privilege, exploitation, and domination by one group over another" (ibid., 95). Socialism, therefore, was the material precondition for liberty. It was not opposed to nationalism but an integral part of it.

Aflaq was by no means an economic thinker. His understanding of socialism was rudimentary. Essentially, it was a system within which state intervention would guarantee a fair and equitable distribution of wealth as a basis for equality and justice. Large enterprises would be under state control as would be prices and wages. Small-scale private ownership would be preserved as would be private inheritance. Unlike in Communist thought, the state played a principally distributive role in the economy and did not necessarily represent the working class or any other class. It was a progressive force that simply mediated and ensured economic justice.

Aflaq's use of the label "Arab socialism" had several significant elements. It signified that this socialism was in harmony with and sub-

ordinate to a certain nationalism, in this case, Arab nationalism. More importantly, however, Aflaq argued that this socialism was an original expression of the reformist egalitarian Arab spirit. The same spirit that had carried Muhammad to reform the social and economic institutions of his day carried the modern Barthists to transform their contemporary environment. Socialism was an expression of economic justice immanent in the Arab spirit and original to it. Therefore, in a very deep sense, this socialism was an authentic Arab expression.

It is not hard to discern that the interlocking of these three popular political themes of unity, liberty, and socialism was an intelligent move on the level of political strategy. By appealing to all three principles, Aflaq could place the Barth in the mainstream of progressive political life. We may recall that Husri was similarly concerned with broadening the appeal of his message, but whereas Husri was satisfied to show that his nationalist message was not in conflict with positions from the religious Right to the Communist Left, Aflaq took a more fruitful approach, eliminating the two extremes of religious Right and Communist Left and forging out of the divergent tendencies of the broad center a philosophy that insisted that nationalism contained all their objectives and was essential to the realization of each one of them. Aflaq was able, thus, to group all the progressive tendencies of the Arab center together and to multiply the power of the nationalist movement through diversification and consolidation of its sources of support. Outside of the Arab nationalist mainstream he left the Communists, the religious establishment, and the Islamic revivalists; within the arena he had gathered Arab nationalists, liberals, socialists and nearly all non-Communist, non-religious opponents of the status quo. This central alliance would prove a powerful and explosive force in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is difficult, in this detached analysis of Aflaq's thought to convey the music and emotion redolent in his work—the ringing phrases, the happy metaphors, the pithy epigrams. The strength of Aflaq's contribution to Arab nationalism lies as much in the ideas he elaborated as in the style in which he presented them. As George Sorel noted, "The idolatry of words plays a large part in the history of all ideologies" (Sorel 1950, 53). Aflaq was an especially gifted weaver of

words. His awareness of the political power of the Arabic language would become a central pillar of Arab nationalism's hold on large sections of the population. In the words of Fouad Ajami, "The gripping language had been one of the principal weapons of the pan-Arabists in Cairo and Damascus: it intoxicated and created an impression of great power and accomplishment" (Ajami 1981, 26).

In intellectual terms, Aflaq's ideological contribution was seminal although not without its internal contradictions and omissions. He harnessed the appeal of Islam to the movement of Arab nationalism but did not resolve the obvious contradictions between his own secular outlook and the religious outlook of Islam. He also introduced socialism into the heart of the Arab nationalist message but failed to clarify what this "Arab socialism" meant in terms of workable and detailed social and economic guidelines. In Batatu's words,

The logical difficulties that, on examination, his ideology betrays, are not due merely to his romantic style, but also to his undisciplined eclecticism: his thoughts are a mixture of an essentially humanitarian nationalism and aspects of the individualism of the Enlightenment, the democratism of the Jacobins, the youth idealization of Mazzini, the class standpoint of Marx, the elitism of Lenin, and over and above that, a strong dose of Christian spirituality and a nationalistically interpreted Islam. (Batatu 1978, 730-31)

The Appeal and Social Dynamics of Arab Nationalism

The popularity of nationalist ideologies during the intermediate phases of modernization is not a phenomenon confined to the Arab world. Throughout the developing world, nationalism provides a way to adopt many of the patriotic, secular, and progressive outlooks of the West, recast them in nativist form, and then use them as a weapon against the domination of the West. It is a way to marry the ideas and principles of the West to the symbols and identity-structures of one's native culture. Arab nationalism was no exception. It was the door through which Western modernity entered the Arab world. As Kemal Karpat observed,

Ideology in the Middle East . . . performed an intellectual function within the general framework of modernization. It introduced new ideas by adapting them to indigenous forms of expression and values and eventually claimed to have created a new—albeit eclectic—national ideology. [This] fa-

cultivated further borrowing of ideas and values from other cultures without risking internal opposition. . . . It added new dimensions to thought by introducing to it economic, social, and political elements. (Karpas 1982, xxii)

Under Arab nationalist regimes, sweeping reforms of educational, economic, and social systems transformed most Arab societies beyond recognition. The success of Arab nationalism, however, rested on the fact that its ideologues succeeded in relating the progressive ideals and reforms that people desired with the romantic myths and symbols that they missed. It was a way of linking the future to the past; the West, to the East. Its ability to bridge that gap, to contain that contradiction, even if temporarily, was the key to its success as an ideology.

Conservative Arab nationalism. In chapter 1, I argued that ideologies owe much of their existence to the role they play in satisfying particular psychological needs of individuals experiencing acute social and cultural strain. I posited that in developing societies, ideologies can provide a sense of identity, a means of escape from intellectual and moral confusion, and a system for the healthy displacement of aggression. This may be referred to as the psychological appeal of an ideology to denote its somewhat subconscious and pathological nature. It should not be confused, however, with the more conscious interest-oriented appeal that a set of ideas may have to a particular group or class. The latter type of appeal is, of course, associated with Marx, whereas the former category is associated with the Strain Theory school as discussed in chapter 1.

Unlike radical Arab nationalism, the appeal of conservative Arab nationalism can best be understood with reference to considerations of interest rather than those of acute psychological strain. The reason for this is that the main protagonists of this Arab nationalism came from a class that was experiencing relatively moderate social, economic, and cultural flux and, hence, did not develop intense psychological needs. The class basis of this early Arab nationalism was mainly from among the Sunni landowning, bureaucratic, and merchant upper classes of the Syrian towns. This class had traditionally sat at the top of the social pyramid in the economic, political, and cultural

spheres and was disturbed by the events of World War I only insofar as it had to adjust to a loss of Turkish-Ottoman suzerainty and adapt to the establishment of, first, an Arab state under Faysal, and later to a fragmented Syrian governmental system under French control. Its social, economic, and cultural position remained relatively unchanged although the identity and structure of the political system within which it was to hold power went through considerable transformation. Unlike the new middle class that formed the backbone for the radical Arab nationalism of the post-1948 period, members of this traditional Syrian upper class experienced little of the confusion and anomie that is a result of rapid role change and swift vertical and horizontal social mobility. Members of the Syrian upper class derived a fair measure of stability from the status of their families and their classes and their traditionally accustomed role in society, polity, and economy. There was no desperate search for identity or urgent quest for a role, but rather a redefinition of certain political principles and assumptions to adapt to the decline and collapse of the Ottoman state and the rise of alternative political frameworks. It is important to note, however, that among the nascent professional and intellectual class, most of which supported the Arab nationalism of the upper class before World War II, one begins to see in the 1920s and 1930s those elements of strain characteristic of the new middle class that rose to power in the 1950s and 1960s. This nascent professional class, however, played only a secondary political role during this period.

Conservative Arab nationalism reflected the interests of the upper classes that promoted it. First, members of the dominant landowning and merchant class had a stake in unifying under their control the Syrian towns and territories in which they had material and political interests; this course recommended to them an Arabism that resisted foreign influence and a program of Arab unity that expressed Syrian unity in the guise of a more rousing rhetoric of Arab unity. Second, their vested interests in the social status quo suggested a conservative social program that would preserve their dominance. Indeed, they "offered little in the way of concrete solutions to the social and economic problems affecting the Syrian people," and confined their political activism to "intermittent popular protest, diplomacy, and

regional and international activity" rather than revolutionary armed struggle (Khoury 1987, 620-21). Third, the fact that this ruling class comprised a network of families distributed across several towns whose fortunes would more or less rise or fall together recommended to them a liberal constitutional parliamentary political system that would protect their political freedom and private property and provide them with a broad and legitimized hold on government. Fourth, the fact that members of this class "were educated in modern professional schools . . . had experience in the new branches of the Ottoman administration . . . and shared similar political experiences . . . in the political parties and secret societies of Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, and Paris before the First World War, and afterwards in Faysal's short-lived Arab kingdom" recommended to them a secular outlook free of the religious and tradition-bound influence of the *wilama* class (Khoury 1987, 620). Of course, none of these relationships are iron-clad laws of cause and effect, but they do highlight an important and effective symbiosis of interest and ideology.

To be sure, early Arab nationalism did have some of the psychological appeal that would become so crucial for the new middle class and the radical Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s. Most importantly, it offered a secular Arab identity to respond to the identity confusion created by the collapse of the Ottoman state. It offered principles of cultural and racial community to supplant principles of religious community. Indeed, early Arab nationalism was quite successful in this sphere as this secular Arab nationalist identity survived the interwar period and was eventually adopted by radical Arab nationalists and confirmed as a basic element of modern Arab political thought until serious challenges in the 1970s and 1980s from Islamic revivalists. Unlike in the sphere of identity confusion, in the spheres of intellectual and moral confusion discussed in chapter 1, this early Arab nationalism had little to offer. In contrast to the Communists or radical Arab nationalists, these early Arab nationalists shied away from ideological dogma as they modeled themselves more after the liberal upper classes of the democratic West than after the upstart party activists that had come to dominate Russia and would rise to positions of dictatorship in Germany and Italy as well. Intellectual and moral truths were supposed to be the objects of private pur-

suit not the subjects of official decree. In this attitude, they also reflected their aversion to the role of determining official dogma traditionally held by the *wilama*. Finally, they offered little satisfaction in the category of aggression-displacement that would also become a prominent element of Arab ideological life later on. Theirs was an accommodationist attitude, and although they showed some hostility both to the Turks and to their French successors during and immediately after World War I, their traditional role was to accommodate these imperial powers not to ardently resist them. Their hostility, therefore, was sporadic and was used primarily as a lever in the political bargaining that necessarily accompanied such power sharing within an imperial system.

The variables of class, ethnic, or sectarian identity, intergenerational opposition, and political crises (see chap. 1) help explain the rise of early Arab nationalism around World War I and its decline in the late 1940s. It is fair to say that the rise of Arab nationalism cannot be understood in isolation from the deep crisis engendered by the collapse of the Ottoman state, the defeat of Faysal's Arab government, and the fragmentation of Syria under French rule. The orientation and outlook of interwar Arab nationalism were shaped by these traumatic events. The weakness and collapse of the Ottoman state discredited traditional Islamic models of government while the divide-and-rule policies of the French undermined the necessity of Arab unity. The victory of the French, however, also highlighted the strengths of the capitalist democratic systems of the West, which served as an example for emulation for many early Arab nationalists.

From the perspective of class, this early Arab nationalism, as mentioned, was an upper-class phenomenon. It began in the last years of the Ottoman empire as an opposition movement among those members of the landowning, bureaucratic, and merchant upper class who had lost political power as a result of the Turkification policies inaugurated after the 1908 CUP coup in Istanbul. These disgruntled members of the Arab Syrian upper class represented the second rung within the native ruling class and directed much of their hostility toward rival and more dominant members of the local ruling class who still held positions of power within the Ottoman system and still displayed strong pro-Ottoman sentiments. This discontented portion of

the upper class could count on the support of large portions of the nascent professional and intellectual class who were attracted to many of the secular and nationalist ideals of Arab nationalism and had an important role to play in galvanizing popular support. In essence, however, early Arab nationalism emerged not as an expression of class struggle but as an expression of normal political tensions between rival branches of a dominant upper class. As Philip Khoury noted, "Class conflict was not the foundation of political rivalry in Damascus or for that matter in other Syrian towns. Rather conflict was mainly confined to the politically active elements in one particular class that rested at the top of the social hierarchy in Damascus," (Khoury 1983, 74). Surprisingly, the Syrian Arab upper class, which championed this early Arab nationalism, came to enjoy considerable prominence under the mandate system despite the hostility of the French authorities to the Arab nationalist cause. Admittedly, the upper class enjoyed this prominence only at the cost of toning down its Arab nationalist rhetoric, especially after the failure of the Great Revolt of 1925–27. Nevertheless, this liberal conservative form of Arab nationalism would remain the most widely accepted ideology in the Syrian political arena until the authority of the traditional upper class was challenged by the power of a rising new middle class and the legitimacy of conservative Arab nationalist ideology was challenged by a new revolutionary version of Arab nationalism.

From the perspective of intergenerational opposition, whereas the main beneficiaries of early Arab nationalism, especially during its rise in the wake of World War I, were of the same generation that had shared power with the Turks before the war, the liberal atmosphere of the 1908–14 period and the collapse of the Ottoman army and Ottoman bureaucratic institutions had freed a significant number of young intellectuals and military officers who sought empowerment in a new political order. The adoption by the traditional local ruling class of the new ideology of Arab nationalism served as a means to co-opt these younger elements and diffuse the threat they posed to the older generation. As education and modernization expanded the outlook and role of the younger generation, however, this subordination and co-optation would no longer be workable. The tension this created would engender a new ideological orientation, expressed in

radical Arab nationalism, that would become the adopted worldview of the generation of the post–World War II period.

From the perspective of interconfessional or inter-ethnic competition, many Christian Arabs who had acquired education and economic power under European protection benefited from the redefinition of the basis of political community in terms of Arabism rather than Islam. Despite its avowed secularism, however, the Arab nationalism of this early phase was still perceived by many as closely associated with Islam, and its leadership was dominated by Sunni elites that had been formed under the Islamic government of the Ottoman state. Furthermore, many Christians as well as other non-Sunni Muslims (e.g., Alawis, Druzes, and Shī'a) benefited directly from the European mandate itself, which checked Sunni power and provided opportunities for Christians in government and non-Sunni Muslims in the army. Indeed, the full effect of the push of minority groups into mainstream politics would not be felt until after World War II when it would be expressed through a far more secular Arab nationalist ideology in which members of minority groups would play a leading role.

This early conservative Arab nationalism owed its ascent to the decline and collapse of the Ottoman empire and the need of the Syrian upper class to devise a new ideological worldview that would ensure their material and political interests within the new political environment. It largely reflected the interests of that dominant upper class at a time when social and psychological strain had not yet reached the critical levels of later decades. Its rise can best be understood from the perspectives of political crisis and class conflict; the categories of inter-ethnic or intersectarian conflict and intergenerational competition are less relevant. Nevertheless, this form of Arab nationalism survived until the late 1940s when the power of the rising middle class and the shock of the loss of Palestine in 1948 fatally weakened the ruling upper class and irreparably discredited its ideological worldview.

Radical Arab nationalism. The new revolutionary Arab nationalist ideology that gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s can also be analyzed—and with great profit—from the various perspectives of crises, classes, generations, and inter-ethnic or interconfessional competition. From the perspective of political crises, it is evident that the sud-

den rise of revolutionary Arab nationalism cannot be understood in isolation from the bankruptcy of the traditional ruling elites and their liberal conservative ideology after the collapse of British and French power in World War II and the loss of Palestine to the Zionists in 1948. These events marked a watershed between the decline of conservative Arab nationalism and the rise of its radical rival and set the stage for a new phase of ideological politics.

From the perspective of class, the socioeconomic class that adopted and disseminated this new revolutionary ideology has been described by most authors as the "new middle class," or, more technically, the "new petty bourgeoisie." As Erik Wright argues, "In the course of capitalist development the traditional petty bourgeoisie—independent artisans, small shopkeepers, etc.—has steadily dwindled. In its place there has arisen what Poulantzas calls the 'new petty bourgeoisie,' consisting of white-collar employees, technicians, supervisors, civil servants, etc." (Wright 1978, 34). Others, such as James Bill, have referred to this class as a "nonbourgeois" or "professional" middle class, pointing out that "the members of this class are engaged in professional, technical, cultural, intellectual, and administrative occupations and include teachers, professors, students, technocrats, engineers, physicians, writers, artists, journalists, bureaucrats, and middle-ranking army officers" (Bill 1972, 433). Strictly speaking, this group does not constitute a class in the Marxist sense but "may be negatively defined as what remains after one has positively defined the classical trio: landed aristocracy, bourgeoisie, proletariat" (Laroui 1976, 16, see also Halpern 1963; Binder 1978; Vatikiotis 1985; and Dekmejian 1971). Furthermore, the socioeconomic roots of members of this class are extremely diverse. Some are descendants of traditional urban petty bourgeois families, some are fallen members of the traditional upper class, whereas others have worked their way up from the large class of urban poor. A large portion, however, are individuals of rural origin who have come to the city to take advantage of the social and economic opportunities available there. Indeed, the mixed origins of this new middle class that arose to fulfill new bureaucratic and economic functions in rapidly developing societies helps explain this class's psychological confusion and its appetite for ideological politics.

In any case, this new middle class was "the first to 'make it' in the wake of the limited growth of capitalism after World War I," and it successfully challenged the political dominance of the big bourgeoisie in the 1940s and 1950s (Hussein 1973, 29). It succeeded in this ascent into power mainly through penetration into the Middle East's "most rapidly expanding bureaucracy, namely, the military bureaucracy. Seizing power through coups d'état at the highest level of government, it came to dominate all areas of society. As Laroui observed, in all Arab countries "we find public administration, the technical services of public and private organizations, teaching and culture in the hands of the petite bourgeoisie" (Laroui 1976, 161). Furthermore, as Hussein points out, the politically volatile high-school and university student body of the 1940s and 1950s, which played a key role in revolutionary party politics, was also "largely petty bourgeois" (Hussein 1973, 34). Hussein goes so far as to say that "all the political parties and organizations which challenged the established system and the ruling class were led largely by individuals who came from this petty bourgeois section" (Hussein 1973, 36). Indeed, this new petty bourgeoisie provided the followers for the three principle ideological movements that challenged the conservative nationalist status quo after World War II: revolutionary pan-Arab nationalism, communism, and the activist Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Eventually, the first of these three elbowed out the other two to become the dominant ideology of the new middle class.

To understand why the principles and symbols of revolutionary Arab nationalism were attractive to this rising middle class, one examines its psychological and material environment and first, the category of alienation and identity confusion. Halpern argues that the defining characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie is the isolation and separation of its members, which derives from the great variety of social and economic environments from which they come. "The new middle class is distinguishable from all other classes," he states, "by being the first to be composed of separate individuals. . . . Coming into being by influx from all social classes. . . the salaried new middle class is the first in Middle Eastern history for whom family connections can no longer help automatically to establish class membership" (Halpern 1963, 280). Hussein agrees that the petty bourgeoisie

was most importantly "a fragmented class" (Hussein 1973, 28). Naturally, such a fragmented class suffered from considerable identity confusion. The highly romanticized Arab nationalism of Aflaq could directly address this crisis of identity.

Hussein adds to this sociopsychological portrait, however, the point that the nature of this class's work was essentially mental as opposed to manual: they were involved in the bureaucracy, the educational system, or the modern economy, not in the manual fields of agriculture or handicrafts. This means, Hussein argues, that this class had a marked intellectual orientation and a strong cultural sense derived from its literacy and its active immersion in the Arabic language. Taken together, these two factors—the fragmented and literate nature of this group—indicate that members of this class would normally exhibit symptoms of a rather acute identity confusion but would be open at the same time to intellectualized appeals to an Arab identity based primarily on language and culture. This approach may help explain the success of a highly intellectualized version of Arab nationalism, such as that of Michel Aflaq.

Second, in the category of intellectual confusion, revolutionary Arab nationalism could also be quite helpful. Although intellectually rather able, members of the new middle class were typically still quite confused by the vast economic and political arena that confronted them. Experiencing considerable mobility and unprepared by families or schools for the complexities of modern urban life and the politics of mass societies, they would be attracted to ideologies that simplified this mystifying reality and provided them with intellectual direction within it. Typically, also, members of this class had a positive orientation toward modernity because they had secured their current status through the modern job types of the bureaucrat, the officer, the professional, the university professor, the technician, and so forth. Generally, therefore, they were favorably disposed toward modernity with its attendant scientific and secularist principles. These two factors, taken together, suggest that members of this class would be especially attracted to fairly sophisticated and modern ideological theories of social and political affairs. Such theories were provided by revolutionary Arab nationalism through its adoption of most of the pseudoscientific socioeconomic and political philosophy of Marxism

under the guise of "Arab socialism." This pseudoscientific ideology offered a simplified version of reality to the intellectually confused new middle-class individual, and it was a version in which modernity was regarded positively.

Along with identity and intellectual confusion, members of the new petty bourgeoisie also typically experienced deep moral crises. Exposed to both traditional Islamic and modern Western moral systems and presented with a liberal social framework, they were, naturally, morally confused. The need for moral guidance, however, seems to have evoked a not fully satisfactory response from nationalist ideologues. Aflaq, for example, drew eclectically from the moral systems presented by Western liberalism, Marxist socialism, and Islam, with liberalism given the central position. This approach left the individual in considerable moral confusion. Indeed, revolutionary Arab nationalism's inability to address the crisis of moral confusion may have been its Achilles's heel, for it left the door open for the rise of the heavily moralistic Islamic movement that began to gain ground in the 1970s. If Arab nationalism would not squarely address moral issues, other ideologies would.

Finally, the loneliness, vulnerability, and frustration of average members of this new petty bourgeois class, faced with the challenges and hardships of modern mass society, can help explain the growing emphasis on power, militarism, and hostility to the West with which revolutionary Arab nationalism became infused, for these themes could serve as a vicarious source for a sense of individual power and a direct target for relocating frustration and aggression.

In addition to considering how revolutionary Arab nationalism may have reflected the psychological and material condition of the new petty bourgeoisie, or new middle class, one must also consider how the ideology served the practical political interests of this class. Although this class began to emerge in the process of economic growth that followed World War I, it was not until the 1940s that it reached sufficient size and power to challenge the older landowning and merchant ruling class. In this class struggle, the rising class needed an ideology that would distinguish it from the ruling class, justify the overthrow of that class, and provide a new basis for legitimacy. Revolutionary socialist Arab nationalism provided an attractive

set of ideological characteristics with which to oppose and overthrow the ruling upper class: (1) pan-Arabism was conveniently antithetical to the regionalism of the upper classes; (2) socialism was antithetical to the upper class's *laissez-faire* liberalism; (3) chauvinism was antithetical to the upper class's Europhilism; and (4) Marxism-Leninism could provide a justification for the revolutionary overthrow of the upper class whose members, it could now be proclaimed, were "exploiters of the masses" and "agents of international imperialism." From this perspective, revolutionary Arab nationalism was the means by which a rising middle class facilitated its move into a position of dominance.

In terms of generational dynamics, the dialectical movement from conservative to radical Arab nationalism is rather straightforward. The groups that conquered political, and with it, economic and cultural power, in the wake of World War II and 1948 were generally young officers or party activists, and they enlisted the help of members of their own generational group to serve in positions of influence throughout government and society. In this sense, the revolution of radical Arab nationalism was a revolt against the old generation and its political traditions as much as it was a positive vision of new options.

Finally, the role of minorities in promoting a radically secular Arab nationalism and smothering the role of traditional Sunni Muslim precepts cannot be underestimated. The founder of the Ba'ath was a Christian as was the founder of the ANM. The ranks of non-Sunnis in army officer corps that had been swollen by French and British designs to circumscribe Sunni power also played an important role in bringing about the military putsches that did away with many of the traditional regimes. This is especially true of Syria, of course, where Alawi and Druze influence in the army eventually developed into an almost purely Alawi dictatorship.

Revolutionary Arab nationalism began to decline in the late 1960s and 1970s. On purely intellectual grounds, the ideology remained quite vague and eclectic. It never achieved much coherence and unity because of the dearth of able ideologues and the divisions within the movement of Arab nationalism itself. The fragmented nature of the ideology carried within it the seeds of its weakening and collapse. Splintered and divided, revolutionary Arab nationalism left itself wide

open to criticism and attack. Furthermore, although the romantic side of Arab nationalism was quite developed, its concrete pragmatic side was not. Although it borrowed from socialism to try to provide a detailed and comprehensive worldview, that borrowing was always partial, inexact, and selective. As a result, Arab nationalism never provided a strong, coherent, and concrete worldview in light of which social and economic developments could be understood and related to. Although its romanticism made the ideology superficially attractive, its weakness at the concrete analytical level meant that it would not stand the test of time as a stable mental framework within which to interpret political, social, and economic processes over the decades. To survive, an ideology must have a strong intellectual foundation and continue to build actively on that foundation in light of new developments and events. No such attention was given to the serious elaboration of ideological positions within the movement of Arab nationalism. Ideology was a source for mobilizing popular support and a symbol of legitimacy for new regimes. Once in power, nationalist regimes tended to fall back on traditional means of maintaining power—especially coercion—largely ignoring the need to continue the elaboration and updating of ideology.

From the perspective of class, if revolutionary Arab nationalism is viewed as the cover under which the new middle class successfully challenged the power of the upper bourgeoisie, then its function once the new middle class had firmly established itself in power is questionable. When it was out of power, the new middle class needed ideology as a means to justify its overthrow of power and to galvanize widespread political support for that overthrow. Once in power, however, that class no longer needed ideology as badly. The conventional political power of the state was more or less sufficient to maintain a position of political dominance. No longer needed politically, the ideology of Arab nationalism lingered but languished, no longer a necessary source of political power, it lost its vitality and dynamism.

The same general comment can be made about the integration of members of the minorities into the social mainstream. Revolutionary Arab nationalism was, for them, a necessary vehicle for their acceptance into positions of political power after they had achieved economic, cultural, or military prominence. Once they were in positions

of political power, however, they could maintain their position through the normal levers of institutionalized political power. They no longer needed ideology as an extraordinary source of power, for they now enjoyed the benefits of ordinary state power. With their fate no longer tied up in the success of the ideology, their dynamic absorption in it waned.

From the perspective of generational change, the decline of revolutionary Arab nationalism is quite normal. Faced with a confusing and frustrating social reality, every new generation, especially in developing societies, is driven to assemble some simplified ideological worldview through which to interpret and interact with reality. Because of their natural hostility to the status quo, which is presenting them with significant difficulties and obstacles, they are inclined to adopt a worldview in opposition to the worldview of their elders, who are in positions of social dominance. In societies experiencing rapid material and cultural change, unless the dominant class exerts a supreme effort to socialize and integrate youth both materially and mentally, new generations left largely to their own devices are likely to develop an outlook in deep hostility to the status quo and its legitimizing ideology. From this perspective, the emergence of an antithetical challenge to revolutionary Arab nationalism—as it happened, in the form of Islamic fundamentalism—was almost inevitable.

Finally, as for the rise of revolutionary Arab nationalism, the timing of the decline of that nationalism was closely linked to certain historical crises throughout the 1960s, most importantly, the collapse of the UAR in 1961, the breakup of the Ba'ath party in the mid-1960s into competing factions, the defeat of 1967, and the death of Nasir in 1970. The ability of radical Arab nationalist ideology to evoke feelings of positive identity, self-esteem, security, and power was shattered. Its authority as a guide in directing socioeconomic and cultural change was also deeply shaken. The ideological arena was blown open to allow new ideological orientations to compete for popular allegiance, namely, a radical Marxist revolutionary nationalism rallying around the forces of the Palestinian leftist guerilla organizations and an equally radical, puritanical fundamentalist Islamic movement.

The Legacy of Arab Nationalism

Whereas early conservative Arab nationalism focused on Syria and the major Syrian towns, the revolutionary Arab nationalism of the postwar period addressed itself to the entire Arab world "From the [Atlantic] Ocean to the [Arabian] Gulf." It created a sense of shared identity and community among a group of societies that had been left isolated from one another after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. While the Ottomans had provided Islam as the macro-identity overarching tribal and regional identities, Arab nationalists offered Arabism to serve the same purpose. Arabism gave rise to a sense of community among Arab peoples whose effects, although far from decisive, cannot be ignored. This communal sense led to several attempts at unity between Arab states, most notably the Syrian-Egyptian unity experiment between 1958 and 1961. It also helps explain the fairly uniform early Arab response to the creation of Israel as well as Arab attitudes toward Palestinian rights and demands. Furthermore, although conflicts and rivalries between Arab states are often intense, this sense of shared community can also help explain why these tensions only rarely erupt into open warfare. Moreover, it helps reveal the hidden logic behind the Arab League and the practice of Arab summity. Despite its failure to even come close to its proclaimed objective of Arab unity, Arab nationalism has succeeded in implanting the desire for inter-Arab cooperation and condominium, and it is not unlikely that this will become articulated in the form of increasing bureaucratization and institutionalization of inter-Arab economic, technological, and cultural relations.

But the legacy of Arab nationalism is deeper and more pervasive than a communal sense. First, as mentioned previously, Arab nationalism "performed an intellectual function within the general framework of modernization. It introduced new ideas by adapting them to indigenous forms of expression and values and . . . added new dimensions to thought by introducing to it economic, social, and political elements" (Karpas 1982, xxii). In a sense, Arab nationalism was the avenue through which Western modernity entered the Arab world.

The Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, brought with it a wave of secularism that unseated Islam from its central position in political, social, and cultural life. Although early Arab nationalism, led by traditional Sunni elites, adopted secularism only halfheartedly, the new radical Arab nationalism introduced a thoroughly secular outlook. Although the secularization of Arab society is in no way complete, neither in scope nor in depth, nevertheless, in the countries that succumbed to the rule of Arab nationalist parties or military cliques, political, social, and economic life was transformed beyond recognition. The traditional religious classes were drastically weakened, and the secular state took control of the domains of education and justice that had been previously the preserve of religious classes.

Based on their adoption of socialist outlooks, Arab nationalists also succeeded in raising important issues of wealth distribution and economic justice. They introduced a theme of revolutionary egalitarianism that had been absent in early Arab nationalism and that contributed to the overthrow of the traditional social and economic systems. After their rise to power, radical Arab nationalist regimes constructed moderately socialist state-dominated economic systems, which, although they did not produce efficiently, did succeed in reducing foreign influence in local economies and in achieving more even levels of wealth distribution. This opposition to unfettered capitalism and attachment to principles of socioeconomic egalitarianism has become a mainstay of political culture in the countries that came under the control of Arab nationalist regimes.

Furthermore, unlike early Arab nationalism, revolutionary Arab nationalism had a strong understanding of the challenges of state-building in developing societies. It borrowed both from Marxist-Leninists and the Fascists of Germany and Italy the awareness of the need to construct a strong and stable state. Ironically, while Arab nationalists claimed that their objective was to dismantle the state system that had grown out of the collapse of the Ottoman empire, their vigorous state-building efforts within their own state boundaries greatly reinforced the political divisions that they claimed to oppose. While seeking to change the political map of the Arab world, they contributed unwittingly to its ossification.

Along with revolutionary Arab nationalism's emphasis on state-building, however, came an understanding of state organization borrowed from both extremes of the European Left and Right. This understanding, shared by both Bolsheviks and Fascists, was that state power is based on authoritarian one-party rule. Satî' al-Husri was the first to reject French and British contractarian notions of nationalism in favor of more deterministic German notions. Aflaq confirmed this rejection of contractarian thought by borrowing notions of class struggle and one-party rule from the Marxists. In the end, Arab nationalists based their rule on a fervent faith in their mission and a heavy dose of coercion. This is as true of the Ba'ath, whose founders were greatly influenced both by the Arab Communist parties and the proto-fascist Syrian Social Nationalist party of Antun Sa'adeh, as it is true of the ANM, which borrowed many of its attitudes from the popular expressions of European fascist and hypernationalist movements. Nasir's form of authoritarianism was more homegrown but still borrowed from the authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies present in revolutionary Arab nationalist ideology.

Furthermore, the idea of class struggle itself that Aflaq and others introduced into the mainstream of Arab nationalism had its own dangerous effects. By undermining ideas of social solidarity and social harmony, which were part and parcel of traditional Islamic political culture and part of the liberal democratic ideology introduced by the French and the British, the radical Arab nationalists dealt a serious blow to the political stability of their own societies. They encouraged intra-social conflict as a necessary ingredient of progress. The politically alarming element of this position was that it posited a situation of social war in which the use of violence was normal and necessary. By denying the existence of a basic social consensus, it undermined the possibility of peaceful politics. This logic was convenient to the parties and army cliques that seized power in several Arab countries for it allowed them to use the instruments and propaganda of war to deny the legitimacy of any opposition and enforce their complete monopoly on political power. Acting in the name of oppressed classes, new ruling groups waged wars against large sections of their own populations.

Furthermore, although Arab nationalism was effective in subduing religious and confessional tensions for a number of decades, it had

the reverse effect on inter-ethnic tensions. This rendered Arab nationalism flawed in the ethnically mixed Berber-Arab societies of the Arab *maghrib* and contributed, more perilously, to the exacerbation of Arab-Kurdish relations in Iraq. The latter resulted in open warfare between the Arab Barthist Iraqi state and its large Kurdish minority.

Finally, one of the more subtly destabilizing legacies of Arab nationalism is the ideological delegitimation of current state boundaries. Although, as argued here, Arab nationalist and other regimes have built state structures which, by their very existence, reinforce the current state system and generally act within its framework, Arab nationalism denies the state system complete legitimacy because the only fully legitimate state is the one unified Arab nation-state. By continuously undermining state legitimacy, Arab nationalism has introduced a mood of continuous crisis into Arab politics. Moreover, regimes that are not allowed sufficient legitimacy are forced, by the normal laws of politics, to shore up their stability through coercion, which may help explain the chaotic and coercive nature of contemporary Arab political life.

Furthermore, the myth of Arab unity has also allowed many Arab regimes to distract attention from pressing domestic political and economic issues. Because the state and the society it is ruling over are not considered complete and legitimate units, the responsibilities of the government toward its population are not clearly understood nor are the rights and duties of the population itself. With the dominant ideology concerned with a theoretical Arab nation and Arab state, actual Arab societies and Arab governments are left in an open, uninformal political confrontation. By focusing on issues beyond their borders Arab nationalist regimes help keep issues of domestic reform off the political agenda. In an important sense, by keeping the dream of Arab unity alive, they are suppressing awareness of the nightmare of Arab politics.