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**THE FORMATION OF ARAB NATIONAL THOUGHT IN  
LEVANTA**

**FORMOVÁNÍ ARABSKÉHO NÁRODNÍHO MYŠLENÍ V LEVANTE**

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*In Prague 21.8.2015*

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## **Abstract**

The Arab world today is shaped by many ideologies that constitute the dynamic movements and change in it. They vary from violent to non-violent, religious to secular, Islamic to nationalist and fundamentalist to modernist. All of them, despite their diversity are characterised by some relation to tradition and modernity. The aim of the work is to analyse the emergence of the most significant schools of thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that had serious impact on the later ideological evolution, the formation of states and national identities in the region. The work covers mainly the issues of the attitude of the Islamic world towards modernity, Islamic modernism and fundamentalism, Ottomanism, Arabism and Arab nationalism. The interpretations are situated in the context of the cultural shock of the clash with western civilization, the decline of the Ottoman Empire and struggle against colonialism. The work examines these ideologies, and the major thinkers that represent them such as Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Rida, Butrus al-Bustani, Shibli Shumayyil, Farah Antun, and Abd al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi. The research is based mainly on the secondary Western and Arabic literature but also on the original works of the thinkers of this era.

**Key words:** Islamic modernism, Arabism, Arab Nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, Colonialism, Ottomanism

## Abstract

Arabský svět je dnešně tvořen mnohými ideologiemi, které představují dynamická hnutí a neustálé proměny. Vyskytují se v mnoha variantách: od násilných po nenásilné, od náboženských po sekulární, od islámských po nacionalistické a od fundamentalistických po modernistické. Všechny z nich, navzdory jejich rozmanitosti se vyznačují určitým vztahem k tradici a modernitě. Cílem práce je analyzovat vznik myšlenkových proudů devatenáctého a počátku dvacátého století, kterým mělo vážný dopad na pozdější ideologický vývoj, formování států a národních identit v regionu. Práce zahrnuje především problematiku postoje islámského světa směrem k modernitě, problematiku islámského modernismu, fundamentalismu, osmanismu, arabismu a arabského nacionalismu. Výklady jsou situovány do kontextu kulturního šoku v rámci střetu se západní civilizací, úpadku Osmanské říše a bojů proti kolonialismu. Práce zkoumá tyto ideologie, které zastupují jejich střední myslitelé: například Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' at-Tahtávi, Džamal ad-Din al-Afghání, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rašíd Ridá, Butrus al-Bustání, Šibli Šumajjil, Farah Antun, a Abdar-Rahmán Al-Kawákibí. Výzkum je založen jak na sekundární západní a arabské literatuře, tak na původních dílech představitelů této éry.

**Klíčové slova:** islámský modernismus, islámský fundamentalismus, arabismus, osmanismus, arabský nacionalismus

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## Introduction

I chose the theme of the Formation of Arabic National Thought in Levanta and covered it in the span of approximately the years 1800-1916 to study the beginnings and emergence of ideologies which had the aim of defining the political and social bases of the Islamic and Arabic world.

This work can be used as a starting point and a source of inspiration for the study of the subsequent historical periods especially the creation of nation states after the First World War under the colonial rule and agreement of Sykes-Picot. The reality of these new states, that except of slight changes remain the same till today, with the combination of understanding the ideologies that were emerging prior to the First World War is essential for the understanding of current political and social changes in the Middle East and the search for identity.

The Focus of my work is a period in history when the Arabs among other nationalities of the Middle East were pulled into a new world and had to think far beyond their own communities, societies and even beyond the boundaries of the whole Islamic umma. This world which the Muslims became drawn to, expressed itself in European influence in the trade and diplomacy, scientific discoveries that often challenged religious doctrines, new ways of life and relations between men and women and new forms of and institutions in the military and government. These are only some of the aspects of the clash between the east and west which started to take place mainly from the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I focused on these aspects and the reactions to them presented in various schools of thought because they were by implication changing the political and social nature of the Islamic world which is the concern of my work.

The schools of thought in the modern history of the Islamic world (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) can be divided in two major groups. The fundamental Islamic ideologies from which modern political Islam has emerged and modernizing Islamic ideologies from which by gradual secularizing tendencies emerged the Arabic Nationalism. The fundamental Islamic ideologies emerged later than the modernizing and reforming ideologies and were in a sense a reaction to them but did not replace them. Both of these movements were an adaption or a reaction to various western ideologies. Whatever the source of their primary influence was, they were all basically a result of the realisation of

the European hegemony and the cultural shock felt in the house of Islam when it came face to face with European progress.

Among the first authors to undertake a study on this topic is George Antonius and his *The Arab Awakening* published in 1938 which for decades paved the way in the field of study the modern Arab intellectual history and was claimed as a theory of Arab Nationalism of the twentieth century. However this book was heavily questioned generations later and today is regarded as being uncritical. It overemphasizes the role of Christian Syrians on the formation of Arab Nationalism and generally overemphasizes the role and influence of Arab Nationalism and Arab Nationalists dating them too deep in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

In the upcoming years works of several western scholars started to fill the area of these studies among them Gibb's *Modern Trends in Islam*(1947) and Wilfred Smith's *Islam in Modern History*(1957). However these studies did not constitute a complete synthesis of the material and were more an independent scattered works.

The first important and maybe one of the most important works in this field was published in 1962 by Albert Hourani under the name *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. It is a book that truly filled the gap in the Middle Eastern studies when it was published and its importance and relevance has not decreased in time.<sup>2</sup> It was the first book to provide a full synthesis and systematic treatment of modern Arab intellectual history. This work form the backbone and the chronology of my study classifying the evolutionary periods of the development of the schools of thought in the Arabic world.

Among the other major works which I relied on in my study is Anthony Black's *The History of Islamic Political Thought*(2001), which is a major comprehensive study of the subject of the Islamic thought development from the time of the Prophet to the present therefore very essential and giving a general outlook on the period of modern history in the context of the whole development of Islamic thought from its emergence.<sup>3</sup> I mainly worked with the last chapter V "Islam and the West" that covered the historical span of my work.

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<sup>1</sup>LioraLukitz, "The Antonius Papers and The Arab Awakening, Over Fifty Years On," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1994): 886, accessed August 6, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Donald M. Reid, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age Twenty Years after," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*14, No. 4 (Nov., 1982), 541, accessed August 6, 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Neal Robinson, "The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present, by Antony Black," *The English Historical Review* 119, No. 480 (Feb., 2004): 159, accessed August 6, 2015.

Another helpful work was the Czech translation of Reinhard Schulze's *Geshite der Islamischen Welt im 20. Jahrhundert*. It is primarily a historical study and not rare of its kind, but what makes it special is the approach of the writer who is a historian as well as a linguist and filolog and therefore his method is not of a objective trace of historical events, agreements and wars, but rather is filled with interpretations and comparisons based on his methodological starting points.<sup>4</sup>

Among the books with less overlap with my field of study is a work of Adeed Dawisha *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From triumph to Despair*(2003). As the name indicates it's focus is the peak of Arab Nationalism, therefore it is only slightly overlapping with my material of study. However precisely because this book is set to investigate periods subsequent to the period that I studied I found chapter two „Early Stirrings: The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” very useful. It presents the ideologies of this era with an emphasis on the thinkers and ideologies that were crucial for the formation of the movement in the next generations.<sup>5</sup>

Abdellilah Belkeziz's *The State in Contemporary Islamic Thought*(2009) is a major and high caliber work in its field in the modern era, but only slightly overlapping with the content of my work, because as its name implies it studies only the Islamic thinkers and ideologies and only their views on the form and notion of state. Therefore the influence of this study on my work was rather minor. With similar importance for my work was the study of Malcolm Kerr *Islamic Reform: The political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida* (1966) that focused mainly on the juridical theories of law and state and the placement of the *Sharia* in it.

For a solid historical base of my work I used various general studies of the Middle East. To mention some of them William L Cleveland and Martin Bunton's *A History of the Modern Middle East*(2009), Bernard Lewis's *Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1961), Eduard Gombár's *Moderní dějiny islámských zemí*(1999) and *Dějiny Egypta*(2009) of the authors Ladislav Bareš, Rudolf Veselý and Eduard Gombár.

As a method of work I tried to track the schools of thought from the first Islamic thinker who looked at the west for a source of inspiration, through Islamic modernism

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<sup>4</sup>Miloš Mendel, “introduction to *Dějiny islámského světa ve 20. Století*, by Reinhard Schulze (Brno: Atlantis, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Mary Ann Tetreault, “Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair,” *The Journal of Politics* 67, No. 1. (Feb., 2005): 306-308, accessed August 6, 2015.



and revivalism. However i was not trying to give a full vast study of all the movements that emerged from these first ideologies which spoke to the matter of Islam, society and political life. I tried to follow a path of ideas in these movements that beared or eventually led to the creation of the first nationalist and secular ideologies. Therefore in the last chapters and periods beyond the great thinkers of Islamic revivalism as Afghani, ‘Abduh and Rida I did not follow the strain of thought connected with Islamic fundamentalism but lied my emphasis on the first secular and nationalist thinkers.

In these chapters on Arab Nationalism I was dealing with two kinds of literary sources that present two varying interpretations of the origins of this ideology. The older one, already mentioned in relation to George Antonius, which promoted the idea of the Arab Christians from Syria who where the creators of secular Arab Nationalism prevailed to some extent in Albert Hourani’s work who stated that for the Christians unlike the Muslims, the western and European ideas were not alien therefore they accepted them more freely and sooner than their Muslim neighbors. However Hourani does not give the central role in the creation of Arab Nationaism to these Christian thinkers as it is in Antonius’s work. Similar ideas to these can be found in Bassam Tibi’s *Arab Nationalism* and Hisham Sharabi’s *Arab Intellectuals*.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand these theories were firstly questioned with skepticism by Sylvia Haim’s book *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (1964)<sup>7</sup> and later with proper critical study rejected by Ernest Dawn in his *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (1973), and later summoned in another essay *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* edited by Rashid Khalidi in 1991. According to his opinion it was not the Christians from whom the ideas of nationalism came, rather he derives it from the Islamic modernization movements and ideologies. For him the injured self-view of the Near Eastern thinkers Muslims and Christians alike belonging to the same civilization that found itself overcame by an advanced Europe served the need of a search for the causes of decline. This self-view united the Christians and Muslims in a defense of Islam as a civilization. The emergence of Arab Nationalist thoughts from the ranks of these Islamic modernizers is then explained by Dawn in two ways, firstly by the emphasis of thinkers as ‘Abduh, Rida and Kawakibi on the Arabness of Islam who sought in it nothing more than a purification and originality of the umma that was in a

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<sup>6</sup>A. L. Tibawi, “Arab Intellectuals and the West, Hisham Sharabi,” *History of Education Quarterly* 15, No. 4 (Winter, 1975): 483, accessed August 6, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Donald M. Reid, “Arabic Thought,” 542.

contemporary bad stage. This emphasis led further than they expected or wished and so to the first national ideologies. Another explanation of Dawn is based on an inter-elite struggle between the Syrian elites. On one side stood those who were holding governmental positions in the Ottoman Empire and therefore stayed loyal to their Ottomanism, and on the other stood the ones who did not hold offices in the government and therefore turned to ideologies of Arab Nationalism as a form of protest and struggle for power.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of my work is to distinguish the influences by which the various schools of thought affected each other and investigate which thinkers or ideologies were significant on the creation of the Arab Nationalism. This I will try to do in the context of the mentioned two historical explanations of the emergence of this movement.

This work owes much to the research done at the library of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University and the National Library of Prague. I must also thank the coordinator of my thesis Mgr. Pavel Tupek, Ph.D. who helped me in all the steps of my work and had great patience with me.

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<sup>8</sup>William L. Cleveland, "From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism," *The American Political Science Review* 69, No. 4 (Dec., 1975): 1470, accessed August 6, 2015; Mahmoud Haddad, "The Rise of Arab nationalism Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (May, 1994):201, accessed August 6, 2015.

## **1. From the Peak of the Islamic Umma to the Realization of Decline**

In 1453 when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople, turning it into the new capital of their Islamic Empire Istanbul, and after their successful advance into the heartlands of Christian Europe and brief conquest of most of the Arabic territories from Iraq to eastern Morocco their power seemed unstoppable. The Ottomans were like most of the Turkish dynasties Sunni Muslims, but their Sunni character was mainly underlined by gaining the holy cities of Islam Mecca and Medina and the base of Sunni Islamic thought Al-Azhar in Cairo under their territories and was strengthened by their opposition to the Shia Safavid Persian Empire. By this rapid expansion of the Ottomans the Sunni Islamic world seemed to be revived in its glory and far ahead of Europe.

In the later centuries while some internal political processes in The Ottoman Empire where the reason of a gradual stagnation and downfall from the peak it lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, another movement that took place far behind the borders of Islam caused that the Islamic world found itself under the supremacy of Europe and the Western world.

The Renaissance period to which is mainly attributed the artistic developments and contributions of such people as Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo mainly started as a cultural movement and is considered to be the bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history in Europe. This period brought new social and political orders and expansion in sciences based on observations in the nature. Among these, the most influential scientific novelties were the geographical discoveries, that opened new naval routes for the Europeans to Asia around Africa cutting off the Ottoman income from the duty of the trade passing through their empire, and the discovery of America and the flow of gold from there to Europe. From the social aspects of the Renaissance period the most remarkable was the Protestant reformism led by Martin Luther and John Calvin, which eroded people's faith in the Papacy and questioned much of their traditional thought.

In the later centuries the impact of the Renaissance brought up another two major turning points in European history. One of them was the French Revolution in 1789 which introduced liberal and democratic ideas and in the course of modern history triggered the global fall of absolute monarchs and theocracies replacing them with republics and democracies. The other one was the Industrial Revolution during which new manufacturing processes were introduced that included going from hand production to machines. This accelerated the industrial process and opened new possibilities for technical developments in Europe. It also had a direct impact on the Islamic world that local Oriental economies with their hand productions of goods could not compete with the cheaper imported goods from Europe.

The situation in the Islamic world on the other hand had a different course of events in the historical development. Until the fall of Constantinople the Muslims were leaders in both the intellectual and technical fields and the states and rulers saw themselves to be the dominant force in the world. But after the fall of the city they had no longer the supremacy in these fields and the big expansion was only driven by the inertia force, but was already the beginning of the end of Muslim hegemony. Still it took until the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the Islamic rulers to realise the switch of power that had happened. To this period vaguely stretching from the 16<sup>th</sup> till the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Islamic history is being referred as the Early Modern period. In the basics of Islamic political thinking of this period there were no innovations except basic developments in minor fields of political thought as political culture and religious organisation.<sup>9</sup>

In the Arabic regions and in the Levant in particular we should divide the span of the reign of the Ottoman Empire before the reformation and Nahda period in two eras. The first was briefly after its conquest, which still in the light of the peak of the Ottoman Empire brought progress to these lands. Before the arrival of the Ottoman armies into the Levant and into the Arab world in general they were a mass of decentralised and unstable local states that fought for hegemony between each other. By the Ottoman conquest these territories gained unity, one judicial system and unified currency that helped the economies and trade. The prosperity of any community can be measured by

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<sup>9</sup>Anthony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 193.

the material progress and inhabitedness of its cities. We can spot this in the growth of the Arabic cities in this period in both population and urbanization.<sup>10</sup>

But when the downfall of the Ottomans began and they started to lose the centralised power, local authorities and rulers re-emerged from either the feudal landowners and tax collectors substituted by the Sultan or from local tribes and families acknowledged by him. This policy led to isolation of particular regions from one another. As a model example even the societies living in the cities, as it was in Damascus for example in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were divided into the city quarters that were totally autonomous of each other and were based on religious, national, tribal or professional memberships. They had limited contacts with one another and the gates of each quarter would close for the night and open in the morning. On the whole city level, the contacts with the surrounding countryside, that provided the agricultural goods for the city were very basic too. In reality a person living anywhere in the Arab world in the Early

Modern period had almost no or very limited knowledge of the closest surroundings of the place he lived in. Therefore there is no surprise that the Arab societies living in isolation could not even imagine the progress and development that was taking place in Europe in that time. They were not part of it or influenced by it all. The Islamic societies lived in total ignorance of what was happening in Europe. An exception was the Christians of Syria and Lebanon who were in contact with the Europeans and their thinking through the European Christian missionaries and colleges since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These colleges began to produce erudite and intellectual individuals who for practical reasons and for historical explorations and commentaries began to conduct a precise study of Arabic language. These studies eventually led to the passion and love of the language and therefore the individuals that emerged from these colleges are usually considered by most of the scholars as the starting point and fathers of the Arabic literary revival.

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<sup>10</sup>A. Raymond, *Arabské hlavní města v Osmanském období* (Damašek: 1986), 34.

## 2. The Age of Reforms and the First Generation of Thinkers

The exact dates of the beginning of the Modern history period varies from historian to another and varies in regard of which part of the Middle East are we speaking about. One of the most frequently used dates is Napoleons expedition to Egypt (part of the Ottoman Empire at that time) and his brief defeat of the Mamluk armies and advance to Syria that the Ottoman Empire was not capable to stop. The presence of the French army in the Orient was short and they were driven out by the Ottoman and British coalition very soon, nonetheless this experience that showed how much the balance of power between the east and west has switched and how unable the Muslims were in dealing with the European armies on their soul. This evoked a series of major governmental reforms in Istanbul and Cairo since the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Albert Hourani divides the evolution of the schools of thought in Modern Islamic history into 4 periods. The last one of them covers a historical period ulterior than the span of this work, therefore is not mentioned.

The first period roughly stretching from 1830-1870 is an age when reforming thinkers and writers were writing in the light of the mentioned reforms that started to take place in the governments of Istanbul and Cairo. These reforms were mainly adjusting some laws and institutions to the European model and reforming the military and navy systems. Europe in this time was perceived by most of these thinkers as a path that can be followed and the aim of their writings was the public still living in their own traditional order of world thought to persuade them, that they can adapt some laws and institutions from outside the borders of Islam and still remain faithful to their roots.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note, that in this period Europe was perceived as a source of which the Muslims can borrow what they consider can be helpful, or as an equal partner from who they can gain some inspiration. It was yet never perceived as a dominant civilization or even an adversary and a military threat.

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<sup>11</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), vi.

### 3.1. *Egyptian Reforms and Rifa'aBadawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi*

In Egypt the reforms are connected to the person of Muhammad 'Ali who as a chief of the Albanian troops sent to Egypt by the Turkish Sultan gained power in the power vacuum left in the country after the withdraw of the French army. After his massacre of the mamlukes in 1805 and the confiscation of their lands and properties he had enough power and funds to build his empire and was recognised as an Ottoman governor by the people of Cairo and by the Ottoman sultan.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad Ali became an absolute monarch that in fact ruled his country autonomously from the Ottoman government. His absolute rule had the features of many previous military governors that on the expense of the Ottoman Empire tried to establish a hereditary dynasty of the traditional style. Nevertheless under his command Egypt represented the first Middle Eastern state to undertake vast modernizations in military and institutions.<sup>13</sup> Due to these two sides of his rule he is either pictured by historians as the Last *mamluk* or as the founder of modern Egypt.

Inspired by the French administration and scientific novelties he wanted to create an Egypt that would be part of the Western world. Believing that core of the European success was in their industrial and scientific conveniences he built modern army and navy, irrigation systems and reformed the administration and taxation system. He issued no decrees or proclamations of rights and made no attempts to reform the political system. His reforms aimed on increasing Egypt's power among its neighbours and increasing his power in it.

To create military officers and technical professionals he opened military schools where European teachers lectured and later also sent missions of Egyptian students to study in France. Even though he discouraged interest in politics, humanities and anything other than military and technical sciences he could not prevent the gradual acquiring of his students some knowledge of the life in Europe, its literature and ideas of Enlightenment and the French revolution. From this generation emerged the first modern Egyptian thinker Rifa'aBadawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-1873).

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<sup>12</sup>Ladislav Bareš and Rudolf Veselý and Eduard Gombár, *Dějiny Egypta* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2009), 401-403.

<sup>13</sup>William L Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *The History of the Modern Middle East* (Philadelphia: West View Press, 2009), 65.

Tahtawi was educated in the traditional way of religious learning at al-Azhar and became an imam in the new Egyptian army and later was sent as a moral guardian of the students of the first mission sent by Muhammad 'Ali to France. During his stay he gained a deep knowledge of the French language and life and ideas of Enlightenment had a strong impact on him. Through his writings after his return he expressed his awareness of the advance of the European Christian lands and his admiration to modern sciences and he called the Muslims in following and learning from these sciences that should be the fuel for the reforms which he advocated.

In his opinions on the right form of the state he was a traditional thinker accepting the rule of an autocrat and he saw that the 'only hope of effective reform was that the autocrat should use his powers properly'.<sup>14</sup> What was new however was his view on the Sharia and the European 'natural laws'. He was the first one to suggest that the Islamic law was not fixed and established tradition and should be adapted to contemporary circumstances. He justified the borrowing from European laws claiming, that if an interpretation drawn from a non-Islamic legal code does not contradict with the tradition should be accepted. These ideas pushed the thinkers of the next generation to open the doors of Ijtihad that had been closed for centuries. Here, in the role of '*ulama*, the guardians of the Sharia, he also saw an embodiment of another idea of western thought: an active part of the population in the public affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Another idea with a similar importance was introduced by Tahtawi for the first time in Arabic literature. He adopted the concept that the world constituted of countries that given their special geographical circumstances had their own special characteristics. He introduced the term patrie as fatherland and patriotism from French as *watan* and *wataniain* in Arabic and for him it was Egypt the geographical territory that forms his and all Egyptians fatherland, not the Arabic world.<sup>16</sup> The age in which Tahtawi lived was a time when the tensions between the west and east had not grown yet, and therefore in his view Europe is not seen as a military or political danger. It only represented science and material wealth and the Muslims by learning from the Europeans and sticking to their true religion would close up the gap of advance that has emerged between the two civilizations.

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<sup>14</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 73.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>16</sup>Ernest Dawn, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," in *The origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 4.



Muhammad 'Ali was not trying to introduce liberal or democratic values to his country or to encourage any local Arabic or Egyptian feelings of identity. He regarded himself as an Ottoman style ruler that was separate from his subject ethnically and linguistically and the language of his high bureaucracy was Ottoman Turkish not Arabic which he did not even speak. His preference for the high administrators was also not for the local Egyptians but Turkish and Circassians. For practical reasons he relied on minority groups too in government and advisory as Christians and Armenians. But his pragmatic policies as widespread education that was in Arabic for training local professionals and establishing a modern army from the local peasants *fellahin* led to the emergence of Egyptian elite of bureaucrats and first senses of national feeling. In the next generation of Muhammad 'Ali's sons Arabic language replaced Turkish in all levels of administration.<sup>17</sup>

In 1831 Muhammad 'Ali invaded Syria and threatened the heartlands of Ottoman Empire itself. During this period his son Ibrahim Pasha ruled Syria and opened the country for more European travellers and missions, established a centralised administration and an obligatory conscription for the military service, exploited the countries resources and established equality among members of all religions and nationalities. Nevertheless a wave of discontent and opposition arose from between the Syrians and Lebanese when he introduced unpopular regular taxation and disarmament of the tribes in the remote mountainous districts. After the advance of Ibrahim Pashas army to the Ottoman territories of Minor Asia, that was considered by the European powers a threat to the being of the empire which they wanted to preserve, and after their intervention Ibrahim Pashas army had to withdraw from the Ottoman Empire and Syria back to Egypt. Nevertheless the period of the Egyptian rule in Syria was a new epoch in the country that opened the ways for progress and development that became embodied in the next generation thinkers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Eduard Gombár, *Moderní dějiny islámských zemí* (Praha: Karolinum, 1999), 85-87.

<sup>18</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 60.

### 3.2. *The Tanzimat Period in the Ottoman Government*

In Istanbul sultan Mahmud II was inspired by Muhammad 'Ali's massacre of the Mamluks and defused the Janissaries in 1826 who were his major obstacle in reform and who deposed the previous reformer sultan Selim III. This time however they were successfully eliminated due to new circumstances which were the new generation of bureaucrats conversant with the ideas of modern Europe and the Greek war that resulted in the independence of a Greek state where the traditional Ottoman army corps, the Janissaries, proved to be ineffective against European advanced military technology and strategies.

Mahmud II. launched the reforms with the creation of a new army, opening new schools of a European model and reorganizing the government. However these were only minor adjustments to the vehicle of government and state. After Mahmud II's death a new phase began in the direction of the empire that was carried on not by the sultans themselves, but by the Europeanized Ottoman bureaucrats, graduates of the modern educational institutions established by Mahmud II. Reshid Pasha, 'Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha are the names of the three dominant reformers who led the empire in the most intensive reformist part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century called the *Tanzimat*.<sup>19</sup>

On their insistance two major decrees were issued in the name of Mahmud II's successor Abdulmecid, the Gulhane decree and the *Hatt-i Humayun* in 1839 and 1856 and were the expression of a new direction in the empire's policy towards its own inhabitants and an attempt to introduce new moral and legal basis to the empire and the Christian subjects in it.<sup>20</sup> 46-46 In the time when the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, whose inhabitants were both ethnically and linguistically different from the Turkish Muslim leading element, started to drop out encouraged by new senses of nationalism and support of the European powers, particularly Russia, the empire had to find and promote a new collective civil identity among its subject-citizens. This was an Ottoman identity, meaning that all the people living within the boarder of the Ottoman Empire are equal and have the same rights, duties, a sense of belonging to one community and loyalty to one government. This was a substantial switch in the perception of identity that was till then only based on belonging to a religious

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford university Press, 1961), 112-116

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

community and these new ideas were indeed of a secular western character. The two decrees ensured to all citizens complete equality in front of the law, in paying the taxes and recruitment to military service to all the subjects in the empire with no regard to religious or national identity.<sup>21</sup>

This was on one side an attempt to prevent the Balkan provinces from detaching from the empire, but also and mainly aimed to hold the remaining parts of the empire together and give the multi-national empire a new source of identity in the times of emerging national ideologies. The question to be asked here is whether the non-Muslim communities will respond to this call for Ottoman patriotism or not and what will be the reaction of the Muslims who suddenly found themselves drop from being a first class citizens to equal citizens with other religious minorities.

These decrees were however issued in the name of the sultan as an absolute monarch to his people and the new laws emerging from these decrees were growing alongside the Sharia that had been till then the only source of judicial system. The power of the sultan was growing also because the old institutions that had some control over the sultan's power were replaced by new ones that were created by him.

These reforms had indeed their opponents. Some of them were from the religious and conservative circles that criticized the governments of heresy and trafficking with the western enemy, others from non-conservative circles opposed the reforms not because they disagreed on them in general, but they saw the reforms the way they were implemented ineffective.

Among those was an important politician and grand vizier Ahmed Vekif Pasha in who's opinion the empire could not rest on the equality of all the national and religious sentiments and call for Ottoman unity, because the Christians of the Balkan were willing to revolt and struggle for independence. Therefore giving them new freedoms would increase their will to revolt. In Ahmed Vekif Pasha's opinion the idea of Ottoman patriotism and united identity did not have real basis in the society. He saw also that the mentioned decree will also give the Powers excuses and opportunities to intervene in the matters of the empire. He also criticized the absolutistic character of the decrees where due to the abolishment of the old Ottoman institutions the sultan will gain absolute freedom of action as an absolute monarch. Therefore in Ahmed Vekif Pasha's opinion it

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<sup>21</sup>Fruma Zachs and Basilius Bawardi, "Ottomanism and Syrian Patriotism in Salim al-Bustani's Thought," in *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration: Studies in Honour of Butrus Abu-Manneh*, ed Itzchak Weismann et al. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005), 111.

was better to keep the system on its tried principles, that secured the being of the empire for centuries and these were the supremacy of the Islamic law and the Turkish Muslim element and purify it from corruption and inefficiency.<sup>22</sup>

The reforms in Istanbul took Europe as an unquestioned model to follow in administration, centralization, military and industry and even adopted the European dress code to replace the traditional Ottoman clothes in the council and offices. However there was one major part of the western political thought that they totally ignored and that is the liberal and democratic character of state and a public representation of the population. This became the main point of criticism in the next generations thinkers who demanded representative governments and constitution.

### *3.3. The Syrian Christians and their Revival of Arabic Literature*

Unlike the Muslims in Syria, who did not have much direct contact with the west because they did not take part in the politics and the central government as a whole the Christians had had more experience through the Euro-Christian missions in the region for already few centuries. It is generally assumed that unlike the Muslims they had no or less prejudice in accepting western values as they did not see in it a betrayal to their hereditary culture and traditions, nor did they have to justify to the members of the community any adoptions from outside<sup>23</sup>, this interpretation is however questioned and reconsidered by authors like Ernest Dawn.<sup>24</sup>

While the concern of the Muslims was how to reform the *umma* and the empire to revive their past glories, the main concern of the Christians was where was their place in the society in the light of these new reforms. Until then they had lived in closed religious communities with no political life. Their identity was shaped by the religious membership like the identities of Muslims. Because they did not possess the loyalty to the Ottoman Empire as the protector of the Sunni Islam, therefore they were more

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<sup>22</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 48.

<sup>23</sup>Hisham Sharabi, *Arab intellectuals* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), 58-59.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 141-146.

willing to support this new Ottomanist course of policy. Here the Muslims had more hesitations.

But if the Christians should leave their closed religious communities as the maker of their identity, which community should they belong to and what identity should they acquire? The Ottoman Empire despite its new policies was an Islamic state with a majority of Muslim citizens and in the view of many these reforms were carried on to assure Islamic revival against Christian Europe, so to what extent could they become an equal part of it? Driven by these questions and by the precise study of Arabic language since the previous century the consciousness of an Arabic past and glory began to emerge. The idea that all who speak Arabic have something in common and that the territory they inhabit constitutes an Arabic homeland similar to the idea of Ottomanism formed an alternative to sectarian based religious identities. This ideology was later to be regarded as Arabism.<sup>25</sup> After the events of the civil war in Syria and Lebanon in 1860 the need to find an alternative to religion based loyalties became more urgent.

One of the first and most prominent Christian Arab thinkers was Butrus al-Bustani from a Maronite Lebanese family with a tradition of providing educated scholars and intellectuals from its ranks. He is regarded to be by most of the contemporary western and Arabic scholars as an Ottoman patriot who encouraged local territorial identity of Syrian patriotism. For him as for many other writers of his time having multiple identities that were not exclusive to each other was a common occurrence. He considered that man can have one large identity and sub-identities within each other that do not contradict with themselves. Therefore his loyalty was to the Ottoman government and his sense to belonging to a sub-fatherland was to Syria, which was only one of the fatherlands that constitute the empire. He saw that the Ottoman Empire was actually the protector of the Syrian patriotism against foreign intervention and against sectarian patriotism. He never advocated separation from the empire.

He was an Ottoman reformer advocating autonomous government under the shield of the Ottoman Empire with Arabic as a language of administration and education.<sup>26</sup> In his theories on reform he believed, that the Near East could revive itself only through borrowing the knowledge of European sciences. The borrowings however should not be blindfolded. The Near East should be able to judge and criticize the

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<sup>25</sup>AdeedDawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 8.

aspects of European civilization and adopt only those, that it would consider helpful and compatible with its customs and traditions. The Arabic civilization had its great past that it lost because it lost its desire to learn due to various factors. That is what happens to every civilization which reaches its peak in a historical period. Europe has learned from the Arabs and built on that knowledge. The Arabs instead of searching for means of revival in themselves only, can easily speed up this process by learning from Europe and so learn in a short time what took Europe centuries to achieve.

Like Tahtawi, he emphasises loyalty to the Sultan and value of national unity embodied in his Syrian patriotism. Perhaps due to the fact of being a Christian and thanks to his life experiences of breaking out the Maronite community and becoming a Protestant he lays higher emphasis than Tahtawi on religious freedom and equality between different faiths.<sup>27</sup> His enormous contribution to the world of Arabic language is reflected in his work that contained the assistance in translating the Bible to Arabic, establishing his own school The National School where Arabic language and modern sciences were taught and his two overwhelming works the Arabic dictionary *Al-Muhit* and Arabic encyclopedia *Da'irat Al-Ma'arif*. His aim was to create a modern Arabic language that would be correct in its grammar and precise and easy to understand for the goal of transmitting modern thought.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Hourani, *Arabi Thought*, 101.

<sup>28</sup>Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Christians between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus Al-Bustani," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (May, 1980): 290-293.

## 4. Islamic Modernism: The Young Ottomans, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Rashid Rida

In the second period 1870-1900, on one hand the Islamic civilization became closer to the European one. Reforms took their roots, change seemed unavoidable and a new generation of intellectuals that were educated in new schools of European model were filling the governmental posts, but on the other hand the relations between the two civilizations became more tense as the European armies were present in many Muslim countries and the influence of European powers was felt through their diplomatic pressures in all the centres of the Islamic world.

In this phase the aim of the thinkers was to keep the continuity of the Islamic society despite the changes it was going through. In other words, they were trying to convince those who adopted European values that they can and should still hold to something from their past and culture in order to prevent becoming alienated from their own environment.

The writers of this generation that we are considered about here are however different from those of the first phase. It might seem that the evolution of thought in this phase was just a natural progress in the thinking of the first generation and building up on what they brought in, but these thinkers were aware of new circumstances that shaped the course of Middle Eastern history in the 1870s and 1880s and the military occupations of the western powers of the Middle East. Therefore in their thought there is a drastic switch in direction in both, the topics they were mostly concerned about and also the solutions that they offered. While for Tahtawi Europe presented only the ideas and inventions of human reason and perfection, while the political danger of one European country in his view was considered that can be checked on by another European country therefore did not consider a threat in his mind, this became a serious issue for this later generation. The problem of Thatawis thought is the backwardness of the Islamic world in comparison to the west, but the centre of his focus is not the west, but the Islamic world itself. The decline of his world and how to address it is the question that he tried to answer. For the next generation this problem was maintained but overshadowed by a

more urgent one: the existence and continuity of the Islamic world threatened by an external force represented in the European interference and occupation.<sup>29</sup>

This generation also saw the reforms as a necessary step in order to cure the internal decline of the *umma* and prevent the foreign interference. However where they differed was where they were searching for the ideals that should guide their reforming efforts. By asking question as whether it is necessary for directing the reforms to derive them from the European model or whether they can be derived from the principles of Islam we can see their reforming ambitions. But these thinkers were not whole hearted westernizers like the “French knowers”, the leading bureaucrats of the *tanzimat*. They stressed on their belonging to the Islamic tradition and claimed that reform could be directed from the Islamic law itself. They also claimed that many of the European values as liberalism and democracy are not foreign to Islam, but are actually corresponding with the Islamic principle of *shura* (consultation) that was present in the prophet and was later abandoned. Therefore reform is not an innovation but a necessary implication of Islam. They also pointed on how Islam in its history was the protector and cause of scientific discoveries and its compatibility with the modern world.

Another element not emphasized in Hourani’s work, but Dawn gives it proper recognition is the “perception of the Self” of the intellectuals in the Islamic world as a “deprived relative to the Other”<sup>30</sup> that was increasing the more the western adoptions were taking place. This injured perception of the self view as the Islamic world being culturally inferior to Europe that was yet not present in the times of Tahtawi, began to emerge and later reached its peak with the peak of colonialism. It created a reaction that emerged in the form of an opposition to the current establishment in the Ottoman Empire under the name the Young Ottomans who grasped the opportunity when the Eastern crisis indicated how much the *tanzimat* were ineffective in bringing the Islamic world to equivalent position with Europe.

The Young Ottomans were not from the beginning a coherent organization or a school of thought. Their members had slight distinctions in ideas from one another and were formed into an official body only later. What they had in common was their dislike to the autocratic government of the reforming Ali and Fuad Pasha, critics of the blind folded imitations of the west, demands for public representation in the government in the

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<sup>29</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 104.

<sup>30</sup>Dawn, “*Origins of Arab Nationalism*,” 5.



form of a constitution and an elected parliament and a strong feeling of belonging to an Islamic Ottoman society. They expressed their ideas by a new political weapon in that time, the press. Therefore are considered to be the first political movement of wide public influence in the Islamic history. One of the most prominent speakers of the Young Ottomans Namik Kemal pushed the concept of the Ottoman patriotism even further than in the decrees of 1839 and 1856 while linking it with the respect of the Islamic foundations of the Ottoman society. This is where they differed from the secular course that the Ottoman patriotism was undergoing in the theory of *tanzimat*.<sup>31</sup>

In 1876 Midhat Pasha, one of the associates of the Young Ottomans led a coup d'état after few years of the chaotic rule of Sultan Abdulaziz and the death of Ali Pasha in 1871 combined with Russian international threats and deposed the Sultan for another member of royal family Abdulhamid II. Midhat Pasha declared a new constitution with responsible ministry, an appointed Senate, an elected council of deputies and a hierarchy of local councils<sup>32</sup>, that the sultan pledged to respect. However he was only forced to do so due to the pressure of the Powers and when he felt more firm in his position he dissolved the parliament and suspended the constitution in the same year. This was a shortly lived first constitutional experience in the Ottoman Empire which was succeeded by three decades of an autocratic rule of the Sultan Abdulhamid.

The doctrine of Islamic modernism got its full expression in the persons of two great scholars in the Islamic history Jamal ad-Din al- Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh who are regarded as the fathers of Islam’s revival and teachers of many thinkers of the next generations. Their influence is present not only in the Islamic thinkers but they are considered as a source of primal inspiration by the protagonists of Arab nationalism.

Al-Afghani as his name claims was born in Afghanistan, however the early period of his life is hardly documented and there is evidence that he might have been born in Persia, a claim that many of his opponents made to disqualify him. His Persian origin would imply his belonging to the Shia Muslims, which considering that most of his life was spent in Sunni countries and that his message was meant to address all the Muslims, would discredit him. He spent most of his life traveling from one Muslim country to another in his search for the “perfect ruler” who would cooperate with him in the mission of regeneration of Islam, and he was always disappointed. His career was

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<sup>31</sup>Cleveland and Bunton, *Modern Middle East*, 86.

<sup>32</sup>Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 114.

troubled due to his impatient nature and temperament and when he did not achieve what he wanted or got in a rupture with a ruler he soon withdrew all his sympathies and used his influence and effort in agitating against him. That often led to his eviction from the country.

In Afghanis thought the central problem was the threat of Christian west which he felt thorough the Islamic world and was often its witness in India, Egypt and Istanbul. All his effort was focused on how to overcome this political and military expansion. He wanted the Islamic world to regain its power, but for him this was not a political goal primarily, rather a social one concerning the whole *umma*. He wanted the Muslims to understand the proper Islam and live in accordance to its teachings freed from popular superstitions and misleading interpretations. By doing so they would become strong again because as the strength of Europe lies in its knowledge, the weakness of Orient lies in its ignorance. This ignorance could not be overcome by simply imitating and adopting the knowledge of the west, which is the fruit of a long termed evolution of thought that is needed in Islam too and it is the true understanding of the religion. This European knowledge and superiority was not only compatible with Islam but infact imbedded in the very essence of the Muslim faith<sup>33</sup> and was borrowed by Europe from the Muslims and used for their advantage while the Muslims abandoned the true principles of their religion and therefore fell into stagnation. Therefore the backwardness of the Islamic world he states is not caused by the backwardness of Islam itself, but by the backwardness of the Islamic religious structures and society and the reforming governments which had knuckled under to the Europeans by the piecemeal borrowing of European practices. This should be solved by eliminating the corruption in the political system and return to the true pristine Islam.<sup>34</sup>

Another appeal is for the unity of all Muslims in the world. This unity can be divided in Afghanis thought into three levels. 1. The feeling of the bound of solidarity that should bind all the Muslims in the world with a sense of belonging to one community. This sense is more important than any other identity and he deplored emerging national ideologies as a western forgery meant to weaken, not strengthen the *umma*. 2. A political cooperation on the level all the governments and states in the Islamic world in order to face the common enemy embodied in the west. The rulers of

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<sup>33</sup>Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 19.

<sup>34</sup>Dawn, "Origins of Arab Nationalism," 7.

the Islamic lands should not stand in the way of the unity of Islam, and if they did it was legitimate to depose them. However he did not advocate the necessity of a unified Islamic state or recreation of the Caliphate of early times. If the rulers will cooperate in the service of Islam there is no need for a unified state. 3. Reconciliation between the Sunnis and Shia Muslims and their offshoots. In his opinion even the greatest doctrinal conflicts could be outweighed for the sake of unity.<sup>35</sup>

A new element present in Afghani's work is that when he speaks of Islam he is not speaking of a religion but of a civilization which is authentic in its own right and this authenticity is what distinguishes it from the West and is the source of its strength. From this claim and the opposition to the West drove the Arab nationalists' inspiration years later. Although he was not a constitutionalist, nevertheless his frequent agitations against the rule of Islamic governors blew the wind in the sails of constitutionalist and emerging nationalist opposition movements in the Middle East. His critic of the backwardness of the Islamic religious orders also caused general erosion of people's faith in the unquestioned position of the 'ulama and their influence.

Both Afghani and 'Abduh advocated the concept of Islamic umma that unified all the Muslims and overshadowed any national belongings. Neither of them was hostile to the rule of the Ottomans over the Arab lands and if any nationalism should be found beyond the Islamic unity it would be the Egyptian, not Arab in 'Abduh's thought.<sup>36</sup>

One of 'Abduh's followers, the writer of his biography and his ideological heir, Rashid Rida, also considered by most of the scholars as an Islamic reformist brought a new element of Arabist thinking to his Pan-Islamic doctrine. Similarly as Afghani and 'Abduh he advocated the necessary return to the principles of true and abandoned Islam. Here however he puts more emphasis on the fact that early Islam was an Islam of the Arabic ancestors and therefore the revival of early Islam is the revival of Arabism. To Rida the Arabic language is the only language in which the doctrines and laws of Islam could be transmitted. He also states that the Turks are the ones who usurped the Caliphate from the Abbasids and therefore from the legitimate tribe of Quraysh and by that undermined Islam.<sup>37</sup> Rashid Rida sees a clear distinction between the Arabs and the Turks and the former are the ones to whom greater glory and first place belongs.

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<sup>35</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 115.

<sup>36</sup>Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 20.

<sup>37</sup>Anis al-Abyadh, *Rashid Rida: TarikhwaSira* (Tripoli: Jarrus Press, 1993), 53.

After the death of his master Muhammad ‘Abduh he started to act with greater freedom and established some connections with the organizations and societies in Syria and Lebanon opposing the rule of the Sultan Abdulhamid II. And when the Young Turks revolution ended the absolute monarchy of the sultan he favoured it until the Turk nationalist signs of the Committee of Union and Progress started to rise. Even though in 1916 when the Arab revolt against the Ottoman rule broke out and he favoured Arabic separation for practical reasons as he said “it would be of the benefit to all Muslims”, he did not prior to 1916 question or undermine the political position of the Ottoman rule as he saw in it a continuity and strength of Islam and after the First World War broke out he initially called all the Muslims to protect the Ottoman Caliphate. But it is more than natural that his support for the Ottoman Empire withdrew after the hanging incidents of the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1916 in Damascus and Beirut committed by Jamal Pasha and then later supported the Arab Revolt.

Whatever glorification of Arabism he made, he made for the purpose of regeneration of the Islamic Umma. It was a sub-content with the purpose to serve the main content.<sup>38</sup> It is important here to point to the fact that Rida’s life was stretching in two historical periods already mentioned by Hourani, the first one being the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the second one being the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If we focus on the pre-war period we will see that Rida’s thought did not much differ from that of Afghani’s and Abduh’s who did not live to witness the war. He was a Pan-Islamic reformist thinker who had to search for other alternatives than loyalty to the Ottoman government for the purpose of his Pan-Islamic ideology after the loss in WWI and Turkish nationalism caused the abolition of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate.

All the thinkers discussed in this chapter of Islamic modernism had the common feature that they tried to merge the tradition of Islamic law and the essence of modern life. All of the did hold loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and government even when some of them to a higher or lesser extent advocated some ethnical distinction of the Arab element. Anyhow none of them demanded any political or territorial consequences to their Arabism. The first one of the Muslim thinkers to demand political representation of the Arabs on their own, presented in the idea of a dual state where the centre of power would be switched from the Turks to the Arabs was ‘Abd al-Rahman al-

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<sup>38</sup>Rashid Rida, *al-Khilafa* (Cairo, 1923), 53-58.

Kawakibi.<sup>39</sup> Therefore he is by some regarded as the first Muslim Arab nationalist or even as the first precursor of modern secular Pan-Arabism was and he shall be discussed in the next chapters.

## 5. Emergence of Arab Nationalism

The third period covering the years from 1900 till 1939 is an era when the previous process and the two strands of thought that the previous generations tried to hold together moved further apart from each other. On one side were those who stood firmly on the Islamic bases of society and by gradual polarization of ideologies moved further to Islamic fundamentalism. This ideology went not only to the principles of Islam but also to a historic period that embodied what they believed to be the results of the right principles of the religion. This ideology saw the solution of the problems of the Islamic world in the return to the roots of Islam. According to this movement the Islamic *umma* has deflected during the centuries of its existence from the true belief and the right principles and that is the reason of its degradation.

For the Islamic fundamentalists there could be no better period in the history, which embodied the right principles and the political success of the *umma* more than the time of the prophet and his rightful successors *al-khulafa' al-rashidun*. This era became a source of imitation and idealism to them and an utopia they tried to reach.<sup>40</sup>

On the other side by the evolution of Islamic modernism and gradual loosening the bonds with the Islamic principles secular ideologies have emerged. For them Islam as a religion was nevertheless respected but regarded as only one of the features of the nation but not a norm in accordance to which life in society should be regulated.<sup>41</sup> Therefore the secular principles of the writers of this era and ideology were that of nationalism whether Turkish or Arabic or other regional nationalist ideologies.

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<sup>39</sup>Dawn, *Origins of Arab Nationalism*, 140.

<sup>40</sup>For studies on Islamism see Black, *History of Islamic political Thought*, 304-324; Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of fundamentalism: political Islam and the new world disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, vi.

What started as one movement of thought from the need to reform the Islamic societies and government in some way to overcome the European hegemony now split in two major strains that sought for inspiration in two different directions, nonetheless to achieve the same goal.

In the previous chapters, terms as Arabism and Arab Nationalism occurred, however to deal with them in a more detailed manner there is a necessity to classify this terminology. To define the term Arab Nationalism and to distinguish from related terminology I am using the definition used by AdeedDawisha in his book *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* which he derived from various studies and authors on the issue of nationhood, ethnicity and nationalism. As Bernard Lewis stated a nation is “a group of people held together by a common language, belief in a common descent and in a shared history and destiny. They usually but do not necessarily inhabit a contiguous territory; they often enjoy, and if they do not enjoy they commonly seek, sovereign independence in their own name”.<sup>42</sup> The emphasis of the nation’s sovereign independence in its own name is what distinguishes the nation from an ethnic group. The latter does not seek political sovereignty. The distinction of the political level in the Arab nation’s desire to form an independent political unity represented in a unified state is what presents the ideology of Arab Nationalism. On the other hand the term Arabism covers everything mentioned in the term Arab Nationalism except the desire for a political unity of the Arabs on their own. Therefore there is a difference in saying that someone is an adherent of Arabism, as can be said of Tahtawi, Butrus al-Bustani and Muhammad ‘Abduh for instance to whom this was an identity of being an Arab not incompatible with other identities and with no political affiliations deriving from this identity. On the other hand an Arab nationalist regards himself as an Arab culturally and in addition he demands political recognition to his nation.

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 81.

### 5.1. *Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi and the Idea of an Arab Caliphate*

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the failures of Ottoman military against Europe began to accumulate, specifically in the treaty of KucukKaynarca in 1774 in which the Ottoman Sultan was titled as the caliph of the Islamic nation for the first time in an official document, a policy of Ottoman highlighting this claim began. In this era also a legend was created telling the story of the Sultan Selim I. and his conquest of Cairo in 1517 after which he officially accepted the title that passed on him from the last Abbasid caliph.<sup>43</sup> During the *tanzimat* period this claim was overshadowed by that of the sultan as the monarch of all the subjects of the empire, but in the reign of Abdulhamid the stress on the concept of the caliph sultan re-emerged, perhaps from the need to re-assure the loyalty of the Arab Muslim subjects that were the majority of the empire and felt threatened by the *tanzimat* policy.

However the reaction was not as it was awaited. For the Arabs the caliphate represented an inherited doctrine and was connected with a pride of their nation and their credits for Islam. More than that, according to the teaching of the tradition (*sunna*) the caliphate was an office for a privileged tribe of Quraysh, therefore the Ottoman sultan could not have the legal basis to claim this position. They regarded him as a ruler and protector of Islam, but not a caliph.

The Islamic modernist thinkers had always highlighted the special place of the Arabs and the Arabic language in Islam and in this mood they were considering in theory the possibility of the return of the caliphate to the Arabs. This way they thought nothing would stand in their way for carrying out the reforms in accordance to the Islamic law and restore the glory of the *umma*. But they were aware of the shield which the Ottoman sultan shed over the Arab Islamic countries and that he was their protector from the threat of western Europe. But as time moved on and the pressure of the western powers on the Empire increased and the sultan proved to be unable to defend the Muslim lands ideas of an Arab caliphate were gaining momentum.<sup>44</sup>

The first thinker to pronounce these ideas in their full expression was Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi. He was a Syrian from Aleppo, had a classical education and

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<sup>43</sup>Reinhard Schulze, *Dějiny Islámského světa ve 20. Století*, 35-36.

<sup>44</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 268.

worked as an official and journalist. He was an opponent of the autocratic rule of Abdulhamid and a rival of one of his advisors who was from a noble family from the same city of Aleppo and had a family quarrel with Kawakibi's family earlier. (This might also be one of the causes of his hostility to the Ottoman court as we shall see later according to Ernest Dawn's theory on the emergence of Arab nationalist thinkers from the class of the Syrian elite who did not possess positions in the Ottoman government).

Al-Kawakibi wrote two books *Umm al-qura* and *Taba'i' al-istibdad* which are classical works of an Arab intellectual of that time that was dealing with the question of the decay of the Islamic *umma* and the reasons that led to this decay and the possibilities to cure it, *al-da' wa al-dawa'* (the illness and the remedy).<sup>45</sup> His emphasis lays on blaming the rulers of the Islamic world who have encouraged false spirit of pure imitation among the people. This way they can keep the people ignorant and passive which is for their own personal gain. For him the right state is a state where the people enjoy freedom and justice and the government's purpose is the happiness and prosperity of its people and in the same time is being controlled and watched by them. None of these ideas are innovative however. What gives al-Kawakibi the importance among historians is his formulation of the Arabic caliphate. In order to create a just state not only reform of law and institution and right education is needed but also a major transfer of the power from the Turks to the Arabs, specifically the Arabs of the Arab Peninsula is needed. The reason why this is necessary he provides in stating the position of the holy cities and the Arabic language in the Islamic world and he states also that beduins are not affected by moral decline and corruption, therefore are more suitable for government. When the caliphate is moved to the Arab Peninsula and Arab caliph from the tribe of Quraysh will be elected and though the tradition of Islamic law fulfilled.<sup>46</sup>

Being the first one to advocate some sort of political recognition to the Arab nation and a switch of power from the centre in Istanbul to the Arabic lands gives him the acknowledgement of being the first precursor of secular Pan-Arabism.<sup>47</sup> However we can see that the matter he spoke to was of the whole Islamic *umma*, and similar to Rida he also uses the glorification of Arabs for the higher purpose of the glorification of

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<sup>45</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, *Umm al-qura* (Damascus, 2002), 25-35.

<sup>46</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, *Taba'i' al-istibdad* (Cairo, 2011), 12-14.

<sup>47</sup> Sylvia G. Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 22, 49, 60.



Islam. The first thinkers to really pronounce the ideas of a secular state were those of the Christian writers.

## 5.2. Syrian Christian Nationalists and Secularists

Among the Christians in the time between the dusk of the 19<sup>th</sup> till the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas of belonging to an Arab nation and a necessity of a political representation to this fact were spreading. In their writings these theses were overriding those of al-Kawakibi which were in the end reluctant to champion complete political independence for the Arabs from the Turks.<sup>48</sup> They were the outgrowth of a school of writers and first journalists in the Arab world started by those as Butrus al-Bustani.<sup>49</sup>

From the first of them were Negib 'Azoury and Ibrahim al-Yaziji who advocated the thoughts of Rida and Kawakibi by blaming the Turks from being the cause of decline however they did so with a special Arab Christian twist of theirs. For them the Turks did not ruin the Islam but ruined the Arabs who were the greatest of nations. These two thinkers were perhaps the first ones to advocate a total break-up from the Turks and create a secular, liberal nation state that would spread from Iraq to the Suez Canal.<sup>50</sup> They addressed this call to all the Arabs which were equal Muslims and Christians, but their advocating fell on deaf ears, for the concern of most of the Muslims of that time was the still persisting hope for the revival of Islam that was the sole and last guarantee of independence against the west. The role of these thinkers and their contribution to the creation of Arab Nationalism had been overemphasized by George Antonius and prevailed for decades as an official propaganda of Arab Nationalism.<sup>51</sup> This notion has been overcome by many contemporary scholars and it is believed that the concept of Arab Nationalism could hardly have flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the majority.

Another Christian thinker of that time with a slightly different opinion, but with no bigger response was Farah Antun. He was also a proponent of secular nationalism

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<sup>48</sup>Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 25.

<sup>49</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 245.

<sup>50</sup>Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 26-27.

<sup>51</sup>George Antonius. *The Arab Awakening* (London: H. Hamilton, 1938), 98-99.

which was popular among the Christian intelligentsia in that time, but he did not emphasize his Arab nationalist views as often as the others and expressed more less loyalty to the Ottoman sultanate.

His emphasis lied on the relationship between religion and science and from that the resulting relation between the religious and secular forms of government. These ideas brought him into an engagement and controversy with Muhammad ‘Abduh. For him in the soul of a human there were two separate subjects: the intellect and the heart. Derived from that, there were two disciplines, science and religion, in the society. The domain of the religion is the heart and the domain of the science is the intellect. The problem occurs when one of these disciplines claims title on the domain of the other. The two are incompatible, therefore should stay separate.

The same it is not only in this theoretical field of Antun’s work, but also in his political views. There, derived from the previous concept, the spiritual authorities should be separated from the temporal so that total toleration between the men of different faith can be assured.<sup>52</sup>By doing so, the political power would be in secular hands ensuring a state based on freedom, equality and national strength.<sup>53</sup>

This is where his argument with ‘Abduh was rooted. Muhammad ‘Abduh shared his opinions on the importance of modern science, but believed that Islam if purified does not stand in the way of science and serves as a basis for political life. He was also willing to accept some degree of separation between the religious and temporal powers, but regarded the religious authorities to be the legal guardian of the law which should be created not independently but derived from the *sharia*. On Antun’s theory of the state and equality amongst its members he advocated equal positions for non-Muslims but in an essentially Islamic state.<sup>54</sup>

We can spot Antun’s very positive regard to nationalism in general as a force that helps to unify and preserve civilization. There is nothing fanatic in his views and that can be spotted in the way he regards to the other nationalities. Unlike ‘Azoury and al-Yaziji he does not blame the Turks for ruining Islam or the Arabs. On the contrary, the Turks and the Persians and their patriotic spirit were shat maintained the *umma*.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Farah Antun, *FalsafatIbnRushd* (Cairo: Al-Tanwir, 1993), 147-151.

<sup>53</sup>Donald M. Reid, “Farah Antūn: the life and times of a Syrian Christian journalist in Egypt”(Ph.D. diss., Princeton University,1969).

<sup>54</sup>Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 257.

<sup>55</sup>Farah Antun, *FalsafatIbn Rushd*,174.

### 5.3. *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*

The question of the origin of Arab Nationalism is often being raised and different scholars provide different answers, and in certain periods of the study of Arab Nationalism some explanations of this question dominated others. For many years the concept that the Arab nationality for centuries suppressed and marginalized by Islam and the Turks was revived thanks to the contacts of the western Christian missionaries who established their schools among the Christians of the Near East who later led their Muslim compatriots to base the fundamentals of the political life and cornerstone of identity on nationality not on religion. This explanation was given mainly by George Antonius and early western scholars, and was maintained for decades and embodied in the general ideology of Arab Nationalism of the twentieth century.

Opposing to this is the theory that Arab Nationalism sprang from Islamic modernism of Afghani and ‘Abduh.<sup>56</sup> This theory is partly mentioned in the book of Hourani and it holds that when ‘Abduh and his scholars tried to apply the “commonplaces of European society” to their own to restate the principle of Islamic society, the effect was more reaching than they have expected and created the ideology of secular nationalism<sup>57</sup>. What is not hard to understand is that Islamic modernism’s attempt to conciliate the western laws and institutions with Islam and critics of the Islamic religious orders led to increasing scepticism concerning Islam among Muslims.<sup>58</sup> This however does not fully explain why would the thinkers influenced by Islamic modernism switch their focus from the Islamic tradition as the base of the right state and society to nationality when thinkers as Afghani and ‘Abduh clearly denied such principles. This leads us to an assumption that there must have been some other influencing elements which helped the creation of the Arab Nationalism and came from outside the doctrine of Islamic modernism. Perhaps this means that Islamic modernism as a chief factor had its role in emphasizing the role of Arabic in Islam and therefore unwillingly switched the interest of the public to it, however the nationalist doctrines were imported from outside the circle of the modernist ideology.

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<sup>56</sup> See Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*,

<sup>57</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 245.

<sup>58</sup> Dawn, “Origins of Arab Nationalism”, 9.

Other interpretations do not consider the influence of Islamic modernism as a chief factor on the creation of Arab Nationalism. For Sylvia G. Haim and Ellie Kedourie Islamic modernism by implication produced authors of Islamic secularism who were predominantly Ottomanists of secular tendencies. And for these two scholars Arab Nationalism was an importation from the west and established by military officers installed in power after the First World War by the British. Similarly to them another two scholars Sharabi and Tibi also deny the clear connection between Islamic modernism and nationalism stating that Islamic modernism led to the emergence of Islamic secularists whose ideology dominated the Arab Nationalists policy until the interwar period when they were overridden by the ideology of Arab Nationalism. This is where Sharabi and Tibi differ from Haim and Kedourie in the conclusion which gives answer to the question: from wheredid this Arab Nationalism of the twentieth century come? For these two scholars it was the secular Arab Nationalism of the Syrian Christians that overrode the Islamic modernism and Islamic secularism.<sup>59</sup>

Another theory and deffinetly a very common one is that the Arab Nationalism emerged as a reaction to the Turkish Nationalism embodied in the ideology of the Young Turks that got its official political representation in the Committee of Union and Progress. Before the revolution of the Young Turks there had been movements among the Arabs opposing the despotism of the rule of Abdulhamid II. In Egypt such ideas could be expressed more freely in the press, however in Syria and Lebanon they had to move into the hidden sphere of underground and secret societies.

These movements were similarly common among the Turkish speaking people of the Empire who criticized the despotic character of the government too and called for the restoration of the constitution from 1876. So as we can see the Arabs and Turks were on the same boat in this movement and it seemed that they had the same goals and believes. However after the Young Turks came to power it became clear that while they were for constitutional government they were first of all Turkish Nationalists. When the Arabs who till then advocated only loyalty to the Ottoman government and in the sense of the ideology of Arabism which can be regarded to most of them demanded only autonomy, official recognition of Arabic language as a language of bureaucracy and education, decentralisation and representation in the central government realised this nationalist

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<sup>59</sup>Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, 18-19; ElieKedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and other Studies* (London: Cass, 1974); Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals*, 91; BassamTibi, *Arab Nationalism* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1981).

character of the Young Turks they must have suffered a certain shock. For them this only replaces the despotism of Abdulhamid by the despotism of the Young Turks with even worse conditions, because however Abdulhamid's rule was centralised and the Arabs could not participate in it at least his propaganda was that of him as the Sultan of all Muslims and now the centre of focus started to move on to the Turkish element of the empire. This new fact as this theory holds was the main force pushing these Arab thinkers of that time from their ideologies of Ottomanism and Islamic reformism to become Arab Nationalists.<sup>60</sup>

In the ideology of the Young Turks the Arab element was the reason of the backwardness of the empire that kept holding its progress back. On the other side in the ideology of the Arab Nationalism that emerged similar thoughts occurred as that the Turks were the cause of the backwardness of the Arab lands and their conquest started the era of decline while before that the Arabs had a prospering and advanced civilization. Therefore these two contradictory ideologies had as a result the natural movement of the Turkish and Arabic element further apart from each other. However what is being questioned is to what extent did the Arab intellectuals in this period acquire the ideology of Arab Nationalism and how many of them did become Arab Nationalists and how many of them stayed loyal to the ideology of Arabism and the Ottoman Empire. Dawn is providing a detailed study of this issue through the study of the members of societies that were active before 1914 for Arab Nationalist goals. However his study is lacking availability of bibliographical data on all the members, he is suggesting that even after the Young Turk revolution most of the Arab thinkers stayed loyal to the Ottoman Empire and the Arab Nationalists were only a minority.<sup>61</sup>

All these theories in some way reflect the wide scale of the process of formation a political movement which has many diverse factors and influences. We can sum up that except the theories of George Antonius (which is only false in the exaggeration of the role of the Christians, not in the concept itself) all of them have been precisely researched with a solid material and are current until today. The most important factors on the creation of Arab Nationalism therefore were, the evolution of Islamic modernist ideology, the literary revival of the Christian Arabs and their Arab patriotism, reaction on the Turkish nationalism.

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<sup>60</sup>Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, 149-160.

<sup>61</sup>Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism*, 115-120.

## 6. Conclusion

When Tahtawi first landed in Marseille and when he wrote to the eastern public about his experiences and observations of Europe he had no doubts that the Islamic world and western civilization belong to the same modernity and are equal partners that should enjoy its benefits.

However his later generation could not work in such a friendly environment anymore. The west has shown its rapacity and drew precise borders between its civilization and the Oriental world. This required the Islamic thinkers to take a defensive position. The contribution of the main bearers of the doctrine of Islamic modernism, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida, can be summed up in, that they tried to hold together two streams that were already on the way apart from each other. Or they tried to say that none of these two streams are the right answer for the Islamic world and that there is middle way between them which suits the purpose of creating the right society.

The first of these streams were the recognised institutions sunni Islamic learning al-Azhar in Cairo and al-Zaytuna in Tunis, where they had no political power, were not the speakers of their people and foremost were intellectually backward and their minds possessed no virtue.<sup>62</sup>The second stream is represented in the westernizers who held the idea that religion is not compatible with modern society and therefore the basis of law should be the national sentiment. By these means however they destroyed the moral basis of society.

The Islamic modernizers viewed themselves as the one standing in the middle of the two, they had the independence of mind that is necessary to understand both the Islamic law and the modern world. However no matter how much they preached this ideology they could never bring this utopia to practise. The scepticism aroused by them about the traditional religious orders of the Islamic society drew people far from into the hands of secular ideologies. The critics they produced of the west on the other side drew the people into the hands of fundamental Islamic ideologies.

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<sup>62</sup>Rida, *al-Khilafa*, 62.

It seems as if the field of thought of these three masters is blurred between the two counter poles and in the end it totally vanishes. This might be what Reinhard Schulze meant when he said that colonialism snared a trap: “every cultural act of the colonised could be regarded as fundamentalism or westernizing”.<sup>63</sup> Therefore it is no surprise that in the latter generations Afghani, ‘Abduh and Rida are being claimed and regarded as the fathers of both the Islamic fundamentalism movements and the nationalist ones, both the one that they regarded to be the counter poles of the political sphere and both the ones they condemned.

The emergence of Arab Nationalism in the last period studied in my work must be traced to its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the developments of schools of thought mentioned above. When first calls for a national unity based on affiliation of all those who speak the Arabic language were claimed, it were the Syrian Christians who came up with them. They were however a minority and their voices had no impact on a society that could not share such ideas in that time yet. Nevertheless, being the first advocates of this ideology and inspiration for latter generations they should be regarded if not as creator than as forerunners of Arab Nationalism.

Gradually among the Muslim thinkers ideas of Arab nationalism were taking place in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century inspired by both the affiliations of the Islamic modernists to the Arabness of Islam and by the preaching of the Syrian Christians. However on the eve of the First World War representatives of these ideologies were only a minority and their rise was only to come in the inter-war era and their peak represented in the president Jamal Abd al-Naser.

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<sup>63</sup>Reinhard Schulze, *Dějiny Islámského světa ve 20. Století*, 24.

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