

## Chapter 4

### Nationalism and Cultural Diversity

In the wake of the Arab Spring of 2011, anarchy threatened to overwhelm the Middle East and North Africa. A revolt in Syria turned into civil war and the government lost control of its territory. In Libya multiple militias combined to overthrow the Qadhafi regime and then fell into a conflict with each other that threatened the unified existence of the country. The flames of insurgency sparked by the American invasion of Iraq flared once again producing a new entity, the Islamic State, claiming sovereignty over parts of Iraq and Syria as. Yemen fell into civil war with Iran and Saudi Arabia involved on opposite sides of the struggle. Ethnic division and religious sectarianism appeared to be ripping apart these nation-states which had not long ago seemed stable, albeit authoritarian, regimes.

By one line of interpretation, these events represented a continuation in the breakup of the Ottoman Empire that followed World War I.<sup>1</sup> The French and British created boundaries for the states of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine that did not follow the wishes of the peoples concerned or any discernible lines of ethnic or religious division. The problems in Iraq and Syria, the emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan in northern Iraq, and the creation of the Islamic State might be seen as a new phase of post-Ottoman adjustment. The misdeeds of foreigners, including the American invasion of Iraq, become the primary explanation of the anarchy in this analysis.

By another sort of thinking, anarchy emerged from the failure of republican states—among the monarchies only Bahrain underwent serious challenge in the Arab Spring—to generate feelings of national unity sufficient to counterbalance the centrifugal forces of ethnicity, religion, and sect. Only the relatively homogeneous republic of Tunisia, overwhelmingly Arab and Sunni Muslim,

managed to steer the forces of revolt into a constitutional process that won the approval of both secular and Islamist forces. The sheer heterogeneity of the afflicted countries might thus constitute an alternative explanation for these events.

The trouble with putting all the blame on the decisions taken by outside powers after WWI is not that anything but self-interest justified their intervention; it is rather that there was no coherent way to break up what remained of the once Ottoman Empire. There were not and are not logical cultural boundaries to be drawn. Every state in the area is diverse in ethnicity and/or religion, and this fact undercuts the second explanation as well as the first. That is, cultural diversity has not necessarily produced anarchy and instability, and relative homogeneity has not necessarily produced stability, much less liberal democracy. Lebanon seems to illustrate both sides of the argument: it underwent almost two decades of civil war but has offered an example of a relatively liberal, stable Arab state both before and since.

The Middle East and North Africa may be exceptional for the degree of divergence between cultural identities and political boundaries, but some element of divergence exists everywhere. The idea of self-determination invoked by U. S. President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points, intended to guide peace making after World War I, presumed that there are naturally delimited peoples with rights to determine their own destiny as states. Such an idea may come straight from the liberal thinkers who imagined that human beings in a “state of nature” would choose to join each other in a common enterprise. The great Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau all hypothesized a world made up of discrete peoples capable of acting in common to form governments. Early nationalist theory, especially in the German philosophical tradition of the early nineteenth century, suggested that the origins of nations lay deeply rooted in language, history, and culture. Only in building upon such common cultural origins could a people realize its full potential. “Nations were not political constructs, but cultural creations.”<sup>2</sup> By this logic it was thus

more fate than choice that caused the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires to break up.

A more modern version of nationalist theory emphasizes different sorts of necessity. Karl Marx saw nationalism as an unwelcome effort on the part of the international bourgeoisie to segment the working class and protect itself against general revolution. For Ernest Gellner, the British anthropologist, nationalism is a natural product of the changes in society that accompanied the industrial revolution.<sup>3</sup> Urbanization, literacy, improved communication, globalization, and increasing prosperity all contributed to a democratization of politics and the development of nationalist feeling. Neither Marx nor Gellner offers help with explaining why particular nation-states emerged within particular boundaries at particular moments in time.

In a highly influential book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson put the emphasis on individual choice.<sup>4</sup> Why is it that individual human beings come to see themselves as a single nation? Anderson stresses the invention of the printing press and the spread of literacy in the vernacular tongues of Europe as critical to the formation of national identities there. The Americas presented a different model, which he calls Creole nationalism, in which language served as a vehicle but did not distinguish mother countries from their colonies demanding independence. Local officials became important protagonists of nationalism in that context. They pulled people with them toward the notion of a “people.” In Anderson’s view, nationalists produce nations from the cultural, political, and economic resources at their disposal.

Not just any group of individuals can imagine itself as a national community. Every national community, whether in the Middle East and North Africa or elsewhere, reflects a set of historical and geographical constraints that are beyond the control of any single generation. No existing nation can claim it arose by the voluntary actions of its citizens from that hypothetical state of nature dear to liberal thinkers and none can claim it is merely an unchosen product of cultural parameters. Some nations see themselves as products of common language, common ethnicity, common religion,

common history or some combination of those factors. Experience shows that none of those things is necessary much less sufficient. The United States is an example of a country where the only bond seems to be a constitutional document, though that document won initial acceptance from people who must have already felt some element of common identity. Was that a coming together of tribes, as an Israeli author suggests?<sup>5</sup> Is nationalism some mystical quality that emerges among people who live together for long periods<sup>6</sup>? Or is it to be seen as a product of a republican ideology that emerged from the American and French revolutions and then suffered radical amendment in Germany?<sup>7</sup> Political theorists differ on these matters.

They also differ on whether nationalism constitutes an obstacle to domestic tranquility and peace in the world, or a phenomenon that has emerged absolutely essential to the organization of the modern world. Some see efforts to move beyond national identities toward entities such as the European Union as remedies for nationalism, while others, certainly the champions of Brexit, see the nation-state as a bastion of liberty against the menace of “empire” and as a guarantee against incipient anarchy of the sort that can emerge in the absence of effective governance.<sup>8</sup> Without taking the nation-state as an ideal, one can argue for its utility and even indispensability in a world where the disintegration of empires---Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Soviet, British and French--- have left great distrust and distaste for imperialism and a need for an alternative governing formula. However much nationalism suffers attack in the present day as productive of conflict and damaging to the global environment, the nation-state still seems to be the governmental norm in the MENA as in the rest of the world. That was the case after WWI as it is today.

Everywhere nation-states reflect the contingencies of history as well as the choices of leaders and their followers. Problems of conflict between cultural categories and nationalism differ in important ways among states of the region. I see four distinct categories:

- 1) Countries with long histories of living together, hence national identities that have

survived colonialism, revolution, and the ideological proclivities of modern leadership. Iran, Egypt, and Morocco are the prime examples. Cultural diversity does not threaten national unity in these cases.

2) Countries that have used culture in the form of language, ethnicity, or religion as ideology to create stable national entities, but with the devastating side effect of creating alienated minorities. Israel and Turkey illustrate that pattern.

3) Monarchies that have managed to protect themselves from the pressures of universal suffrage and the politicization of feelings and loyalties that go with it; Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and the other Gulf shaykhdoms constitute examples. They have sought to solidify unity despite elements of ethnic and religious diversity by emphasizing cultural practices that cannot be termed nationalistic, if nationalism entails equal citizenship. Blood and kinship are essential to those practices.

4) And then there are the republics where highly politicized nationalism has generated authoritarianism and/or anarchy. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Algeria are the primary candidates for this group, although Tunisia and Lebanon have at some moments fit the authoritarian (Tunisia) and anarchistic (Lebanon) patterns.

### **Nations of Long Duration**

Egypt, Morocco, and Iran set themselves apart from others in the Middle East and North Africa by virtue of their longevity. Ancient Egypt and Iran may not bear much resemblance to the modern countries with those names. But the Iranian Book of Kings, the *Shahnameh*, reminds modern Iranians of their rootedness in territories they still occupy and of their distinction from Turkish-speaking peoples living north of the Oxus River.<sup>9</sup> Persians challenged the Greeks for control of the Fertile Crescent long before Islam emerged on the scene. When the Romans arrived in Egypt, they encountered a long-established civilization whose artifacts continue to impress both modern

Egyptians and the foreign tourists who come to see them. Moroccans date their country from the founding of the Almohad Dynasty in the twelfth century.

Each of these three countries constitutes a nation in the sense that Bernard Yack uses the term: “an intergenerational community based on the affirmation of a shared cultural inheritance.”<sup>10</sup> They were initially communities based in family and tribe that became “nations” in long periods of shared political experience. All have undergone disruptive traumas. Morocco has experienced the rise and fall of dynastic families and, more recently, the imposition of French colonialism, but none of these events compromised the integrity of the state. Separate from Muslim rule in Spain as well as from the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad between 750-1250, Morocco escaped domination by the Ottoman Empire from the fourteenth century to the twentieth. Ottoman domination extended only as far west as Algeria and as far east as Iraq, leaving both Morocco and Iran as autonomous entities in that period. The central governments in both cases governed parts of the territory with enough authority to collect taxes and dominated other parts by virtue of negotiation and conflict with diverse tribal groupings.

All three of these nations felt the impact of Islamic expansion in the seventh century. Muslim armies advanced from the Arabian peninsula into Iran and Egypt shortly after the death of Muhammad in 632 and reached Morocco early in the following century. Islamization followed in the following centuries in all three cases, and Arabization occurred eventually in Egypt and Morocco, though each developed a spoken language that became distinctive. Egyptians complain that they cannot understand Moroccans and vice versa. Persian language and literature survived the Arab conquest and came to flourish under Islamic rule from Baghdad.

Islam became an overlay of territorial identity in all three of these nations. The identification of Islam with Arab rule ended with the effective erosion of Abbasid control after the tenth century; the entire region underwent political fragmentation after 950 until the rise of the Ottomans in the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Fragmentation solidified local, territorial identities across the region. A Shiite Muslim dynasty, the Fatimids, conquered Egypt from the West and ruled that territory and parts of the Levant in the eleventh century, but that caliphate, a rival to the Sunni Abbasids in Baghdad, did not last, and Shiism did not come to dominate the country. When the French conquered Egypt under Napoleon in 1798, they hoped to avoid resistance from the Ottomans, who were nominally the rulers. The Egyptians got no help from the Ottomans, and little help from a foreign elite, the Mamluk militias, who were effectively the rulers of Egypt under Ottoman auspices. Napoleon defeated the Mamluks and negotiated directly with Egyptian notables rather than the Turks. The Ottomans never regained full control of Egypt.

Islam came to predominate in the religious life of Iran, though there remained pockets of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. A family of Muslim mystics, Sufis, from the Caucasus region managed to gain control of central Persia in 1501 and proceeded to make Shiism the national religion, even though mainstream Sunni Islam was then predominant. The Safavids had to import scholarly expertise to carry out their religious revolution, which they may have thought helpful in resisting the power of Ottoman Sunnism to the West. In effect, the Ottomans never managed to conquer Persia, and the Safavids never made significant gains against the Ottomans. The Safavids nonetheless governed a territory roughly similar to that of contemporary Iran. Two other dynasties, the Qajar and the Pahlavi, held power before the revolution of 1979.

Geography favored the Moroccans. The Ottoman tentacles, which reached Algeria in at least a formal sense, never grabbed the Moroccans, and the fall of the Arab caliphate in Spain eliminated any threat from that direction. The High Atlas mountains and the Sahara desert protected Morocco from the south. The kingdom escaped external rule until the French took charge in 1904 after concluding the Entente Cordiale with the British, who accepted the French occupation in return for French recognition of British control in Egypt. Meanwhile, the French had begun the conquest of

Algeria 75 years earlier and had brought that country under a form of direct rule. In Morocco, the French left the dynasty in place. They worked around and through the monarchy, but then, by virtue of serious miscalculation, they unintentionally turned the Moroccan king into a champion of national liberation. By exiling Muhammad V, they cleansed him of the taint of collaboration and enabled the monarchy to lead the country into independence in 1955.

Colonialism served to sharpen local identity in both Morocco and Egypt. In the Moroccan case the primary symbol of Moroccan unity, the monarchy, emerged as a symbol of national resistance. In the case of Egypt, the monarchy also survived into a period of quasi independence but ultimately fell in the revolution of 1952, besmirched by its acceptance of British interference in Egyptian affairs. By then the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, had become one of the most potent and insistent forces for resistance to the British; it saw itself as a champion of Egyptian independence. Then when Gamal Abd al-Nasir asserted Egypt's role as a leader of the Arab world, he did so with clear determination to enhance the national independence he had championed since 1952.

Thanks to the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt led the way in an embrace of political Islam and became, thanks to President Nasir, the principal modern protagonist of Arabism. Unlike other countries where these movements drew support, however, Egypt did not depend upon either Islamism or Arabism to solidify national identity. The Egyptian attraction to these ideas stemmed from the shaky legitimacy of its political institutions. A military dictatorship followed a discredited monarchy propped up by a foreign power in what the regime called the "revolution" of 1952.

The military regime sought legitimacy in popular acclaim and Nasir's charisma without resort to competitive elections. Arabism as ideology subsequently proved useful to Nasir in enhancing his power within the region, and his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, turned toward the Brotherhood and Islamism to escape Nasirism.

Iran escaped the colonialism imposed on Morocco and Egypt but suffered foreign interference from Russia and Great Britain—intervention marked by vast concessions to entrepreneurs and zones of influence—that weakened the monarchy and helped open the way to the birth of a new dynasty, that of the Pahlavis, father and son. The father, Reza Shah (1923–1941), who brought the diverse tribal areas of Iran under central control, saw himself as an Iranian nationalist fending off foreign influence. When he declined to honor allied requests to use Iran for the trans-shipment of goods into the Soviet Union during World War II, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin effectively forced him into exile and put his son on the throne. The son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, depended upon British and American support to surmount a crisis in 1953 and nonetheless saw himself as defending Iranian power and influence in the world. His overthrow in 1979 brought to power a religious regime claiming international leadership of Islam. Yet that regime has proved even more defensive about Iran’s independence and distinctiveness than the dynasties that preceded it. Islam has not created contemporary Iran. The Islamic Republic has created a political version of Shiite Islam---another version of cultural ideology---to reinforce Iran’s coherence as a nation and enhance its power and status in the world.

Cultural homogeneity cannot explain the solidity of national consciousness in any of these three countries. Of these three nations, Iran is the most diverse in terms of language and religion, but it resists defining any of the non-Persian speaking and/or non-Muslim groups as “minorities,” with one exception: the Bahais. In the eyes of the Muslim majority, the Bahais reject Islam by honoring a person, the Bab, who claimed status as a modern prophet. In contrast, Jews and Christians honor prophets acknowledged within the Islamic tradition. Persecuted in Iran ever since the nineteenth century, Bahais now are relatively few in number and scarcely represent a threat to national unity.

**Table 1: States with Long Established Identities**

|                                 | <i>Egypt</i>   | <i>Morocco</i>                                 | <i>Iran</i>  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Dominant Religion</i>        | <i>Sunni Islam</i>   | <i>Sunni Islam</i>                             | <i>Shiite Islam</i>  |
| <i>Dominant Language</i>        | <i>Dialect of Arabic</i>   | <i>Dialect of Arabic</i>                       | <i>Persian</i>   |
| <i>Pre-colonial government</i>  | <i>Monarchy</i>  | <i>Monarchy</i>                                | <i>Monarchy</i>  |
| <i>Colonial experience</i>      | <i>French invasion 1798;<br/>British occupation 1882<br/>to 1922</i> | <i>French occupation 1904-<br/>1955</i>        | <i>Foreign interference but no<br/>occupation in 20<sup>th</sup> century</i> |
| <i>Post-colonial government</i> | <i>Authoritarian Republic</i>  | <i>Monarchy since<br/>independence in 1956</i> | <i>Islamic Republic since<br/>revolution of 1979</i>                         |
| <i>Elements of diversity</i>    | <i>Coptic Christianity 10%<br/>or more.</i>                          | <i>Berber speakers.</i>                        | <i>Non-Persian and non-<br/>Shiite elements. Bahais.</i>                     |
| <i>Regional diversity</i>       | <i>North vs. South</i>   | <i>Cities vs. rural areas</i>                  | <i>Center vs. periphery</i>  |

In Morocco, the monarchy has opened the door to the teaching of a Berber language in public schools. While the French sought to exploit the division between native speakers of colloquial Arabic and Berber dialects, that distinction has not threatened the unity of independent Morocco. The use of multiple languages—colloquial Arabic, modern standard Arabic, French, Berber dialects, and some English—does not appear to affect unity, either. While Islamism has fueled anti-Christian sentiment in Egypt, Coptic Christians consider themselves the most authentic of Egyptians and resist any identification as a minority, although they constitute just 10% of the population. Egypt is also marked by serious geographic division between a more prosperous North and a more rural, poorer South. These cultural divisions affect domestic politics but do not threaten the unity of the country.

### **States Defined by Cultural Ideology**

Two countries, Turkey and Israel, have defined themselves in cultural terms and used ethnic identification to build solid nation-states without the long historical tradition available to Morocco, Egypt, and Iran. Once part of the Ottoman Empire, these states emerged in opposition, or at least indifference, to the 600-year Ottoman tradition, 1300-1918. They both achieved remarkable success in applying a European model of nationalism built upon ancient narratives, common language, and state-building ideologies. Both started with boundaries resulting from war and managed to fashion states that continue to command loyalty from most citizens. One serious cost of the cultural strategies has been, however, the alienation of inhabitants who do not fit the standard definitions of Jewishness and Turkishness. Israel has struggled to integrate its Arab population, Muslim and Christian, just as Turkey has struggled to integrate Kurds and Armenians on the ethnic side and Alevis for the religious. Neither has succeeded.

The resort of these two countries to a model of nationalism founded in cultural ideology owes something to timing and something to the opposition they confronted. Both Zionism and Turkism emerged at the end of the century in which nationalism blossomed in Europe. Greece took its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1921. Italy and Germany became nation-states after 1850. Both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires sought in vain to generate nationalist loyalties and found themselves instead threatened by various groups claiming nationhood. The idea that the world was divided naturally into peoples, and each people had a unique, authentic identity was sweeping the world. An Austrian journalist named Theodore Herzl argued in *The Jewish State*, published in 1896, that the Jews were a people who deserved protection from persecution in a state of their own making. Ziya Gokalp and other Turkish intellectuals came to argue that Turkishness should become the basis for the reform or replacement of the Ottoman state. With the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, reform gave way to replacement, and the war efforts conducted by the Turkish military paved the way for the emergence of a Republic within the confines of the Anatolian

peninsula. The Turks did not hesitate to invoke Islam in their efforts to rally Kurds to the war effort, and religion more than language appears to have sparked the transfers of population between Anatolia and Greece. But the man who emerged as leader of the new republic, Mustapha Kemal, himself a product of the French thinking about the dangers of clericalism, abolished the religious offices of the Ottoman state, drove Sufi brotherhoods underground, and banished religious symbols from the public sphere. Turkism became the rallying cry of the nation.<sup>11</sup>

Both movements looked to language rather than religion as the glue that would hold together the community. While both evoked history, each wished to strike out in a new direction. The Zionists arriving in Palestine from Eastern Europe spoke a mixture of languages, of which Yiddish was the most common, but the Jewish community in Palestine insisted upon the revival of an ancient language, Hebrew, which was otherwise barely spoken except in religious ceremonies. In the very first decade of its existence, Turkey backed away from writing Turkish in the Arabic script and thereby cutting itself off from the language of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish came to replace Persian as the literary language of the elite, and the new republic sought to reduce its dependence on Arabic in religious observances. The radical secularism proclaimed by Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, written as an untouchable principle into the constitution in a country that was overwhelmingly Muslim, reflected anti-religious, anti-Ottoman feelings and paralleled the anti-clericalism then prevalent in Europe, especially France. The early Zionists encountered resistance from many of the Orthodox and ultra-orthodox, who thought the Zionists were trying to push the hand of God toward messianic redemption. And indeed, like the Turks, the Zionist settlers were trying to make their own history by creating a new society. Social idealism and Marxist ideology dominated their thinking.

All nationalism reflects opposition to some other principle of identity. In these two

countries, the nationalist movements opposed oppressive regimes—the Ottoman Empire in the case of the Turks, Russia in the case of the Zionists—but they did not face colonial rule as would many of the Middle Eastern and North African movements that subsequently appeared. The Turks won independence by defeating Greek armies but defined the principal enemy of Turkish nationalism as the Ottoman past, anchored in a dynastic family and Sunni Islam. Abolishing the office of the sultan/caliph, the new state put the management of religion under a directorate of religious affairs. It also closed the lodges of the Sufi brotherhoods, associations engaged in mystical practices and identified with broad popular followings, forcing them underground. The Turks sought to emulate the West by making religion a personal matter. Islam as a system of justice and a symbol of state identity represented the past they were attempting to leave behind.

Although the Ottomans also governed what came to be known as Palestine, the Zionists never saw the Ottomans as their principal adversary. They were escaping oppression in Europe but got help from the British, who issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and then accepted a mandate for Palestine a few years later. In many eyes, the Zionists were colonizers rather than colonized. Still, they ultimately sought liberation from British rule. Zionist terrorists attacked British forces even as they also fought against Palestinian Arabs, but the Zionist culture underpinning nationalism was neither anti-European nor anti-British. It was not anti-Muslim or anti-Christian, either. Rather the dominant strain in Zionism saw itself as creating a new society free of the arbitrary rule of Eastern Europe and free of the anti-Semitism that continued to mark even liberal states in the West. The Zionists fought European injustice, on the one hand, and Arab resistance to their settlement in Arab-dominated Palestine, on the other. The Arabs saw the Zionists as colonists, hostile in culture, racist in attitude, but the Zionists did not see the question as a colonial matter at all.

Unlike the nationalist movements that emerged in subsequent decades, neither Turkey nor

Israel worried about embracing Western culture, which they identified with science, progress, modernity, industrialization, and secular liberal institutions. Zionism resisted only aberrant aspects of Western culture, such as anti-Semitism, and Turkey resisted Europe as a military threat but embraced Western culture---lock, stock and barrel. The new Republic of Turkey sought to legislate Western dress and promote the behavior of Western women. To do anything “a la franca” was not only acceptable but desirable. For the Turkish elites in Ankara and Istanbul nothing could be too modern or too Western; when the military enrolled “unenlightened” boys from the rural areas, it sought to cleanse them of their attitudes toward liquor and women. The Zionist settlers of the pre-state era, especially those idealists of the Kibbutzim, similarly saw themselves leading the country toward radical egalitarianism and disregard for established religion. The legend is that they called the pigs they raised “giraffes,” which reflects at least an awareness that they were violating religious prohibitions on eating pork.

Both movements saw themselves as breaking radically with the recent past by evoking an ancient history known more in mythology than in any concrete way. In the Turkish case, the effort was to remember the strength and valor that brought Turkish speaking peoples out of central Asia to take power under the nominal rule of the Abbasid family in Baghdad and then to assert their dominance in Anatolia. For the Zionists the relevant history was that of the early Jewish commonwealths, not of the diaspora. The story of Masada, massaged and mis-remembered, became a fixture in the training of young Israelis.<sup>12</sup> Eventually the Holocaust, shunned at first as a sign of Jewish weakness, assumed a pivotal role emphasizing Israel’s role in guaranteeing Jewish survival. Memory sharpened the Zionist attachment to Palestine as an area of settlement; later waves of settlers claimed a more particularist attachment to cities and monuments important to religious history in the West Bank territories occupied in 1967.

Both Turkey and Israel showed great reluctance to utilize religion to justify the state. That

reluctance in Turkey reflected a sharp desire to fashion citizens of the Republic who would escape “traditional ways,” which the new regime believed to be anchored in religious practice and prohibitions. The Kemalists saw religion as a drag on their revolutionary ambitions. Only a modernized Islam, cleansed of its mysticism and sanctioned by the state, would be available in mosques and schools, while religious dress and symbols would become inappropriate in the public sphere. Only in the 1950s, as Turkey moved to multi-party democracy, did politicians begin to bring religion back into public discourse. And then in the 1970s there emerged an Islamist movement that explicitly demanded change. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who took power in 2002, has completed the task of reinserting Islam into official Turkish identity without explicitly compromising the radical secularism proclaimed in the constitution.

In Israel the secularism of the founders, many of them socialists with grave reservations about the role of religion in politics, has gradually given way, too, as a result of demographic and ideological developments. The need to accommodate religious Jews into the new state drove David Ben Gurion toward compromise. While his majority would not accept a constitution that proclaimed Judaism as the religion of the state, he did, in a famous letter to the ultra-Orthodox, promise that the state would honor certain religious traditions. As in Turkey, it was democratic politics that pushed Israel toward making religion a more significant aspect of identity. The religious parties turned out to be key allies in almost every coalition government. Moreover, the arrival after independence of Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries, most of them observant Jews, tipped the political balance toward the right and gave the religious parties greater leverage. The electoral success of Shas, a party created by ultra-Orthodox Moroccans with great appeal for traditional Jews from the MENA, epitomized the new focus on religion. In addition, many of the Jews who settled the West Bank after the 1967 war share a fervently religious vision of the state. Prime Minister Netanyahu’s insistence that the Palestinians, who have recognized Israel since 1993, now go beyond

that to recognize Israel “as a Jewish state.” More than one Israeli writer deplors what is described as the decline of “Israeliness” in favor of “Jewishness.”<sup>13</sup>

Turkey’s turn away from exclusive reliance on Turkish culture as the rationale for national identity and toward greater reliance on Islam would appear to open the way toward accommodation

**Table 2: States with Identities Strongly Linked to Culture**

|                                      | <b>Turkey</b>  | <b>Israel</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Dominant religion</b>             | Sunni Islam  | Judaism   |
| <b>Dominant language</b>             | Turkish  | Hebrew  |
| <b>Cultural ideology</b>             | Turkism  | Zionism   |
| <b>Origins</b>                       | From Ottoman Empire; war for independence 1020-23                      | From mandate created after breakup of Ottoman Empire                            |
| <b>Colonial experience</b>           | None after 1923  | British mandate, 1922-1947  |
| <b>Post-colonial government</b>      | Multiparty republican  | Multiparty republican   |
| <b>Elements of Diversity</b>         | Kurds in terms of language; Alevis in religion                         | Arabs in language and Muslims, Christians in religion                           |
| <b>Role of religion in the state</b> | “Secular state” that nonetheless promotes an official version of Islam | Secular state that nonetheless calls itself Jewish and favors Orthodox Judaism. |

of the Kurdish minority, which has sought to protect its own cultural traditions. The Turkish state has authorized the teaching of Kurdish in some schools and permitted the use of that language in certain public functions, but the government has not been able to overcome the economic, social, and political alienation of the Kurds. Elements of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) continued to attack Turkish forces from Iraq and Syria. The government continued to oppose them with force and to maintain a large security force in eastern Anatolia.

Religion opens the way toward agreement with the Kurds but does not guarantee it. It also opens the way toward reconciliation with Turkey’s Ottoman past, something the Erdoğan-led governments have exploited to the full. While the government built an enormous presidential palace

in Ankara, anticipating transformation from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2017, it has also spent billions on enhancement of Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, which is rich in Islamic monuments and memories.

The shift away from Israeliness toward Jewishness in Israeli identity renders ever more problematic the position of some 1.5 million Arabs, Muslims and Christians, who are already citizens of Israel by virtue of living within the so-called Green Line, the boundary that resulted from an armistice agreement after the war of 1948–49. Does this mean that the non-Jewish workers who come from outside the region and who number at least a quarter million cannot become Israelis? Most Jewish Israelis follow some religious traditions, but Israel appears to be the most secular of all countries in the MENA, to judge by survey results. The increasing deference to Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox groups appears to reflect determination to retain control of key religious sites in the West Bank. Yet the government retains an official position in favor of a two-state solution, a position long embraced by the Israeli left from Ben Gurion through Yizhak Rabin via Amos Oz, the novelist who was for fifty years a leading light of Israeli intellectual culture. For the Israeli Left, the primary objective has always been to build, defend, and enhance the state of Israel, not to advance the cause of Judaism.

Turkey and Israel are remarkable for the relative stability they have achieved. That stability has enabled them to advance toward liberal democratic norms. Both have managed to withstand hostility from external and especially internal opposition, building the most powerful armed forces in the region and aligning themselves with the West. Neither polity has resolved, however, the problem of integrating groups that do not identify themselves with the state of which they are citizens. To resolve those problems in permanent fashion there must be some broadening of both national identities. Would the Turks be willing to rename the state Anatolia? Would the Israelis ever accept Israel-Palestine as a label? The current cultural definitions of nationhood, however effective

heretofore, may not prove adequate in the long run.

### **Where National Identity is Weak**

A number of states in the Middle East and North Africa have achieved apparent stability without the benefit of the long histories available to Egypt, Iran, and Morocco and without need for the cultural nationalism characteristic of Turkey and Israel. These states are all monarchies where allegiance to ruling family outweighs national identity in importance. The prime example is Saudi Arabia, where the name of the country is the name of the ruling family. It is more accurate to speak of rulers and subjects rather than national government and equal citizens. In the smaller Gulf shaykhdoms, foreign workers outnumber citizens, and there appears to be little effort to imagine a form of national identity that would merge these two groups. The kingdom of Jordan falls into this category because it is young by comparison with Morocco, Iran, or Egypt, and because it remains a monarchy. A dynastic family of foreign origin has nonetheless managed to hold together a country that combines Bedouin tribes from the east bank of the Jordan and refugees from west of the Jordan, many of whom have retained identity with Palestine. People of Palestinian origin now constitute the majority, but power continues to favor families from the east bank. The glue is only the monarchy, which has been skeptical of Arabism and careful about Islamist claims. Both doctrines threaten to destabilize the regime, which has nonetheless tolerated parliamentary elections and the emergence of an Islamist movement. Jordan has taken enormous strides toward European-style modernization, including elements of political representation, all the while elevating Bedouin culture (now virtually extinct) to epitomize national ideals. Jordanian nationalism has pursued modernizing policies begun under colonial auspices in combination with the cultivation of political traditionalism and cultural distinctiveness.<sup>14</sup>

The emirs of Kuwait have also permitted a limited sort of political development. The royal family has sought to protect itself by enabling women to vote and has reached outside the highly

urban context for support deemed more favorable to monarchy. An elected Parliament has been able to exercise some influence, but Kuwaiti money and American military strength—not nationalism—saved the country from Iraqi invasion in 1990. This city-state, like others to the south, continues to be the property of its sovereign more than it is a possession of its people.

While the cultural practices of these individual monarchies differ from one another, they share several characteristics. They are all Arab, all Muslim and mostly Sunni by majority of citizens (except for Bahrain), all wealthy, though to different degrees—Jordan is the exception—and all dependent on the United States for defense. To the extent they differ in aspects of culture such as rights of women, it is a result of independent histories or because the rulers have set down rules. It is not cultural homogeneity that has produced a unified Saudi Arabia but rather the Saud dynasty that has sought to create cultural uniformity in support of the political institutions. The Saud family tied itself to a puritanical version of Islam called Wahhabism in the eighteenth century; it has sought to impose that sort of Islam on the country as a whole, despite resistance from areas outside the central Najd region. Bahrain is governed by a Sunni family but the island kingdom is majority Shiite, a characteristic that sets it apart from neighboring mini-states. Its distinctiveness reflects the arbitrary verdict of dynastic history and not the action of a cultural affinity group.

Dress and dialects distinguish these countries from each other, but it is difficult to speak of “nations” much less “nationalism” in any of these cases, except in Jordan where the monarchy has explicitly cultivated nationalism and used the tools of modern electoral politics to bridge the differences among peoples of differing origins. Sandwiched among more powerful neighbors—Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq—Jordan has sought to placate all of them in some measure without losing its own independence and identity in the process. Support of Arabism drew Jordan into war in 1948 and again in 1967, but it avoided getting caught up in the rush for Arab unity that brought together Egypt and Syria in 1958. It endured vituperation of Arab neighbors

when it flushed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from its borders in 1970-71 and again when it supported Saddam Hussein in his occupation of Kuwait in deference to Palestinian opinion in Jordan. It invokes the religious credentials of the ruling family, which claims descent from the clan (Hashim) of the Prophet Muhammaed—King Hussein at one point let himself be called al-Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet killed at Karbala in 687, a special hero of Shiites. King

**Table 3 Monarchies without Morocco’s Long History**

|                       | <b>Saudi Arabia</b>                                      | <b>Jordan</b>                                | <b>Gulf Shaykhdoms<br/>(Kuwait, Bahrain,<br/>Qatar, UAE, Oman)</b>   |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Dominant Religion     | Sunni Islam  | Sunni Islam                                  | Sunni Islam (except Bahrain)   |
| Dominant Language     | Dialect of Arabic  | Dialect of Arabic                            | Dialect of Arabic  |
| Origin                | Military conquest, 1900-1930                             | British decision at Cairo Conference of 1920 | Family traditions  |
| Colonialism           | Saud family benefited from British approval and support  | British support                              | British protectorates beginning about 1900 and continuing until 1969 |
| Elements of diversity | Shiite Muslims; Sufi orders; non-citizen migrant workers | Palestinian refugees and immigrants          | Non-citizen migrant workers  |
| Nature of government  | Authoritarian, dynastic monarchy                         | Authoritarian, dynastic monarchy             | Authoritarian, dynastic monarchies                                   |

Hussein and now King Abdullah have permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to achieve representation in Parliament, but they have also prevented that organization from achieving the sort of political influence that would threaten the monarchy. They have used sophisticated electoral techniques to make sure that tribe and family continue to influence the shape of parliament, and not just Islamist organizations. It is the monarchy that defines the nation and the meaning of nationalism in that country, not the nation that has defined the kingdom.

When the British at the Cairo conference of 1920 delineated an area called “Transjordan”

within the mandate for Palestine they had awarded themselves, they permitted the current king's great grandfather, Emir Abdullah, from the Hijaz region of Arabia to govern it, perhaps perhaps in deference to promises made during World War I to Abdullah's father, Sharif Hussein, keeper of the Holy Places in Mecca. Colonial tutelage under the British produced a legal system and then a military force, eventually called the Arab Legion, created an administrative framework for unity within the new territory. A British soldier who led the Arab Legion from 1939 until his dismissal by King Hussein in 1956, John Bagot Glubb, began recruiting troops exclusively among Bedouins. In doing so he launched a tradition of associating the state with nomadism, even as the state sought to settle Bedouins and transform them into agriculturalists. The tradition survived the end of British tutelage and even the departure of Glubb, who equipped his troops with modern weapons and attired them in practical uniforms distinguished by flourishes he deemed consistent with Bedouin traditions. The Bedouin became a symbol of national identity. As Joseph Massad has written, "The new cultural norms are modern inventions dressed up in traditional garb to satisfy nationalism's claims of a national culture for which it stands. The new culture, however, is not so much traditional as it is traditionalized."<sup>15</sup>

At various moments in Jordan nationalism has meant opposition to British imperialism, Israeli aggression, Arab nationalism, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Making opportunity out of crisis after crisis, the kings have cultivated nationalism and the equality of all citizens whether they trace their origins to the East Bank or West Bank and whether they call themselves Arabs, Circassian, Palestinian, or something else. They have also managed to avoid giving up significant authority to elected bodies. Citizens may be equal to each other but the king remains above them.

In a set of Arab republics afflicted in important ways by colonialism and imperialism, cultural identities have proved threatening to political stability. These republics are young states, dominated by a dialect of Arabic, predominantly Muslim, and afflicted by authoritarianism and/or

the threat of anarchy. All these countries have felt the need to define the nation in constitutional documents, common symbols, and historical narratives to support the legitimacy and unity of their states. In doing so they have created or confronted a politicization of cultural categories that has threatened stability and invited authoritarian response. The states are Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya in North Africa, and Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen in the Middle East. All of have experienced periods of civil war except for Tunisia.

Why has Tunisia so far escaped the violence that has marked the recent history of all these other Arab republics? Maybe it deserves to be placed with Morocco, Egypt, and Iran as a country with a long history (as Carthage) dating from Phoenician and Roman times but subject to the Ottoman Empire, at least in theory, from the sixteenth century until the twentieth. The French kept the Ottoman political structure in place and treated it as a protectorate, rather than as it treated colonial Algeria, which for a century became, in theory if not in fact, an integral part of France. The arrangement in Tunisia resembled that of French Morocco, except that independent Tunisia did not have the dynastic continuity available as a rallying point for nationalism in Morocco. When it achieved independence in 1956, Tunisia abolished the dynasty that had once governed as representatives of the Ottomans. Its ties to ancient history, though visible in the ruins at Carthage and the treasures of the Bardo museum, did not constitute the foundation for national mythology available in Iran and Egypt. The Republic of Tunisia thought of itself as a new state.

Unlike the “new” states of Turkey and Israel, however, Tunisia did not attempt to define itself in precise cultural terms. The constitution proclaimed that it was an Arab state and Muslim in religion, but the government of President Habib Bourguiba, president from independence in 1956 until being deposed in 1987, avoided emphasizing either of those points. He shunned the use of culture as ideology. Tunisia was a relatively homogeneous country, overwhelmingly Arab, mostly Sunni Muslim practicing the Malekite school of law. The Berber-speaking minority was minuscule,

and the Christian minority insubstantial. To the disgruntlement of some academicians, the government promoted Arabization in the schools, but French remained important in education, government, and society. Moreover, pressed by President Abd al-Nasir of Egypt to join other Arab states in their hostility to Israel, Bourguiba refused. As for Islam, Bourguiba regarded himself as a reformist interpreter of the religion, who shocked everyone by suggesting that the country could not afford to fast during Ramadan. The need for political and economic development took precedence over religious dogma. Bourguiba encouraged the emergence of an Islamist movement among university students in the 1970s, partly to offset the appeal of Marxism among educated youth, but in the end both he and his successor, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who ruled from 1987 until 2011, suppressed the Islamist movement and proclaimed the secularism of the state.

By suppressing the Islamists, Bourguiba and Ben Ali effectively politicized the division over the role of Islam in the country and created circumstances that could still hamper Tunisia in moving toward liberal democracy. After the overthrow of Ben Ali in 2011, the interim regime liberated some 100,000 Islamist prisoners and gave many of them jobs within the government bureaucracy. The Islamist leader, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, returned from twenty years in exile, and his political party won the first elections held in the wake of 2011, but a constituent assembly dominated by Islamists deadlocked over the place of religion in politics, and the solution that emerged avoided additional constitutional commitment to Islam. The Islamist party, the Nahda, endorsed a new constitution and decided not run a candidate for president, presumably to help depoliticize Islam in the society. The Islamist influence in Parliament and in society remains substantial. Problems abound: terrorism from extremists, criminal activity, lack of sufficient economic growth, inequality between the coastal areas and the interior, but as of this writing, the country has neither descended into anarchy nor reverted to authoritarianism.

Lebanon led the way toward Arab anarchy in 1975 when it disintegrated into a civil war that

lasted thirteen years. Until the United States invaded Iraq, and even before Syria began to unravel in the wake of the Arab Spring and Libya fell into a struggle among militias, Lebanon appeared to be an anomaly in the Arab world. Now the Lebanese experience seems to presage developments of the past decade. It struggled with its sense of national identity, pressed from one side to be part of the Arab world, and from the other to maintain ties with France and Europe; it succumbed to demographic trends, an Islamist movement, and a refugee problem it could not manage. The Lebanese government virtually ceased to exist. Half a dozen militias struggled to secure their territory, and citizens fled by the thousands or hunkered down in apartments equipped with generators, running out for groceries when the bullets ceased to fly. Life resembled what it has become for parts of Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen in recent years.

Did extreme cultural diversity produce conflict in Lebanon? With boundaries carved out of Syria by the French when they assumed the mandate for Syria after World War I, Lebanon had always sheltered a mix of Christians—Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, etc.—and Muslims of both Sunni and Shiite allegiance. A prominent group, the Druse, an sect linked to the Shiite tradition, had battled the Maronites for control of central Lebanon, but it was the Shiites of the rural east and south, the poorer sections of the country, who upset the apple cart by mobilizing politically under the leadership of an Iranian cleric named Musa al-Sadr. Under represented in the political system, the Shiites advanced their claims. Meanwhile, refugees from the Palestinian *nakba* of 1948–49—the war for Israeli independence that caused some 750,000 Arabs to leave their homes—suffered from disdain and neglect in Lebanese camps. Much to the distress of many Lebanese Christians, the Palestinian Liberation Organization complicated the situation by relocating its forces to Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan in 1970-71. In command by virtue of occupying the presidency and profiting from a six-to-five Christian advantage in Parliament, the Maronite Christians tried to hold their advantage against the demands for revision of the system and support

of the Palestinians. An incident of violence set off a civil war in 1975 that lasted more than a decade. Two separate Israeli invasions of Lebanon in that period, both aimed at destroying the PLO and supporting a Maronite-dominated regime, generated further suffering and chaos without achieving their objectives.

The sectarian cleavages in Lebanon became chasms in the thirteen years of civil war. The war ended with an agreement reached at Taif in Saudi Arabia that modified the Lebanese political system, giving Muslims and Christians equal representation in Parliament. Christians kept the presidency, but under the new arrangements the prime minister, always a Sunni Muslim according to the Lebanese constitution, became the chief executive officer. The Shiites retained the speakership in the Parliament. With these modifications, and the Syrian military keeping order, Lebanon gradually moved back toward normality. The devastated capital, Beirut, was rebuilt, and the country began to recover the reputation for tourism and banking that it once enjoyed. People of different religious traditions are once again living with each other. The militias have disbanded, except for Hezbollah, a Shiite organization that continues to fight Israel but also participates in parliamentary elections and supports the governing coalition. The new system almost disintegrated when the principal protagonist of Lebanese recovery, Rafik Hariri, was assassinated in central Beirut in 2005. Many fingers pointed to Syrian intelligence as responsible for blowing up his car, presumably because he had resisted Syrian suggestions. One result was an evacuation of Syrian military personnel from Lebanon. The deterioration of Syria into civil war after 2011 put still further pressures on the fragile polity in Lebanon.

What does it mean to be Lebanese? That has always been a critical question. A president put in power by the Israelis, only to be assassinated shortly thereafter, tried to explain what it meant in an article published in 1985. He invoked history going back to the Bible, five centuries of history as an identifiable unit under the Ottomans, a “way of life that is distinctly Lebanese, with values

distinguishing it from the rest of the Arab world and the Middle East as a whole.”<sup>16</sup> A recent book argues that the Lebanese dialect differs significantly from Modern Standard Arabic and thereby constitutes the defining feature of what it means to be Lebanese.<sup>17</sup> With a population that is

**Table 4 Small Republics with Reasons for Avoiding Cultural Appeal**

|                                 | <b>Tunisia</b>                                | <b>Lebanon</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Size</b>                     | Population of 11 million; 63,000 square miles | Population 6 million; 4,000 square miles  |
| <b>Pre-cultural history</b>     | Part of Ottoman Empire                        | Part of Ottoman Empire  |
| <b>Dominant religion</b>        | Sunni Islam                                   | Islam and Christianity  |
| <b>Dominant language</b>        | Dialect of Arabic                             | Dialect of Arabic   |
| <b>Colonialism</b>              | French protectorate from 1882 until 1956      | French mandate from 1922 until 1943   |
| <b>Post-colonial government</b> | Authoritarian republic from 1956 until 2011.  | Confessional republic, 1943 to 1975.  |
| <b>Political disruption</b>     | Arab Spring of 2011                           | Civil War, 1975 to 1988   |
| <b>Current government</b>       | Secular presidential system                   | Secular parliamentary system  |
| <b>Elements of diversity</b>    | Relatively few                                | Varieties of Islam (Sunni, Shiite, Druse); varieties of Christianity (Maronite, Orthodox, Armenian, etc.) |

probably 40 percent Christian, Islamism lacks national appeal, and Arabism causes many Lebanese to imagine Lebanon being lost in some larger Arab entity. Instead, support for Lebanese nationalism must come from history, humor, food, geography, dialect, and spirit—sentiments that were not strong enough to head off civil war but must be nurtured for lack of a simple definition of the nation.

Among the young republics without long histories of autonomous government, Lebanon

and Tunisia seem relatively fortunate. Tunisia suffered decades of authoritarianism but has now found a path that promises a more liberal democratic future. Lebanon avoided authoritarianism but fell into civil war before recovering a certain stability even as neighboring Syria went up in flames. Five other Arab states—Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, and Yemen—have undergone both authoritarianism and civil war. All are ethnically and/or religiously diverse. All are young states. All have experienced a period of European domination. All have undergone high levels of political violence.

### **Where Cultural Categories Have Exacerbated Conflict**

That cultural diversity does not necessarily produce conflict and instability should already be apparent from the previous discussion of Middle Eastern states. The question is why cultural categories became politicized in these five states to a greater degree and with more disastrous consequences than in other states of the region. Why have governments in these states been unable to deal with ethnic and religious diversity except by authoritarian means? And why, when authoritarianism has collapsed, have these differences produced violence?

The underlying problem in each of these five states has been legitimacy. Political Scientist Michael Hudson argued half a century ago that legitimacy was the fundamental problem of the Arab states.<sup>18</sup> The problem has been most severe in these five young republics. In all five countries the departure of colonial powers and monarchies of greater or lesser stature was supposed to inaugurate popular sovereignty. Governments had no choice but to declare themselves representative of their people, even if they were not chosen by competitive election. They fancied themselves supported by the masses, put more emphasis on education at all levels, and publicized their commitment to popular ideals such as democracy, Arabism, and Islam. Meanwhile they closed down the opportunities for public participation, filled their prisons with dissidents, and kept power through domination of the military and the support of cronies. They popularized politics without providing

institutions through which popular participation could be channeled. In societies without freedom of association and therefore without independent political parties, family, tribe, sect, and ethnic groups became politicized. Regimes tried to support themselves with cultural allegiances and appeals and then encountered opposition organized along cultural lines.

These republics inherited a set of cultural conflicts that owed something to the previous regime, colonial or monarchical. Three of them entered the 1950s as monarchies: Libya, Yemen, and Iraq. One, Algeria, achieved independence after an eight-year struggle with the colonial power, France. Another, Syria, experienced a series of *coups d'état* and revolving-door governments after independence. In Algeria the French had distinguished Arabs from those who spoke Berber dialects as their native language and granted favors to Berbers, seen as more favorable to French rule, that they denied to Arabs. They also looked with favor on popular Islam and local mystics, whom they saw as less hostile than the religious officials (ulama) in the large cities. In Iraq, the Ottomans had long governed the districts of Baghdad and Basra through officials who were overwhelmingly Sunni, not Shiite or Kurdish. The British continued that tradition, and brought in a Sunni monarch to rule the country after WWI. The Yemeni republic emerged from a revolution against a Shiite (Zaidi)<sup>19</sup> monarchy. In Libya, the Italians had destroyed about every vestige of governmental authority. Taking charge of the territory after WWII, the United Nations chose the head of the Sanusiyya Sufi order, Idriss, whose base of support lay with tribes in the eastern province of Tripolitania, to lead the country as king. In Syria, the French recruited heavily for the military among a minority, the Alawis, who came to be a foundation of power for the rule of the Asad family since 1969.

While the cultural divisions in these countries are ancient, imperial intervention accentuated their importance, and the advent of republican rule further perverted the use of cultural identities for political purposes. Weak regimes seeking to bolster their legitimacy tried to define their countries using cultural ideology. Algeria promoted both Arabism and Islam, importing teachers of Arabic

from Egypt and promoting an official version of Islam through appointments and seminars. Syria promoted Arabism but not Islam; it agreed in 1958 to merge with Egypt in the United Arab Republic, only to back away four years later from what the Syrians perceived as Egyptian rule. When the Muslim Brotherhood appeared to be winning support, President Hafiz al-Asad smashed it in Hama by bombing the city and killing some 10,000 people. In Iraq Saddam Hussein invoked Arabism through the Baath party, then invoked ancient Mesopotamia as a narrative to unite Iraq, before eventually embracing Islam in his fight against the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>20</sup> In Libya, Muammar al-Qadhafi dressed in tribal costumes, met visitors in his tent, and invoked both Arabism and Islam as he implemented a fanciful system of governance by the masses, which in theory left him with no power but in fact made him the only source of authority in the country. Sharp differences between Zaidis (Shiites) and Sunnis in Yemen complicated the politics of the republic from the overthrow of the Zaidi monarchy in the 1960s, though Lisa Wedeen has shown that those categories do not correspond to the struggle for control of the country since the Arab Spring. Neither do other categories such as religious vs. secular or north vs. south.<sup>21</sup>

The most striking commonality in the recent history of these five countries is the dominance of the military in politics. In every one of these countries the military has seized power at least once in a coup or revolution; Syria and Iraq experienced a series of coups in the 1950s and 1960s, until Hafiz al-Asad, himself a military officer, and Saddam Hussein, a Baathist thug who advanced with the support of the military, gained power and established relatively stable police states. Because no constitution sanctions change of government by *coup d'état*, every military government suffers immediately from a lack of legitimacy. A military regime needs to turn power back to civilians or to invent rationales for exercising power. With monarchy a thing of the past, each of these regimes resorted to the language of popular sovereignty and arranged elections to affirm their right to represent the people, nonetheless making sure to forestall any genuine challenge or opposition.

Assuring national liberation from colonialism, representing the “authentic” culture of the country, pursuing a compelling ideology in the name of development—these three strategies coupled with rigged elections served to legitimate authoritarian rule. The mix of strategies varied from country to country but nowhere did the mix provide political development toward liberal democracy.

The prominence of the military sets these states apart from Tunisia and Lebanon, where

**Table 5 Republics Where Cultural Categories and Conflict Appear Linked**

|                                 | <b>Libya</b>                               | <b>Algeria</b>                | <b>Syria</b>                       | <b>Iraq</b>  | <b>Yemen</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Dominant Religion</b>        | Sunni Islam                                | Sunni Islam                   | Sunni Islam                        | Shiite Islam                                       | Shiite Islam in the North; Sunnism in the South          |
| <b>Dominant language</b>        | Dialect of Arabic                          | Dialect of Arabic             | Dialect of Arabic                  | Dialect of Arabic                                  | Dialect of Arabic  |
| <b>Pre-colonial history</b>     | Three provinces of Ottoman Empire.         | Ottoman Empire in North       | Ottoman Empire                     | Ottoman Empire                                     | Autonomous kingdom                                       |
| <b>Colonial experience</b>      | Italian colony from 1911-1945              | French colony from 1930-1962. | French mandate from 1922-1943      | British mandate 1922-1928                          | British colony in Aden 1839-1967                         |
| <b>Post-colonial experience</b> | Monarchy 1950-1969; then military republic | Military dominated republic   | Military dominated republic        | Monarchy 2028-1958; then military republic to 2003 | Monarchy until 1959; then republic dominated by military |
| <b>Ideologies</b>               | Qadhafism                                  | Arabism, Islamism, socialism  | Arabism (Baathism)                 | Arabism (Baathism)                                 | Houthism<br>Salafism                                     |
| <b>Elements of Diversity</b>    | Berbers, regional loyalties, East and West | Berbers, Islamists            | Shiites, Kurds, Christians, others | Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds                           | Islamism has been an issue.                              |

post-independence governments kept the military establishments small in proportion to population.

In the other five countries, armies had fought for independence, as in the case of Algeria, or served

the needs of colonial powers, as in Syria and Iraq. The revolution in Yemen resulted in warfare

between the outgoing regime and the republican forces, with both sides bolstered by foreign troops: Abd al-Nasir's Egyptian forces supported the republicans, and Saudi Arabia tried to sustain the monarchy. The Libyan military was scarcely large when Colonel Qadhafi acted against the monarchy in 1969, but oil monies had begun to flow into government coffers. Funding of the military increased dramatically.

Some observers saw military intervention in a positive light. Samuel Huntington cited the example of Turkey after 1925, where military rule had produced a one-party system, and then the single party had eventually opened the door to genuine electoral competition.<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s, a Princeton social scientist, Manfred Halpern, argued that the military in the Middle East was part of a new, educated middle class that would push both economic and political modernization in these countries.<sup>23</sup> The military regime in Egypt attracted favorable comment in the Arab world, inspiring emulation in Libya and in Yemen. Not surprisingly the mood in all these countries at the moment of "revolution" waxed anti-political. Military officers stepped in to abolish corruption, political favoritism, and political parties, but at the same time they faced the decidedly political dilemma of winning popular support. To do that they turned to cultural ideology rather than to competitive elections.

## **Algeria**

If stability of a regime constitutes success, then Algeria has been the most successful of these republics, because the military has ruled the country without interruption since 1965. In that year, the army led by Colonel Houari Boumediene staged a coup against President Ahmed Ben Bella, a revolutionary leader who had spent time in French prisons, led negotiations for independence, and won election as the first president of the new state in 1962. As an officer in the Algerian army on the Western frontier of the country, Boumediene was largely uninvolved in fighting the revolution, but he prevailed over the guerrilla forces of the interior after independence to help spring Ben Bella into

office. Three years later, in 1965, Houari Boumediene replaced Ben Bella in the name of the National Liberation Front (FLN). After the death of Boumediene, an army officer who succeeded him as president, Chadli Benjedid, made the “mistake” in 1990 of opening electoral competition to the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). A group of senior officers responded by removing Benjedid from the presidency and replacing him with a hero of the revolution, Mohamed Boudiaf, who was soon assassinated, perhaps because he appeared to be winning popular favor and challenging military control. The military tightened the reins and met an Islamist uprising with overwhelming force. Only after a restructuring of the army, an enormous expenditure of money, and several years of fighting that took at least 100,000 lives did the military prevail and restore some semblance of security in the country. Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, once Boumediene’s minister of foreign affairs, assumed the presidency in 1999 with broad public support and, by necessity, with the backing of the semi-hidden military forces (*le pouvoir*) that continued to dominate Algeria. Bouteflika remained in the presidency until 2019, even after suffering disabilities that rendered him invisible, when a popular uprising insisted upon his resignation. But the military still appeared to be in control of the political system—perhaps more thoroughly in control with the influential Bouteflika out of the way.

By the time Algeria became independent, Syria had already seceded from the United Arab Republic, which left a single country, Egypt. The heyday of pan-Arabism had already passed, although talks among the Egyptians, Iraqis and Syrians revived in 1963. Algeria did, however, launch a massive campaign to Arabize its schools at every level. That involved importing teachers from abroad, primarily from Egypt. Many of them were members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which had been declared illegal by the Nasir regime in 1954. The Arabization campaign eventually produced a sharp split among Algerians, between those who were products of Arabic studies at the university level and those of the elite who spoke French. The Algerian government and Sonatrach, the state-owned oil company, functioned in French, although most Algerians also spoke colloquial

Arabic. Berber-speaking areas of Algeria, principally the Kabylia region east of Algiers, took special exception to the Arabization campaign seeing it as an affront to their efforts in the revolution and a threat to their influence in the state. Thus the government's decision to Arabize, taken in the name of cultural liberation from France, effectively politicized the language issue and further exacerbated frictions between Arabs and Berbers, already present under colonial rule and visible in the revolution.

The regime also politicized religion by seeking to create a single Islamic orthodoxy to undermine religious officials (ulama) deemed complicit with French rule and to undercut veneration of popular local mystics, who were portrayed as perpetrators of superstition and collaborators with colonialism. The regime organized seminars in the 1970s to promote its official version of Islam. It was a moment, following the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967, when political Islam, or Islamism, was gaining strength all across the Middle East and North Africa. As it emerged in Algeria and elsewhere, it challenged governments, but it was also a product of governmental decisions to exploit religion for political purposes. The shocking election results of 1990, when a tired and fading Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) suffered defeat in Algeria by candidates of the FIS, demonstrated the strength of the Islamist movement. *Le pouvoir*, which pushed Islamization to reinforce post-colonial nationalism, reacted forcefully when the Islamists seemed likely to command a majority in the Parliament and threaten the domination of secular French-speaking elites. Government cancellation of the second round of elections provoked Islamist groups to turn to violence. Civil war ensued.

The politicization of Islam in Algeria, undertaken with the aim of reinforcing national solidarity through an evocation of authenticity, produced instability and chaos. Seen initially as a tool for legitimizing government, Islamization became a weapon of opposition and even a tool for black marketing and general criminality. Islamists claimed that government forces themselves committed the most heinous crimes—nighttime attacks on villages—but Islamists themselves engaged in

wanton violence and created underground networks to smuggle goods into and out of the country. A revamped Algerian military finally prevailed and imposed a new version of public order based in part on negotiation with moderate elements of the Islamist camp. There is some evidence that the Algerian government has since rediscovered the merits of pluralistic Islam. Under Bouteflika the regime continued to fund mainstream mosques and ulama but also tolerated Berber rituals, local “saints,” Sufi Brotherhoods, and non-violent Islamist organizations.<sup>24</sup>

The Algerian government has backed away from socialism, Arabism, and Islamism in order to protect military dominance and to nurture crony capitalism based first and foremost in the oil and gas industry. Algerian culture marked by the Arab-Berber distinction in language, strong differences between urban and rural areas, a plurality of practices considered religious, and a society heavily marked by the colonial imprint has survived despite determined government efforts to change it. With socialism, and particularly the effort to create communal agriculture, the regime sought to change economic behavior. With Arabism the regime sought to minimize the French influence and the standing of Berber tongues, and with Islamism the regime sought to impose a new morality. Far from producing the desired outcomes, these efforts instead brought unforeseen consequences, some of them disastrous.

The military regime has succeeded in holding power in Algeria for fifty years. That distinguishes this country from the other four in this group of republics. Eight years of revolution helped legitimate the military in the early years of independence. And the horrors of the 1990s in Algeria further reinforced the position of the military as custodians of law and order of the need for law and order. The military has not, however, resolved the basic dilemma posed by the republican form of government. Popular sovereignty remains a slogan rather than a reality. Algeria managed to suppress a fledgling uprising in the Arab Spring, but it has not resolved the problems of legitimacy that surfaced there and elsewhere in 2011. To call the Algerian regime successful by virtue of its

survival is to overlook its colossal failure to deal with the Islamist challenge and head off civil war in the 1990s.

## **Libya**

Algeria was the only one of this group of five Arab Republics to control all its territory in 2015. In 2019 the defeat of the Islamic State enabled the Iraqi government to claim authority in all its territory. After the overthrow of Muammar al-Qadhafi, the strong man in Libya who claimed he held no official position in the regime he created and dominated, militias dominated different parts of the country. Centralized administration appeared to have collapsed. The army had fallen apart. The disparate groups struggling for power appeared to reflect tribalism, regionalism, and Islamism. In 2019 the Syrian government still lacked control of a piece of territory in the north, and Yemen remained divided between rival governments.

When the Italians took control of the country in 1911, it was three separate provinces of the Ottoman Empire: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. There were few people and few resources, but the Italians nonetheless met fierce resistance, especially in Cyrenaica, where they fought a powerful Sufi brotherhood, the Sanusiyya. Ultimately victorious, the Italians obliterated even the modest elements of statehood and bureaucracy that characterized these provinces under Ottoman control. Political Scientist Lisa Anderson portrays Italian colonial rule as devastating.<sup>25</sup> After the defeat of Italy in WWII, the United Nations created a trust territory in Libya and then authorized the head of the Sanusiyya, Idriss, to assume kingship in a new state called Libya. He faced a difficult task in trying to unite a country deemed an economic basket case.

Oil transformed the Libyan situation. Suddenly the problem shifted from penury to a question of distributing riches. The monarchy, which had never enjoyed full support in the western province of Tripolitania, fell in 1969 to a coup led by Colonel Qadhafi, who proceeded to nationalize oil production and reshape the political system into a “republic of the masses.” All power

supposedly passed to popular committees. On paper, as described in Qadhafi's Green Book,<sup>26</sup> the system appears simple in concept, but it proved complicated in practice. From the beginning there was suspicion that the committee structure would only serve to mask the power of the military and its leader. As the years wore on, this proved to be the case.

Qadhafi sought to further legitimate his rule by associating with tribalism, Arabism, and Islam. He affected costumes intended to suggest tribal authenticity. He met with visitors in tents and extolled the virtues of his own tribe. He also voiced his support for Arab unity and often reproached fellow Arab leaders for their timidity in confronting Israel. He alienated Egyptian leadership in this fashion, especially when he refused to support President Anwar al-Sadat in the Sinai campaign of 1973 because Sadat would not promise to attack Israel proper. (Sadat's strategy was to seize some territory on the east bank of the Suez canal and force Israel to negotiate a return of the Sinai peninsula, which it had captured in 1967.) By this action and by his behavior at meetings of the Arab League, Qadhafi earned the title "crazy man of Libya." As for Islam, Qadhafi proclaimed himself qualified to define its meaning and political implications.

Qadhafi's effort to wrap his regime in cultural ideology of multiple sorts appeared clownish to outsiders and probably struck many Libyans the same way. By alienating fellow Arab leaders, fomenting terrorist attacks on Western interests, and developing weapons of mass destruction, Qadhafi further weakened his international position. The explosion of an airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, an event traced to Libyan agents, made Qadhafi a criminal in Western eyes. Though Qadhafi later pulled back on his sponsorship of terrorism and his efforts to produce weapons of mass destruction in return for re-admittance to the international arena, he never escaped a reputation for insanity. (In a tent interview with a prominent political scientist Robert Putnam, he suggested that he should be considered a political philosopher in the same lofty category as Plato and Machiavelli.)<sup>27</sup> When rebellion broke out in the Eastern province in 2011, NATO powers

responded by helping the rebels ward off repression. That extraordinary action, surely to be explained in part by long Western impatience with the Libyan leader, sealed the fate of the Qadhafi regime.

The anarchy that ensued sharpened cultural solidarities. Cyrenaica, the base of the former monarchy and home of the Sanusiyya order, led the fight. Berber communities in the mountains south of Tripoli joined the battle. Islamists squared off against secularists. Individual cities established their own militias and sought to extend their influence. Tribalism reasserted itself. What became apparent was the degree to which Qadhafi maximized his personal power by minimalizing the development of institutions. Qadhafi segmented even the military to help minimize the possibility of a *coup d'état* against him. Algeria, Syria, and Iraq all developed significant bureaucratic capability under French and British auspices and augmented those capacities after independence. The Baath party in Iraq and Syria and the FLN in Algeria constituted non-state bureaucracies. The military establishments in these countries constituted bureaucracies themselves. Even Yemen, perhaps the next weakest in institutional terms among these five countries, surpassed Libya in this regard. The disintegration of the Libyan state after the defeat of Qadhafi went beyond the degradation of capability that occurred or might be expected in any of these other states, all of which could be termed bureaucratic-authoritarian. The Qadhafi regime showed a contempt for conventional administration that reflected personal whim and megalomania. Instead of institutions, he promoted a cultural ideology that included elements of Arabism, Islamism, and tribalism coupled with modernistic political utopianism (i.e. the masses will rule.)

### **Syria and Iraq**

With boundaries established by negotiation between Great Britain and France after World War I, these two countries confronted ethnic and sectarian issues from independence. The two European powers drew the boundaries of these states and then gave themselves mandates to foster

self rule. The decisions did not follow from local wishes or reflect any efforts to make boundaries follow cultural lines. Self rule came to Iraq, at least nominally in 1928, and to Syria in 1943. Both have experienced considerable political turbulence since those moments.

Imperial actions after World War I may be a more significant culprit than ethnic and religious diversity in these unhappy outcomes. Confronted in Damascus by a demand for independence under Emir Faisal, the French issued an ultimatum and then occupied the city without regard for Faisal's acceptance of the ultimatum.<sup>28</sup> The British subsequently put Faisal on the throne of Iraq and bombed Iraqi tribes into submission, continuing an Ottoman policy of support for a Sunni Arab minority in ruling a Shi'ite Arab majority. Both the British and the French ignored the pleas of a Kurdish delegation to the Versailles conference, splitting the area occupied by Kurdish speaking tribes between the two countries and letting Turkey and Iran incorporate still others. The British gave Iraq nominal independence in 1928 and enabled it to join the League of Nations, but then re-intervened in Iraq during World War II. France relinquished its hold on Syria during WWII, but not before they had nurtured the emergence of an Alawi minority within the military of Syria, a minority that came to rule a Sunni majority in that country for more than three decades. In short, the imperial powers left deep, distinct footprints in these countries that served to undermine the frameworks for the liberal, representative governments they ostensibly sought to foster.

However arbitrary the imperial decisions about boundaries, it is not clear that there were better solutions—better in the sense that they would have reduced the cultural diversity these countries came to face. Many Arabs did not want to continue to live in a Turkish dominated empire, and the Turks, winning control of the Anatolian peninsula, showed no inclination to spread their rule to the Levant. If Syria had somehow realized its ambitions to recreate Greater Syria, including what became Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan, the result would have been strikingly diverse. Some Palestinians were certainly drawn toward Syrian leadership, but it is not certain that the populations

of these areas would have been more devoted to this solution than they were to the separate states that emerged. How would a Greater Syria have affected the creation of a “Jewish national home in Palestine” as promised in the Balfour Declaration? Would a separate Kurdistan, a Sunni state including eastern Syria and Western Iraq, and a Shiite state in southern Iraq have been more satisfactory? Only significant population transfers would have enabled these states to be roughly homogenous. In which state would the cosmopolitan city of Baghdad have fit? Would one large Arab state including all the Arabian peninsula and the current states of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Israel been more stable and more popular?<sup>29</sup> The Sharif Hussein of Mecca, an Ottoman official in Mecca, sought British support for such an entity, which would still not have included all the Arabic speaking peoples (it excluded Egypt and the rest of North Africa) and it would have included non-Arabs (Kurds, Turkmen), non-Muslims (Christians, Jews) and many sectarian Muslims (Shiites of several sorts.)

As Elie Kedourie observed, nationalism as Europeans had come to understand it made no sense in this region.<sup>30</sup> There were no naturally existing groups of people ready and waiting to become nation-states. Rather, there was a rich diversity of identities, many of which began even before 1900 to become politicized and thereby nationalized. European ideas and European examples showed the way. Arab groups emerged in various territories to claim that they were either one Arab people or a particular subset of the Arab people. Some Muslims, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, argued that only a state in which Muslims came together could effectively fend off European hegemony. Other Muslims, such as Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, came to see Islam as the factor that could unite and energize his fatherland. The Kurds gathered support for a Kurdish state. The Jews were organizing through the Zionist Organization to promote settlement and state-building in Palestine. Woodrow Wilson’s articulation of the right to self-determination stoked the nationalist fires, although it was never clear how he would define a people

who enjoyed such a right.

The cultural diversity of Syria and Iraq long pre-dated their independent existences as nation-states, but that diversity acquired additional significance when decision making shifted from Istanbul, Paris, and London to Damascus and Baghdad. Neither country came to independence behind a mass party that bridged cultural lines. Iraq began with a king of foreign origin who didn't hesitate to bring other Sunni Arabs into high administrative positions. Syria began with a set of small parties struggling for power. Both governments half-heartedly supported war against the fledgling state of Israel, and both suffered embarrassment from the loss. The military had already stepped to the fore in Iraq before WWII, only to be pushed back in line by a fresh British intervention. The first in a series of coups d'état occurred in Syria within the year of the Arab defeat in Palestine. Within a decade Iraq had undergone a bloody revolution that destroyed the monarchy originally installed by the British and brought the military to power there, too. Both countries were at that point republics struggling to find a source of legitimacy for governments whose hold on power depended simply on force.

Baathism represented an appeal to pan-Arab ideology that should be understood in that light. The Baath party proposed an answer to the questions: Who is an Iraqi? Who is a Syrian? The Baathist answer was that Syrians and Iraqis were, beneath it all, Arabs and therefore a part of a glorious history that predated Islam, encompassed Christians as well as Muslims, and included a commitment to socialism. Though emphasizing that Arabs were Arabs before they were Muslims, the Baathists also accepted Islam as an important element in Arab culture. With a secularist narrative, they sought to blur the lines between Shiites and Sunnis as well as between Christian and Muslim. By bringing all Arabs together, Baathism promised a remedy for imperial exploitation and the humiliation suffered in Palestine.

President Nasir of Egypt became the principal protagonist of pan-Arabism after his success

in surviving the combined attack of Israel, France, and Great Britain in 1956. He did not win a battle but the incompetence of the French and the British coupled with support from the United States and the Soviet Union doomed the attack. Already Nasir had attracted support in other Arab countries for his resistance to the West and the Baghdad pact for the defense of the Middle East. He trumpeted his successes and his dreams on his radio station, the Voice of the Arabs, which reached into every corner of the region. When he reached agreement with Syria in 1958 to form the United Arab Republic, he expected other states to join. The monarchy in Iraq, backed by the West, fell that same year, and Lebanon, another bastion of the West, seemed on the verge of revolution. But then the United States sent troops into Lebanon, and the British intervened in similar fashion to stabilize another ally, Jordan. Revolution in Iraq brought to power an army officer named Abd al-Karim Qasim, who did not share the pan-Arab ambitions of the Egyptians and Syrians. Instead Qasim sought to solidify Iraqi nationalism in terms that appealed to the non-Arab Kurds and to the Shiites, who tended to identify pan-Arab initiatives with Sunnism.

Dawisha blames imperialism for the rapid demise of pan-Arabism.<sup>31</sup> That is surely part of the explanation. Nasir's charisma made him a plausible executor for the pan-Arab ambitions nourished in several quarters for half a century, but he was also a reason for the failure of those ambitions. Nasir's involvement triggered alarm in the West about the prospect of a powerful Arab nation. His popularity also frightened other Arab leaders, and the example of the United Arab Republic, which translated into an Egyptian takeover of Syria, did not reassure them. When Nasir intervened to support revolution in Yemen in 1962, he met stiff resistance from Saudi Arabia. The oil-rich gulf states had never been enthusiastic about pan-Arabism, seeing it as Nasir's plan to dominate the region and redistribute their wealth to the poorer Arab countries. Far from bringing Syria and Iraq together, pan-Arab ideology ended up separating them. Each country came to be dominated by authoritarian leaders, Hafiz al-Asad and Saddam Hussein, both claiming to be part of

the Baath party and talking as if they were part of the same Arab nation. But the two governments found multiple reasons, including disputes over Euphrates water and the transport of oil, to oppose each other's actions. When Saddam Hussein blundered his way into war with Iran in 1980, Hafiz al-Assad refused to support his fellow Arab. That decision ended any pretense of unity between these two countries.

As law and order broke down in Iraq after the U.S. occupation of the country in 2003 and in Syria with the assault on the Assad regime in 2011, cultural identification assumed greater significance in both countries. Many Sunni Iraqis suffered loss of the employment and standing they had enjoyed under Saddam Hussein. Shiite politicians gloated in their new power and willfully neglected Sunni alienation, which turned violent. Kurds escaped the Shiite domination by establishing their own regime in the North without need for official independence. Alawis and other minorities in Syria clung to a regime that many probably detested for fear of a new Sunni state in which they might be punished for existing. The flow of refugees from both countries reflected a general state of insecurity and economic hardship as well as tensions created by a sudden emphasis on cultural identities.

It was authoritarian rule that destroyed these two nation-states. To insist, instead, that cultural conflict was the underlying cause, one would have to argue that only authoritarian rule could have held them together. One would have to argue that prison, persecution, and torture are essential to the maintenance of order in states so divided by cultural allegiances. It is more plausible to blame the breakdown on the very selfishness, favoritism, and clumsiness of these authoritarian regimes, which protected minorities when it served their purposes and punished them when it did not. Both regimes sought to minimize the importance of categories. Both represented societies in which a minority, Alawi in Syria and Sunni in Iraq, acquired power, wealth, and privilege out of proportion with its numbers. Neither of these regimes can be held up as a model of non-liberal

multiculturalism. Whether these states can be put back together is another matter, but it is conceivable that different leadership could have constructed stable political entities without the violence and abuses that brought down these regimes. Cultural conflict is more the result than the cause of these tragedies.

### **Ethnic and Religious Fractionalization**

To measure the degree to which ethnicity and religion divide or unite a country is not a simple matter. Deciding what constitutes a separate language group and what constitutes a religious divide is not easy. As a result, all efforts to turn these concepts into indexes must be regarded with some caution. Indexes of multiculturalism nonetheless tend to further weaken the idea that cultural fragmentation is a primary cause of political disintegration in the Middle East and North Africa.

**Table 6 Ethnic and Cultural Fractionalization**

| <b>Group 1</b>  | <b>Ethnic Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Cultural Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Iran            | 0.669              | 4           | 0.542                | 2           |
| Morocco         | 0.479              | 11          | 0.36                 | 7           |
| Egypt           | 0.164              | 15          | 0                    | 18          |
| <b>Group 2</b>  |                    |             |                      |             |
| <b>Group 2</b>  | <b>Ethnic Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Cultural Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
| Israel          | 0.526              | 9           | 0.246                | 10          |
| Turkey          | 0.299              | 14          | 0.299                | 9           |
| <b>Group 3</b>  |                    |             |                      |             |
| <b>Group 3</b>  | <b>Ethnic Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Cultural Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
| UAE             | 0.737              | 2           | 0.65                 | 1           |
| Kuwait          | 0.708              | 3           | 0.54                 | 3           |
| Saudi Arabia    | 0.553              | 6           | 0.413                | 5           |
| Bahrain         | 0.551              | 7           | 0.46                 | 4           |
| Jordan          | 0.509              | 10          | 0.049                | 16          |
| Oman            | 0.439              | 12          | 0.404                | 6           |
| <b>Group 4A</b> |                    |             |                      |             |
| <b>Group 4A</b> | <b>Ethnic Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Cultural Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
| Lebanon         | 0.78               | 1           | 0.195                | 13          |
| Tunisia         | 0.039              | 18          | 0.033                | 17          |
| <b>Group 4B</b> |                    |             |                      |             |
| <b>Group 4B</b> | <b>Ethnic Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Cultural Frac</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
| Iraq            | 0.549              | 8           | 0.355                | 8           |
| Algeria         | 0.32               | 13          | 0.237                | 11          |
| Libya           | 0.151              | 16          | 0.127                | 14          |
| Yemen           | 0.078              | 17          | 0.078                | 15          |
| Syria           | 0.581              | 5           | 0.235                | 12          |

Source: James D. Fearon, "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country," *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (195-222), June, 2003. Rank means rank among these 18 countries. "Ethnic fractionalization" represents religious as well as linguistic fractionalization; it varies with numbers of groups and their relative size. "Cultural fractionalization" seeks to measure distance between groups or their relative similarity. Lebanon thus appears highly fractured on "ethnicity" but ethno-religious groups share language and differ in varieties of Christianity or Islam.

The states with the longest common histories are one of the most fractured, Iran, and one of the least diverse, Egypt. The younger monarchies, which have maintained a certain stability in turbulent times on the basis of dynastic identity, represent some of the most divided societies in the region as a result of their use of foreign labor. Lebanon and Tunisia have avoided authoritarianism

in the one case and civil war in the other; they are similar in size but utterly dissimilar in the degree of ethnic and cultural fragmentation. As for those republics suffering the greatest devastation since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and then the Arab Spring of 2011, the numbers confirm the fractured nature of two of them and confirm the relative homogeneity of the other three. These numbers tend to confirm what common sense suggests: sharp division of a territory in terms of language and religion may complicate but does not prevent the establishment of a strong national community. The numbers also indicate that ethno-cultural homogeneity cannot guarantee national solidarity.

Contingency has not been friendly to the development of national identities in the Middle East and North Africa. The application of the nationalist idea has worked most successfully in states with pre-nationalist identities. Turkey and Israel have applied the cultural version of nationalism with considerable effectiveness, but not without alienating cultural minorities. Most of the monarchies, swamped by armies of foreign workers, have postponed creation of national communities while most of the republics have struggled to fashion strong identities that are both inclusive of cultural minorities and exclusive of majority diasporas. Arabism and Islamism have been of limited utility, because they divide societies internally and reach beyond any particular set of borders.

It is easy to accept Elie Kedourie's point that the European conception of nationalism makes no sense in the Middle East and North Africa, but does it make sense anywhere?<sup>32</sup> An element of arbitrariness marks the boundaries of all states, some more severely than others. Is there any reason to prefer those nations that appear more "natural" to those whose arbitrariness is more obvious? Yack writes: "Nature unites rather than divides. It just does not give us, in itself, a moral reason for prioritizing natural over contingent divisions in imagining community."<sup>33</sup> The fact is, though, that these artificial creations have great influence over the behavior of human beings. When they fail, they cause great suffering, and when they succeed to the point of attacking neighbors or persecuting minorities, they cause great suffering, too. Yack writes: "Nationalism is morally problematic because

it disposes people to harm their communal rivals in ways that, absent its influence, they would condemn as unjust or inhumane or both.”<sup>34</sup>

Many in the Middle East and North Africa see liberal democracy and the campaign for universal human rights as products of Western culture. Many fewer have been those who have portrayed nationalism as similarly tainted by its association with European imperialism. Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb have argued that Islam could not sanction distinctions built on race, ethnicity, language, or nationality, thus challenging the conceptions of Arab nationalism and Egyptian nationalism characteristic of Nasir’s regime. Qutb suggested that humanity would only enjoy genuine freedom under Islamic law, globally enforced. Osama Bin Laden, having failed to overthrow the Saudi monarchy, similarly talked about an all-encompassing Islamic community, the *umma*. These appear to be the exceptions. In general, the nation-state appears indispensable even among those suspicious of universal rights and liberal democracy, and the nation-state marked by cultural division appears increasingly indispensable or inevitable, as even Europeans are discovering. Everywhere the fit between culture and nationalism is uncomfortable. And there is similarly tension between conceptions of universal human rights and nationalist particularism.

# # #

## Notes

- 
1. John Landis, “ISIS and the Future of Iraq and the Levant,” panel, Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D. C., November 23, 2014.
  2. Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: from Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 52. Sati al-Husri, perhaps the leading early theorist of Arab nationalism, drew on the German school of thought.
  3. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
  4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).
  5. Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).
  6. Liah Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2001) chronicles the growth of nationalist sentiment in Britain well before the French Revolution..
  7. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) treats nationalism as ideology.
  8. Pierre Manent, *Democracy without Nations?* Trans. Paul Seaton, (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2007) is an eloquent defender of the nation-state. Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, and Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) also make strong arguments in defense of nationalism.
  9. Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2007).
  10. Bernard Yack, *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 93.

- 
7. See Robert Lee, *Religion and Politics in the Middle East: Identity, Ideology, Institutions, and Attitudes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Westview, 2014), Chapters 3 and 4, for somewhat more detailed treatment of the Turkish and Israeli cases.
8. James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
9. Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.)
14. Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
15. Massad, 7.
16. Amine Gemayel, "Lebanon the Prospects: The Price and the Promise," *Foreign Affairs* (March 1, 1985), 760.
17. See Franck Salameh, *Language, Memory and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010).
18. Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
12. Zaidis believe that there were five designated successors to Muhammad's leadership of the Islamic community starting with his cousin and son-in-law Ali.
20. See Eric Davis, *Memories of state: politics, history, and collective identity in modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
15. Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 152 ff.
22. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
23. Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton:

---

Princeton University Press, 1963.

24. Judith Scheele, "Recycling Baraka," *Comparative Studies in Society & History*. 49:2 April 2007, 308-328.

25. Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

26. Muammar Al Qaddafi, *The Green Book* (Tripoli: World Center for Studies and Research of the Green Book, 1987).

27. Robert D. Putnam, "With Libya's Megalomaniac 'Philosopher-King' — In a tent in the desert, Gadhafi explained why he could never tolerate any challenge to his supreme will," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition, February 6, 2011: C.3.

28. Abu Khaldun Sati al-Husri, *The day of Maysalun; a page from the modern history of the Arabs*, tr. Sidney Glazer (Washington, Middle East Institute, 1966).

29. See appendices in George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: the story of the Arab national movement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1946).

30. Kedourie, *Nationalism*.

31. Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 311.

32. Kedourie, *Nationalism*.

33. Yack, 263 or 264.

34. Yack, 230.