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# Arab Nationalism in Syria

**Abstract:** Syria is one of many countries in the Middle East diverse in terms of religion, nationality, and ethnicity. Internal divisions emerged when Syria reclaimed independence in 1946, but the differences inside Syrian society have become a taboo. One of the reasons for that was Arab nationalism, which claimed that they were all Arabs. The Syrian authorities managed to maintain the appearance of national homogeneity owing to these claims. This article aims to show the uniqueness of Arab nationalism, which is not characteristic of one country but of numerous states sharing a common past, language, and their citizens belonging to the family of the Arab nation. As a case study for Syria, this article analyses the basic concepts relevant to the subject (nationalism, the nation from the perspective of Islam, and Arab thought), the roots of pan-Arabism in Syria and its presence in the public and legal space. It also attempts to demonstrate that Arab nationalism helped the Syrian authorities (represented by the Alawite minority) blur national, ethnic, and religious differences and thus preserve the unity of society and state.

**Keywords:** *Syria, pan-Arabism, Arab nationalism, Alawites*

## Introduction

A shared language, culture, or religion are no longer sufficient elements to guarantee the unity of Arabs nowadays. The Arab states function in two parallel worlds. In one of them, the unity of language, culture, and religion are important. In the other, what matters is the *raison d'être* of individual countries. This division requires pan-Arabists/Arab nationalists to play conflicting roles. On the one hand, they support the nation-state and strive to maintain its sovereignty; on the other, they oppose this idea and are prepared to violate the

territorial integrity of other states to create a single Arab state in the name of ideology. This discrepancy shows that the connotation of pan-Arabism has changed over the centuries. While, in the nineteenth century, Arab nationalists sought to awaken their nation and revive its identity while fighting for its autonomy within the Ottoman state, these issues lost their importance in the twentieth century. It was because of the emergence of new Arab states and transformations in Arab consciousness. At the beginning of the development of the idea of nationalism, it was in the common interest to survive and maintain one's own culture and language in confrontation with other nations. Then, twentieth-century Arab nationalism was used to fight colonialism, gain and maintain power (e.g., in Syria), and build a single Arab state.

Syria was among the many Arab states that shook off the yoke of colonialism. It gained independence in 1946. Syria is not a homogeneous country in terms of nationality (as well as religion and ethnicity). Apart from Arabs, who constitute the majority of Syrian society, Kurds, Jews, Turkmen, Albanians, Circassians and Armenians also live within the state borders<sup>1</sup>. They are not part of the family of the Arab nation, which, according to Hezem Zaki Nuseibeh (1956, p. 9), descends from one of Noah's sons, Shem, and is named after him as Semites. Importantly, Syrians are not only Muslim but also Christian, Jewish and Yazidi.

Resorting to Arab nationalism in Syria is related to the fact that this ideology was born within today's Syria, that is, in the nineteenth-century Levant, which also included the territories of modern Lebanon. Another reason to address this issue is the origin of one of the article's authors, born in the Syrian Arab Republic. This article aims to analyse the impact of pan-Arabism on Syria's political and social situation and on the society and state in terms of maintaining unity. The following questions are posed in the article: 1) what is pan-Arabism?, 2) how pan-Arabism took shape in Syria?, 3) what instruments have the Syrian authorities used to maintain the unity of the state and society? The authors put forward the thesis that pan-Arabism has helped the Syrian authorities (represented by the Alawite minority) to blur national, ethnic and religious differences and thus maintain the unity of society and the state.

The interdisciplinary approach to the studied phenomenon has enforced the use of research methods characteristic of legal sciences (dogmatic method) and political science (decision-making). The article was also based on observation, which is one of the research techniques. Reaching out has to do with the fact that some of the phenomena described were directly observed by one of the authors. It is especially true of the analysis of the Arabization of Kurds in Syria, which is related to the author's Kurdish origin and the presence of the pan-Arab ideology in the social space.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates indicate that the number of Kurds in Syria ranges from 3 to 3.5 million, Jews – 50, Turkmen – 100-200 thousand, Albanians – 10 thousand, Cherkists – about 80 thousand, and Armenians between 35 thousand and 100 thousand (Jomma, 2018, pp. 144, 153, 158, 161, 166).

## Theoretical Categories

Arab nationalism as an ideology glorifies the Arab people (*al-umma*) and seeks to unite them by creating a single state for them. The following Arabic terms are used to denote it: *al-qawmiya al-arabiya* (Arab nationalism), *al-oruba* (Arabism), *al-ittihad al-arabi* (Arab union), *al-wataniya* (state patriotism) or *al-wahda al-arabiya* (Arab unity). This article uses the terms ‘Arab nationalism’ and ‘pan-Arabism’ interchangeably. The article’s authors adopted this solution because these concepts should not be used separately in the context of building Arab unity. They are coherent because the political existence of the state is inextricably linked with the culture and past of its inhabitants.

Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh (1956, p. 211) says: “The theory of nationalism is a theory of human life. Nationalism encompasses the total experiences, aspirations and strivings of nations. It must account for the motivations, the desires, the needs and fears that spur nations to action”. Regarding Arab nationalism, we can talk about the experience of individual peoples inhabiting Arab states, which will form the Arab nation only due to their merging. The theory of Arab nationalism is rooted in the confrontation of the Arab world with the progress, culture and science of the West, followed by the need for the Arabs’ own rebirth and opposition to modern European civilisation. Pan-Arab ideologists have taken it upon themselves to create solidarity among Arabs as a path to cultural, political and territorial unity. Regardless of their religion (Christianity or Islam), the representatives of Arab nationalism have been united by the conviction that they share their origin, history and language. The only difference between them is their approach to the importance of religion in pan-Arabism. While Christians have abandoned faith as an essential factor in ideology (e.g., Butrus al-Bustani, Nasif al-Yaziji and Naguib Azoury), Muslims have emphasised Islam (e.g., Muhammad Rashid Rida, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, and Abdul Hamid al-Zahrawi). The latter, however, did not form a coherent group. For example, Sati al-Husri (a pan-Arab theorist) had a different approach to the issue. He believed that Arabs share a language and a territory (the Arab state) (Jomma, 2018, p. 47).

These differences brought about the emergence of two currents of nationalism – the Islamist and the secular one (Marszałek-Kawa & Plecka, 2019). The representatives of the former pursued the establishment of one caliphate based on the tenets of Islam and the concept of a Muslim nation. Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855–1902), Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) and Muhammad Abduh (1949–1905) believed that Arabs, as Muslims, were best qualified to restore the glory of Islam and revive Arabness in an Islamic context (Dawn, 1973, p. 84). Through religious revival, they wanted to regain political greatness. The supporters of this current were conservative and opposed the Western understanding of the nation in isolation from religion.

On the other side, there were modernists. Following concepts borrowed from Western Europe, they opted for establishing secular nation-states. They demanded that the notion of *al-umma* be detached from its religious background, which is why the modern discourse uses

the terms *al-umma al-islamiya* and *al-umma al-arabiya*, i.e., the Muslim nation and the Arab nation, respectively. The Christian supporters of pan-Arabism advocated the establishment of a strong national community that would allow them to function within one community on an equal footing with Muslims, provided that national ties were stronger than religious animosities (Sekerdej, 2015, p. 13). This ideology was to protect them against persecution by the followers of Islam.

Nationalism puts the nation at the centre of interest. From the perspective of both Islam and Arab thought, the concept of nation differs from how it is understood in modern European thought. From the Islamic point of view, the concept of a nation is not constituted by place, origin, common language, tribe or country. The only essential factor is faith (Achour, 2005, p. 208). Faith is what binds, despite the coexisting differences, and sets one common goal for the entire community. Faith takes precedence over blood ties, geographical location and economic status. Nation understood in this way is called *al-umma*, a word derived from the Arabic *umm*, or 'mother'. *Al-umma* is therefore a religious community based on the principles of equality and social justice. It is mentioned in the Quran, in which this concept has many shades (Jomma, 2018, pp. 30–31). From an Islamic perspective, the nation is not culturally, ethnically or linguistically homogeneous. It comprises different peoples and tribes united by a common religion. For those who understand the concept of nation in this way, the Arab nation is unique because it is blessed by Allah. Its uniqueness also results from the fact that the Prophet was an Arab, and the Quran, or the holy book, was written in Arabic.

Arab secular thinkers represented a different approach to the interpretation of nation. One of them was the philosopher Muhammad ibn al-Farabi (870–950). For him, the religious factor was one of the many aspects binding the Arab community together, while language played an important role. He also included territory, common history, interests and fear, among other elements constituting the nation (al-Tureiki, 2014). The secular approach to the nation was also represented by Abu Rayhan Muhammad al-Biruni (973–1048) and Abu al-Hasan al-Mas'udi (c. 896–956). In this approach, the Arab nation is a community of Christians, Muslims and followers of other faiths. This attitude gave Christians a chance to emerge from the shadows and become fully-fledged citizens of the state.

The concept of the Muslim nation defined from the religious perspective (*umma*) is anachronistic in the modern world. The term *al-umma* distinguishes a higher-order organised community that constitutes one organism – a common state. However, at the level of individual states, we deal with people whose members share their origin, history, traditions, aspirations, language, faith and fate. Another term used to describe the nation besides *umma*, is *al-qawmiya*. Sometimes they are used synonymously. In general, *al-qawmiya* means a lower-level community than *al-umma* that has not formed its own state. It comprises the citizens of various Arab states and national minorities living within a given state, who will become *umma* only after reunification. Etymologically, the word *al-qawmiya* is associated with other terms relevant to the issue in question. These include *ad-daula al-qawmiya* and

*ad-daula al-wataniya*. The former is understood in terms of the nation-state that will emerge after the unification of all Arab states. The latter stands for the homeland.

In addition to these terms, the term *ash-shaab* is also frequent in Arab countries, which can be translated as a people. It is often used to refer to all citizens of a given state. For example, the phrase the 'Syrian people' (*ash-shaab as-suri*) features in the Syrian Constitution of 2012 (Constitution, 2012).

## The Origins of Pan-Arabism in Syria

Pan-Arabism emerged as an Arab awakening or an Arab revolution (Dawn, 1973, p. 2). Numerous authors have analysed the historical development of this ideology, including George Antonius (1939), Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh (1956), C. Erwin Dawn (1973), Nur al-Din Zain (1968), Abdul Aziz al-Duri (2008) and Sati al-Husri (1985).

According to Georg Antonius, Arab nationalism emerged in the times of Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha (Antonius, 1939). He and his son, Ibrahim Pasha, sought to transform the territories they had conquered into one kingdom, embracing the people sharing the same origin, language and national awareness (Antonius, 1939, pp. 27–28). Ibrahim Pasha's rule in Syria brought economic development and a new order based on the protection of life, property and equality of faith (Antonius, 1939, p. 29). Religious tolerance invited Christian missions (French Jesuits and American Presbyterians) to these territories (Antonius, 1939, pp. 33–34). They brought schools (universities), associations, printing houses and new ideas with them. When Syria came under Abdul Hamid II, Syrian supporters of the Arab national movement began to form secret associations (1875). They called for a revolt against the Turks, granting independence to Syria (based on the unity of Syria and Lebanon) and recognition of the Arabic language as official (Antonius, 1939, p. 84). They continued their social activity after the emergence of the Young Turk Movement, being active both in official and clandestine organisations (the Literary Club – *al-Muntada al-Adabi* [1909], *al-Qahtaniya* [1909], the Young Arab Society – *Jam'iyat al-'Arabiya al-Fatat* [1911], the Ottoman Party for Administrative Decentralisation – *Hizb al-lamarkaziya al-idariya al'Uthmani* [1913]). During meetings, intellectuals awoke Arab aspirations. Their expectations were expressed in the postulates formulated at the Arab Congress organised in Paris in 1913 and included, among other things, the granting of political rights within the Ottoman state, participation in power, the autonomy of Arab *vilayets*, and the recognition of the Arabic language as official alongside Turkish in the House of Ottoman deputies, Arab *vilayets* and the regional military service (Qararat, 1913). Interestingly, after the end of World War I, Syrian nationalism was formed, alongside Arab nationalism, the supporters of which promoted the slogan 'Syria for the Syrians'. It emerged due to the increased activity of Iraqis in the officer corps and their influence on local politics (Dawisha, 2016, p. 46). In the 1930s, supporters of Syrian nationalism gathered in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party founded by Antun Sa'ad.

The General Syrian Congress, convened in Damascus in May 1919, marked an important event in the development of pan-Arabism. The Congress sought to work out a position on the future of Greater Syria to be presented to the American commission chaired by Henry King and Charles Crane. The Congress adopted a 10-point resolution containing postulates characteristic of the pan-Arab ideology, including, among other things, (1) recognition of the independence of Syria and Palestine, with Faisal as king; (2) rejection of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration; (3) preventing the partitioning of Syria; and (4) recognition of Iraq's independence and lifting of economic barriers between Syria and Iraq (Resolutions, 1919, pp. 440–442). On the initiative of the Congress in March 1920, the establishment of the Arab Kingdom of Syria with King Faisal I was announced. The declaration of independence stated that Syria and Iraq 'are bound by linguistic, historical, economic, natural, and racial relationships and ties that make both regions dependent on each other and call for the full independence of the Iraqi state provided there is a political and economic federation between the two regions' (Beyan, 1920). In the time the kingdom existed (March–June 1920), the office of the minister of education was held by Sati al-Husri, whose activity was important for awakening Arab nationalism. He believed that the Arab identity was based on their common language and history (Dawisha, 2016, p. 42).

The idea of founding a sovereign Syria turned utopian after the international conference in San Remo in April 1920. By virtue of decisions made there, Syria became a French mandate. In the Arab world, the resolutions of the conference were considered a betrayal by the Western powers, which contributed to the deterioration of Syrian-French relations and the dismissal of the idea of creating a Greater Syria. During the French mandate, new political movements emerged. They demanded, among other things, Arab unity, sovereignty and independence, non-recognition of Syrian mandate authorities, and the dissemination of the Arabic language (in public and private life). In terms of economy, they proposed the economic unity (integration) of Arab states and fighting against foreign investments and feudalism (Sahafat, 2011). This organisation attracted young, educated people from Syria and Lebanon. It was an ideological prototype of the al-Ba'ath party.

During the French mandate, the following persons played an important role in building pan-Arabism: Zaki al-Arsuzi, the founder of the Arab National Party (*al-Hizb al-Qawmi al-Arabi*) and the Arab Ba'ath Party, as well as Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, the founders of the Movement of Arab Revival (*Harakat al-Ihya al-Arabi*). The groups founded by these ideologists merged in 1943 to form the Arab Ba'ath Movement (*Harakat al-Ba'ath al-Arabi*) (Jomma, 2018, p. 177). Four years later, it was renamed the Arab Ba'ath Party (*Hizb al-Ba'ath al-Arabi*). In April 1947, its members adopted a document called the *Constitution and the internal regulations of the al-Ba'ath party*, which addressed the unity of the Arab nation (Dustur Hizb, 1947).

The party was tasked with founding a unified, independent Arab state within defined borders (from the Taurus Mountains through Pishtko, the Basra Bay, the Arabian Sea, the al-Habasha Mountains, the Sahara, to the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea).

The *Constitution* stated that an Arab is a person who speaks the Arabic language, lives or intends to live in Arab areas, and believes they are a member of the Arab nation. Foreign policy should support the interests of a unitary Arab nation and annul the treaties and agreements violating the sovereignty of the Arab state. The *Constitution* did not refer to religion since the party was secular, and the theorists of its platform claimed that being an Arab was an overarching characteristic (Ibidem). Members of the al-Ba'ath party opted for socialism, which, they believed, was rooted in the spirit of Arab nationalism and was seen as an ideal system. The core of nationalism represented by the al-Ba'ath party espoused Arab unity (*al-wahda*), the freedom associated with the liberation from colonialism and imperialism (*al-hurriya*), and socialism ensuring an ideal social order based on the equality of the individual in the Arab nation and individual dignity (*al-ishtirakiya*) (Ibidem).

In 1953, the Arab Ba'ath Party (*Hizb al-Ba'ath al-Arabi*) merged with the Arab Socialist Party of Akram al-Haurani to form the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (*Hizb al-Ba'ath al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki*), commonly known as the al-Ba'ath party. Outside Syria, the party had branches in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Sudan, Palestine and Yemen. For many decades this party played an important role in Syria's political, social and economic life.

From the nineteenth century until the emergence of independent states in the Middle East, nationalism was used to build Arab unity and liberate Arabs from the colonial yoke. Later, its proponents focused on building territorial unity (for example, the United Arab Republic, the Federation of Arab Republics, and the United Arab States were established) and organisational unity (League of Arab States). In Syria, pan-Arabism, in turn, allowed the Alawites to gain and maintain power, form a coherent society (a people or *ash-shaab*), preserve territorial integrity, and fight against Israel.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Arab nationalism gradually weakened in the Arab world. It was due to the deterioration of inter-state relations, e.g., between Syria and Morocco (the case of Mehdi Ben Barka), Iraq (personal conflict between the activists of the al-Ba'ath party in both countries, the struggle for power in the party's National Leadership) as well as Saudi Arabia and Jordan (regime-related differences). Other significant events at the time included the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, Hafez al-Assad's support for Iran against Iraq, and new political elites rising to power in individual Arab countries and competing with each other, e.g., Hafez al-Assad, Saddam Hussein, Muammar al-Gaddafi and Anwar al-Sadat. The slogans proclaimed by authorities in the Middle East turned out not to serve Arab unity but to be a tool for maintaining and solidifying power. Pan-Arabism consequently eroded due to the differences between Arab states (regime-related, political, economic, and social differences, including religious, ethnic, national and tribal aspects), the lack of full cooperation in fighting Israel and the unsuccessful attempts to establish a Palestinian state. Nationalism was losing importance in political terms (Ajami, 1987, p. 96). It was an outcome of the Arab world having been divided by the borders of sovereign states and the ambitions of their leaders, who aspired

to the role of the ‘first Arab’ to unite the entire nation. One of them was Hafez al-Assad, who, in his speeches, referred to building the unity of all Arabs, claiming that it was a ‘necessity’ (Batatu, 1999, p. 279). To this end, he attempted integration with Egypt and Libya (Federation of Arab Republics, 1971), Jordan (Unified Political Command, 1975–1976), Egypt (Unified Political Command, 1976–1977), Egypt and Sudan (federation, 1977), Iraq (Unified Political Command, 1978–1979) and Libya (federation, 1980) (Batatu, 1999, p. 281).

The crisis of Arab nationalism continues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Citizens of individual Arab states, including Syria, have departed from pan-Arab ideas, focusing on their position within their own states and identity. The authorities in Syria saw the sources of social change, among others, in globalisation and technological advancements (access to satellite television, mobile phones and the internet). At the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of the Regional Leadership of the al-Ba’ath Party in June 2005, President Bashar al-Assad stated that the technical revolution was a threat that might even lead to ‘the destruction of Arab identity’ (Jomma, 2018, p. 457). The changes were embodied by Syrian intellectuals demanding civil liberties and economic and political reforms (e.g., *The Statement by 99 Syrian intellectuals*, 2000, *The Statement of 1000*, 2001, *The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change*, 2005). Opposition activists were increasingly in favour of minorities being able to learn their respective languages and cultivate their traditions and culture, which contradicted pan-Arabism. The Arab majority in Syria was also threatened by the US support for the Kurdish cause and the unprecedented rebellion of the Kurds against authorities in 2004, as a result of which President Bashar al-Assad acknowledged that the Kurdish people constituted a “fundamental part of the Syrian social structure and history of Syria” (President Assad, 2004). Thereby he stated that there are other non-Arab nations, such as Kurds, alongside Arabs in Syria. The Arab Spring, a movement of people who rejected inequality and injustice, also symbolised changes in the approach to Arab nationalism. It was another awakening experienced by the inhabitants of the Arab states. Thanks to him, the government lost the people’s trust and lashed pan-Arabism.

## **Arab Nationalism in the Syrian Public Space and Constitutions**

In 1958, pan-Arabism became the official state ideology in Syria. The indoctrination with it began as early as primary school. Textbooks promoted the idea of establishing a unitary state for all Arabs. Maps showing one Arab state that also covered Israeli territories were used during geography and civics lessons. These and other lessons stressed the uniqueness of Arabs and glorified the Arab civilisation. In schools, pan-Arab songs were sung, including *Bilad Al’orbi Awtani*, by Fakhri al-Baroudi (Jomma, 2018, p. 263), and poems praising nationalism were recited. The memory of the glorious history of the Arabs, its actors, and events was cultivated. Literary Arabic was taught (while forbidding minorities to speak their own languages). The organisation of scout associations in schools also served to bring up young people in line with the ideas of Arab nationalism.



The importance of Arab contribution to developing science, culture and art was emphasised. Arab unity was the subject of poetry, literature, songs and propaganda slogans. The most famous slogans referring to the ideology in question included, for example, 'From the ocean to the Arabian Gulf' (i.e., from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf), 'Arab oil for Arabs' or 'There is one Arab nation, and it has an eternal mission to fulfil: Unity, Freedom, Socialism' (The language, 2008). Syrian schools chose pan-Arab ideologists and activists (such as Zaki al-Arsuzi) as their patrons. Historical figures (e.g., Umar ibn al-Khattab), war martyrs (e.g., Yusuf al-Azma and Jules Jammal), the names of Arab regions under occupation (e.g., Liwa or Alexandretta) or events, such as victory in the Yom Kippur War in 1973, were also used to this end. The same applied to street names in cities. The adjective 'Arab' is featured in the name of public television (Syrian Arab Television) and in that of the news agency (Syrian Arab News Agency). In turn, the names of all-Syrian newspapers referred to historical facts associated with pan-Arabism, such as *al-Ba'ath* (Revival), *al-Thawra* (Revolution), and *Tishreen* (October).

Arab nationalism was visible in Syrian Constitutions, the analysis of which makes it possible to trace its development in this country. For example, the draft of the first Constitution of 1920 (which did not enter into force) was free of nationalist content, even though Faisal I, a promoter of pan-Arabism, ruled at the time. The adjectives 'Arab/Arabic' are used in this Constitution only in the contexts of the name of the state (Arab Kingdom of Syria) and the official language (Constitution, 1920). The 1930 Constitution, which mentioned Arabic only as the official language (Constitution, 1930), was also modest. The changes came when the Basic Law was adopted in 1950, four years after the French left Syria, three years after the establishment of the al-Ba'ath party, and two years after losing the war with Israel. Under this Constitution, Syria became a sovereign, democratic Arab republic (Constitution, 1950). The preamble of this Constitution called for the enhancement of the cooperation with Arab and Islamic peoples, stated that the Syrian people are part of the Arab nation (the same was also stipulated in Article 1.3) and expressed the 'holy wish' that one Arab state is established. Arabic remained the official language (Art. 4), and education was given the task of raising a generation that would be proud of their Arab heritage (Art. 28.2). On the one hand, the president and deputies swore to protect the independence of the homeland, and on the other, declared their pursuit of the unity of Arab states (Articles 46 and 75). This Constitution was in force for only one year, but it was later reinstated twice: in 1954 (suspended in 1958) and 1962 (for one year). After the reunification of Syria with Egypt in 1958, a new provisional Constitution was promulgated; it remained in force until Syria's secession, that is, until 1961. Although the establishment of the United Arab Republic was the implementation of the ideals of Arab nationalism, it was not visible in the content of the Constitution. The adjective 'Arabic' was used only to define the Arab nation composed of the peoples of Syria and Egypt (Constitution, 1958). As well as this Constitution, the Constitutions of 1961, 1964, 1969, and 1971 were also provisional. Their characteristic feature was that they all referred to the state's new name, namely the Syrian Arab Republic, which was part of the great homeland of Arabs. Additionally, the Constitution of 1969 gave the leading role in the state and society to the

al-Ba'ath party, representing the nationalist trend (Art. 7, Provisional Constitution, 1969). Since members of this party supported socialism, they were in favour of forming a socialist Arab generation that would implement the ideals of the Arab nation (Articles 17, 19.1, and 44). Under the 1969 Constitution, the Syrian citizen became a 'Syrian Arab' (Art. 21). This act restored the wording of the 1950 oath taken by the president, prime minister, ministers and deputies (Articles 51, 59, and 66).

The Constitution drafted in 1973 was not provisional. Developed under the influence of Hafez al-Assad, it was the first Arab Constitution to define the unity of the Arab world in terms of socialist and nationalist principles (Syrian Permanent, 1973). The provisions adopted in 1973 maintained that the Syrian Arab Republic was part of the Arab world and its people part of the Arab nation pursuing 'full unity' (Art. 1). Arabic remained the official language (Art. 4). The leading role of the al-Ba'ath party in the service of the Arab nation (Art. 8) was retained, as was the pursuit of building a united, socialist, Arab society (Articles 21, 23, 24.1, and 49); the constitutional oath on Arab unity and freedom was reiterated with an additional reference to socialism (Art. 7). A novelty in the Constitution was that it mentioned the faith of the president, i.e., Islam, and indicated the main source of legislation, namely Islamic jurisprudence (Art. 3)<sup>2</sup>. The 1973 Constitution also stipulated that only 'a Syrian Arab' who enjoys full political rights may run for the office of president (Art. 83). This Constitution was in force until 2012 when a referendum adopted a new draft Constitution. This draft was created during a difficult period for Syria to calm public sentiments. Although over 150 years had passed since pan-Arabism became popular, this did not translate into fewer references to Arab nationalism. Compared to earlier Syrian Constitutions discussed above, such references were considerably more numerous. Perhaps the political and economic difficulties and the threat to security and territorial integrity required the authors of the Constitution to address lofty ideals. It should be noted that Syria, its society and economy were no longer defined as socialist, nor the al-Ba'ath party as a leading force. The preamble to the 2012 Constitution abounds in references to pan-Arabism (Constitution, 2012). It speaks about the Arab civilisation, which is part of the heritage of mankind, and which has been subjected to many challenges throughout its history. The preamble expresses Syrian pride in having an Arab identity and being part of the Arab nation. It states that the Syrian Arab Republic would support cooperation and integration among Arabs in order to achieve the unity of the Arab nation. For it is this unity in which the 'heart of Arabism beats' and its citizens are at the core of the fight against the colonial hegemony in the Arab world and are at the forefront of combating the Zionists. The 2012 Constitution retained some of the provisions proposed in the previous Constitution. It was about retaining in the Constitution

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<sup>2</sup> President Hafez al-Assad agreed to it under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood which staged protests in the city of Hama after the news spread that the stipulation concerning the faith of president had been removed from the draft of the Constitution. The president's decision meant departing from the secular attitude of the al-Baath party and the compromise with the Sunni majority.

that (1) the Syrian people are part of the Arab nation (Art. 1), (2) Islam is the president's religion, and Islamic jurisprudence is the main source of law (Art. 3), (3) Arabic is the official language (Art. 4), (4) the content of the constitutional oath refers, among other things, to the unity of the Arab nation (Art. 7), and (5) citizenship is defined as being Syrian Arabs (Art. 48). The Constitution required that in addition to candidates for the office of president (Art. 84.2), the vice-president, prime minister and deputy prime minister, ministers and members of parliament and of the Supreme Constitutional Court should be Syrian citizens ('Syrian Arabs') (Art. 152).

There is a contradiction in the approach to Arab nationalism in the 2012 Constitution. It consists in appealing to Arab unity above states while protecting territorial integrity, national interests and security, and national unity.

### Arab Nationalism and Alawite Rule

After Syria regained independence and internal struggles for power in politics and the army ended, pan-Arabism allowed the Alawites to come out of the shadows and take power in the state (in government institutions, the army, security services, and the al-Ba'ath party). Interestingly, the Alawites are a religious minority which is a sect of Shiism. Many Sunnis see them as heretics rather than Muslims. The conviction about the unity of Arabs allowed the Alawites to reject national, religious and ethnic divisions in Syrian society.

The Alawites took advantage of the socialist character of the al-Ba'ath party to create the myth of Arab unity within Syria. Thanks to the party's leading role in the state and society, they carried out, for example, agrarian reform and weakened the great landowners (mostly Sunnis) while strengthening small-scale peasants (Alawites). Based on the reform (1963–1966), the authorities additionally confiscated the lands of the non-Arab minority and handed them to the Arabs, changing by this token the ethnic *status quo* in various regions of the state (*muhafazat* al-Hasakah) and reducing the possessions of the non-Arab population.

Arab nationalism allowed the Alawites to identify an external enemy, namely imperialists and Zionists. It helped them justify the condition of the constant threat to the state and the introduction of a state of emergency, which was of significance for other non-Arab groups, such as the Jews or Kurds. The latter were called *shu'ubiyun*, or 'the people who resist Arabization' (Jomma, 2018, p. 400). They posed a serious problem for the Syrian authorities because they were not Arabs and had national ambitions. They pursued establishing their own state, which would include northern Syria, south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and north-western Iran (Kurdistan). The Kurds were discriminated against by being deprived of their Syrian citizenship. It was done by the census carried out under Act No. 93 of August 23, 1962 in *muhafazat* al-Hasakah (Ihsaa, 2016). Except for people recognised as stateless, the Kurds had their citizenship restored as late as 2011 under Presidential Decree No. 49 (Jomma, 2018, p. 405).

In the name of Arabization, the idea of creating the so-called Arab cordon in the Kurdish lands emerged in 1966. The aim was to prevent the merging of Kurdish areas in Syria, Turkey and Iraq. Arab families were settled on fertile Kurdish lands rich in oil deposits, displacing the Kurds and depriving them of their property (Ali, 2015). In this way, the community was impoverished and the region in which no investments were made. The Alawites also took advantage of pan-Arab ideology in relation to the Kurds by (1) changing topographic names from Kurdish to Arabic, (2) prohibiting giving children Kurdish names, (3) prohibiting the celebration of Kurdish holidays, (4) prohibiting the use of Kurdish in public space, (5) erasing all mentions of the history of the Kurds from school textbooks, and (6) their exclusion from political and social life.

The formation of the Syrian Arab people proved to be challenging. The divisions in society deepened due to sectarianism and clientelism. The Alawites, whose power was epitomised by Hafez al-Assad, took over all the essential state offices and institutions. In their attempts to maintain power, the Alawites resorted to Arab nationalism, prioritising tribal (*al-Kalbiya*) and sectarian (Alawites) interests over the interests of the Arab nation or the Syrian people. While aware of this, the Syrians could not protest, as they were paralysed by fear of reprisals by the authorities, which had an extensive network of security apparatus with extensive powers granted to them by the decree on the introduction of a state of emergency.

## Conclusion

It can be stated that Arab nationalism in Syria served several goals. It was an instrument to get rid of colonists, and after a sovereign state was established, it was used to gain political and economic influence over other Arab states (e.g., Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hafez al-Assad) in the name of Arab unity, which was difficult to achieve. Pan-Arabists used the ideology to pursue their own political interests, retain various social roles, and raise their material status and social prestige. What distinguished Gamal Abdel Nasser or Hafez al-Assad from the first ideologists of pan-Arabism was that the latter discussed it at the academic level, and the former implemented nationalism in practice, using it for their own rather than the more general goals of Arabs.

Arab nationalism in Syria, as in the entire Arab world, is becoming a thing of the past. Its importance is declining due to its outdated tenets at a time when the power of state nationalism and Islamism is growing. Another significant factor is that establishing one Arab state is treated as utopian, as is the Arab identity, which is being replaced by regional/state identity. Currently, the concept of *ad-daula al-wataniya* (homeland) appeals to the Arab community more than *ad-daula al-qawmiya* (the Arab state). In addition, tribal, religious and sectarian divisions have not disappeared; on the contrary, they have even deepened, making it impossible to create solidarity, which, according to the philosopher Ibn Haldon, is an inseparable part of *al-asabiya* (Bielawski, 2000, p. 31). Religious, national



