1 Social and Political Integration

Alternative Visions of the Future

One highly distinctive feature of contemporary Arab society is the alarming gap between reality and dream. Pan-Arabism is the proclaimed ideal among the ruling classes and the prevailing sentiment among the Arab masses, but Arab society continues to suffer from the erosion of civil life and profound fragmentation. Efforts at social and political integration have been frustrated by regionalism, the pursuit of idiosyncratic interests by the established ruling classes in separate Arab countries, dependency, colonization, the power of traditional loyalties (religious, ethnic, kinship), urban-rural-nomadic differences, and repressive conditions. What adds to the complexity of the problem is the lack of understanding both of these divisive forces and of their interactions and mutual reinforcement. For example, in Arab society there is a congruence between social class and communal cleavages, with some ethnic, religious, tribal, and regional communities enjoying more wealth, power, and prestige at the expense of others. Although the distinctions relating to these different types of cleavages are now blurred beyond recognition, analysts persist in describing the problem with a vocabulary that emphasizes sectarian identity above all other forms of affiliation. Without clear analysis that grasps and conveys the complexities involved, Arabs can never address the gap between this reality and the dream of national unity.

At the same time, there are a number of very real forces and conditions making for unity; their existence partly explains the dynamism of Arab society and its continuous struggle. This book proposes a theory of transformation predicated on the development, among Arabs, of higher forms of awareness or consciousness of the problems they face in achieving the dream of unity. In the model I propose here, transformation will be achieved through the profound reconstruction—even re-creation—of Arab reality. The analysis that informs this book thus also leads to a theory of action for the future. It does more than

this, however, by focusing on the basic building blocks of Arab society. This analytical focus enables us to understand the dynamics of popular movements for national unity, as well as the efforts that have sought to redefine national identity through establishment of a more effective, democratic model of civil society.

The analytical approach proposed here is crucial, because the failure of those seeking political unity to achieve their goal so far has not been caused by the ideals they set for themselves, but by their inability to devise the necessary rational structures and strategies. That is, the problem lies, not in the ideal itself, but in the gap or imbalance between this goal and actions designed to achieve the historical task of achieving unity. Some objective conditions for unity do exist, to a greater extent than has been the case in other societies that have already succeeded in achieving unity. These building blocks of unity include the Arabic language and shared culture; the Arabs' sense of their place in history, and their sense of belonging; similar economic interests; and the looming presence of external threats and challenges that face Arab society, regardless of nation–state boundary lines.

Even in instances where local or regional identities become very strong because of systematic cultivation, as in Egypt under President Anwar Sadat, Arab nationalism seems to remain alive. The Egyptian scholar Gamal Hamdan has emphasized the uniqueness of Egyptian identity, but points out that Egypt has always been the meeting place of the Arab family. He argues that "Egypt in the Arab world is like Cairo in Egypt": that it is the "cultural hub" and "oasis" of Arabs, and that "it cannot but be a nucleus of Arab unity." As Arabs, moreover, Egyptians share the responsibility to solve larger Arab problems. "Perhaps the final test of Egyptian leadership may lie in whether it is able to face the responsibility of regaining Palestine for the Arabs," Hamdan says. "If it is true that there is no Arab unity without Egyptian leadership, it is probably as true to say that Egypt would lose its leadership among the Arabs by failing to regain Palestine for the Arabs." At the root of Hamdan's argument is his distinction between *wataniyya* (patriotism to the homeland) and *qawmiyya* (nationalism or loyalty to the larger Arab nation). He sees Egypt as the homeland and the Arab world as the nation, and argues that an emphasis on the homeland does not conflict with loyalty to the nation (*al-watan al-'arabi al-kabir*). "We do not see the Egyptian personality, no matter how distinct it may be, as anything other than a part of the personality of the greater Arab homeland," he concludes.[1]

Similarly, the Egyptian anthropologist Laila El-Hamamsy examined Egyptian identity and concluded that "it is not surprising, then, in the light of their history, that Egyptians . . . should be conscious of their national identity and consider themselves, above all, Egyptians." El-Hamamsy then asks: "How is

the Egyptian, with this strong sense of Egyptian identity, able to look on himself as an Arab, too?" Her answer is that Egyptianization has meant Arabization as well: "The result has been an increased tempo of Arabization, for facility in the Arabic language opened windows into the rich legacy of Arabic culture. . . . Thus in seeking a cultural identity, Egypt has revived its Arab cultural heritage."[2]

Consequently, during a period of systematic efforts by the Sadat government to separate Egypt from the rest of the Arab world, a number of articles by prominent Egyptian intellectuals reasserted the Arabism of Egypt. Between October 1978 and January 1979, for instance, the London-based weekly *Al-Dastour* serialized a study entitled "The Arabism of Egypt" by the famous Egyptian poet 'Abd Al-Mu'ti Hijazi, and Hijazi's argument was subsequently reflected in an article by Al-Sayyid Yassin, who writes:

> We can conclude that there are several factors on the basis of which we can talk with certainty about the existence of one Arab nation. These factors are the common historical experience, the Arabic language, and the common cultural heritage. . . . Though all these factors are . . . superstructural, they are the cover of a substructure that has grown and developed along largely similar lines in the different regions of the Arab homeland.[3]

The nature of Arabism and Egyptian separatism have been analyzed by another Egyptian sociologist, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, who scrutinized the dialogue among seventeen Egyptian intellectuals generated by Tawfiq al-Hakim's call on March 3, 1978, for the neutrality of Egypt in the ongoing Arab conflicts with Israel and the West. Of thirty-one articles published between March 3, 1978, and May 11, 1978, eight articles (by two authors, Tawfiq al-Hakim and Hussein Fawzi) called for neutrality yet acknowledged the Arab identity of Egypt; three articles (by Louis Awad) opposed neutrality and denied Egypt its Arab identity; eighteen articles, by such writers as Yusuf Idriss, Ahmed Baha' Eddin, Bint Ash-Shati', 'Abd El-Azim Ramadan, Raja' an-Naqqash, Al-Sayyid Yassin, and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, disapproved of the call for neutrality and asserted Egypt's Arab identity; and two articles wavered between the second and third stands.[4]

It is gradually becoming apparent, particularly in view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese and Sudanese civil wars, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Gulf War, that Arabs are essentially faced with two alternative visions, and consequently two designs for their future. One vision accepts the present reality and proposes to preserve the status quo or even to dismantle Arab society further by legitimizating or establishing sovereign states as national homes for the different ethnic and religious communities in the area. This design provides

advantages to certain Western centers of power. It is being promoted by
Zionism because it would legitimize an expanding Israel while maintaining
Western hegemony.

   The other design envisages a radical transformation of the existing order
through the establishment of an overarching, unified, democratic, secular, and
egalitarian Arab nation. This dream contrasts sharply with the present reality.
How is it possible to achieve unity, democracy, secularism, and social justice
in a society burdened with fragmentation, authoritarianism, traditionalism,
religious fundamentalism, patriarchy, erosion of a sense of shared civil society,
pyramidal social class structure, and dependency? Are such dreams the product
of hopelessly romantic, utopian, and idealist minds? To answer this question,
we must understand the historical context in which Arabs have made deci-
sions, and the special role played by Israel in this context.

Historical Context

Meddling in Arab affairs by European powers, and later by the United States,
accelerated after Britain dishonored her World War I pledges to the Arabs.
Instead of permitting Arab unity, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, which
promised a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, and the Sykes-Picot Agree-
ment, which led to the partitioning of geographical Syria into British and
French spheres of control. The subsequent period saw further attempts to
establish fragmented pieces of the Arab world as separate states. These states
were based on the Western Orientalist "mosaic" perceptions: they defined as
"national" constituents a few particular subgroups in Arab society. For exam-
ple, states were proposed for Alawites and Druze in Syria, Berbers in North
Africa, and Kurds in Iraq. New states, such as Israel, were created. Parts of one
country were annexed to another (for example, Iskenderun to Turkey). Cer-
tain communities were imposed on others within the same country (for
example, the Maronites in Lebanon). 'Ali Eddin Hilal argued that this imperi-
alist policy of fragmentation aimed at several interconnected goals pursued by
the West. First, it led to the establishment of ruling classes and systems that
would stand to benefit from continued disunity. Second, it produced better
circumstances for manipulating internal differences and conflicts among the
Arabs, in keeping with the policy of divide and rule. Third, it created
economically and socially incomplete entities that would, therefore, remain
perpetually dependent on the imperialist powers in order to function in the
global world order. [5]

   The establishment of Israel furthered this policy, while creating a national
home for the Jews. Since its inception, Israel has served both as a base and a
model. As a base, it has worked to preserve the existing order. Examples of

such activity include its participation in the attack on Egypt in 1956 to reverse the nationalization of the Suez canal; its invasion of Lebanon in 1982; its continual threats to interfere with any serious attempts to alter existing socio-political arrangements, on the pretext that they might undermine Israeli security; and its reminders to the West, and particularly the United States, of Israel's strategic role in preserving the status quo in the area.

As a model, Israel has provided the necessary assistance to, as well as the inspiration for, sectarian and religiously or ethnically oriented regimes and movements. In covering the Lebanese civil war, for instance, the American journalist Jonathan Randal discovered the presence of a sustained collaboration between Maronite rightists, Israelis, and some others who believed in the "theory of mosaic states."[6] The personal diary of Moshe Sharett, a former foreign minister and prime minister of Israel, exposed a 1954 proposal by David Ben-Gurion to encourage "the Maronites . . . to proclaim a Christian state. . . . The creation of a Christian state is . . . a national act; it has historical roots and it will find support in wide circles in the Christian world. . . . In normal times this would be almost impossible. First and foremost because of the lack of initiative and courage of the Christians. But at times of confusion or revolution or civil war, things take on another aspect, and even the weak declares himself to be a hero." Sharett also wrote that Moshe Dayan expressed his enthusiastic support for the proposal, saying that "the only thing that is necessary is to find an officer . . . to make him agree to declare himself the savior of the Maronite population. Then the Israeli army will enter Lebanon, will occupy the necessary territory, and will create a Christian regime which will ally itself with Israel. The territory from the Litani southward will be totally annexed to Israel."[7] In the same year (1954), Pierre Gemayel, the founder and the head of the Kata'ib (Phalangist) party, threatened Lebanese Muslims by saying that the Christians were "ready when necessary to cooperate with the devil itself [code for Israel]."[8]

This is the context in which Western studies of minorities in the Arab world need to be placed. In their introduction to two issues of the *Middle East Review* devoted to the subject of ethnic and religious minorities in the area, Anne Sinai and Chaim Waxman argued that

> the current civil war in Lebanon is but the latest and most publicized in a broad range of events and situations which belie the contention that the Middle East is a unitary world of Arabs with a common background, culture, language and identity. The Middle East in fact consists of an intricate mosaic of different peoples. . . . There are Shi'ites . . . Alawites, Druze, Yazidis, Isma'ilies and followers of various other Muslim denominations, who cling determinedly to their own style of faith and their own set of beliefs. They are not

even necessarily ethnically "Arab," being the descendants of many
different peoples conquered and converted by the Islamic armies. . . .
The first of the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, and the
people with whom it is identical, have been part of the Middle East
mosaic from their beginning. . . . There are, in addition . . . other
small religious groupings, each clinging to its own distinctive identity.
No Arab state, thus, can claim societal homogeneity and all consist of
major and minor religious, linguistic and ethnic groupings. . . . Many
of the minority communities have resisted Arabization.[9]

In the same issue, R. Hrair Dekmejian noted:

While few generalizations are valid for the Middle East as a
whole, two realities stand out as being beyond question. (1) No
single state in the Middle East can claim societal homogeneity. All
Middle Eastern states consist of several major and minor religious,
linguistic, and/or tribal collectivities; hence the use of the term
mosaic to describe the region's cultural diversity. (2) In modern times
as well as historically, the Middle Eastern milieu has been singularly
inhospitable to its ethnic minorities.[10]

Thus Zionist scholarship, as well as research sponsored by the United States,
continues to assert the Orientalist notion of a mosaic society. The 1988 edition
of *Syria: A Country Study* in the Area Handbook Series asserts that "Syrian
society is a mosaic of social groups of various sizes that lacks both a consistent
stratification system linking all together and a set of shared values and loyalties
binding the population into one nation. Distinctions of language, region,
religion, ethnicity, and way of life cut across the society, producing a large
number of separate communities, each marked by strong internal loyalty and
solidarity. Although about two-thirds of the people are Arabic-speaking Sunni
Muslims, they do not constitute a unitary social force because of the strongly
felt differences among bedouin, village, and urban dwellers. A perceptive
observer has spoken of the " 'empty center' of Syrian society, a society lacking
an influential group embodying a national consensus."[11]

Even many of those who worry about the effects of fragmentation proffer
solutions rooted in the paradigm of a mosaic society. These analysts often
propose the use of conflict-management practices devised for "integrating"
divided societies. For example, Eric A. Nordlinger recommended "those
decision-making procedures, political arrangements, and behavioral rules
which are potentially capable of accommodating antagonistic groups to one
another, thereby providing the framework within which severe conflicts are
regulated."[12] Another example of the conflict-management theory, although
focused on an outcome that moves beyond the current limitations found in

Arab society, is the consociational democracy model of Arend Lijphart, which calls for governance by an elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.[13] Lijphart at least assumes that Arab society seeks genuine transformation rather than the mere management of divisiveness and fragmentation. These proposed solutions are likely to be ineffective in the long run, however, because they do not create an environment for true social and political integration.

At this point, let us return to the question of whether those who pursue liberation and the creation of a unified, secular, democratic, and egalitarian Arab society have fallen prey to idealism, romanticism, and utopian thinking. Having a dream and a set of ideals for a society constitutes romanticism only if one is unable to devise effective, relevant, and rational structures and strategies for its implementation. The issue is not really one of realism versus idealism. Indeed, modern history provides ample evidence that authentic transformation is possible under certain conditions, and that the application of conflict-management practices in divided societies might be ineffective in the long run. Consider Lebanon's two civil wars since independence as an example. The Arab progressive nationalist movement, despite its imperfections, is developing a better understanding of the divisive forces and contradictions within Arab society. Its adherents increasingly perceive the immensity of the burden and the challenge they face in transforming reality. Successive failures have been disheartening and frustrating at times, but they have also served as an incentive for more serious reflection and for attaining greater readiness for self-transformation and the confrontation of reality. The progressive nationalists are coming to realize that bridging the gap between reality and the dream is a long-term goal achievable only by a popular national movement that undertakes to change the fundamental social structures that order society. Only in this way can the appropriate building blocks be introduced in lieu of existing structures that only promote traditional values and loyalties.

Yet we must move beyond these initial attempts to diagnose and propose remedies for the ailments of the Arab society. We need to raise a series of important questions that have not yet been faced: what conditions have contributed to the survival and intensification of traditional loyalties and cleavages? What kinds of socioeconomic structures and interests promote traditionalism? In what ways do these cleavages coincide with and reinforce one another? To what extent do vertical loyalties (such as religious and ethnic ties) constitute disguised forms of socioeconomic discrimination and distinction? In what ways do traditional loyalties serve as mechanisms of adjustment to, or reconciliation with, situations of deprivation and domination? How can movements for change combat the manipulation of traditional loyalties by foreign powers and ruling classes? To what extent does a fair distribution of wealth, power, and

social status presently exist in the Arab world? Our analysis of existing Arab society must answer these questions before we can fully understand the issues to be addressed by successful strategies for transformation.

Then we face another set of questions, this time concerning the process of transformation itself. Who is likely to carry out the historical task of creating national unity by transcending traditional loyalties? Why is it that Arab nationalists have failed so far to genuinely concern themselves with problems of social liberation and secularism? What forces hinder the process of transformation? What are the sources of the crisis of civil society? On what level should change begin? Should the prevailing traditional loyalties be accepted as permanent, and managed by conflict-regulating practices, or should they be transformed and replaced with higher forms of consciousness? What kinds of goals need to be incorporated into an ideology of progressive Arab nationalist movements? Under what conditions can social integration be achieved? What sort of integration is required?

Conclusion

To succeed, the Arab nationalist movement must formulate a more progressive and realistic program for unity. The movement must continue to pressure Arab governments. Its long-term goals should be the achievement of unity, democracy, social justice, and secularism. In order to attain these ends, the Arab nationalist movement will have to redefine itself more fully by incorporating some basic elements into its ideology:

1.   Secularism has to become a genuine and integral part of Arab nationalist ideology, given the urgent need to transcend traditional loyalties and break the vicious circle of communal rivalries. Through secularism, governments must end discrimination and enable political representation on a nonsectarian basis, making all citizens equal before the law regardless of affiliations and gender. Such equality must be accompanied by the creation of institutional structures that will bring about the emergence of a central state and leadership that represent all, rather than just a segment, of the population.

2.   Arab nationalist ideology must take cognizance of the camouflaged class divisions that exist in Arab society. One of these camouflages is the identity of regional nationalisms. As Samir Amin points out, "The framework within which class struggle occurs is a national framework and the oppression of the peoples of the region is not only economic, but national."[14]

3.   If social integration is to be achieved, the Arab nationalist movement must address itself to the task of transforming the existing social class structure and bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. Extreme concentration of national wealth in a few hands has prevailed in most Arab countries, and

disparities are increasing. Moreover, national liberation from foreign domination is inseparably linked to liberation from internal economic exploitation because of the alliance between neocolonialists and the Arab ruling classes.

4. The Arab nationalist movement needs to become more genuinely concerned with the problem of alienation and lack of civil society. The Arab masses are powerless vis-à-vis their institutions—the state, family, school, religious establishments, and places of work. Numerous movements for national independence have succeeded in liberating Arab countries from foreign control, only to result in the establishment of authoritarian systems of repression, exploitation, and degradation.

5. Social integration and national unity are increasingly understood by progressive Arab movements to mean harmony with adversity rather than the imposition of cultural uniformity. Arab society is pluralistic in a variety of ways, which should enrich its well-being. In any case, efforts to impose unification from the top have proved unsuccessful.

These five elements must become an integral part of the ideology of the Arab nationalist movement if the movement hopes to achieve political and social integration. Secularism, democracy, social justice, individual freedom, and unity with diversity are not a list of separate requirements. They have to be taken or rejected all together, for they are interconnected and represent different aspects of the same struggle for human liberation. If reformers focus firmly on these five elements, they will readily see the kinds of strategies they must adopt in order to pursue such aims as liberalization through modernization; industrialization; the creation of appropriate political and social institutions; the improvement of communication among Arab countries; the end of censorship; the establishment of facilities for cultural and economic exchange; the reduction of travel and residence restrictions on other Arabs; the provision of relevant and readily accessible education; and the protection of human rights. All of these aims are important in achieving successful integration of the Arab world. But they are only manifestations of deeper commitments and a broader vision of a new and integrated Arab society—a society that will only emerge if the five elements delineated here are placed at the center of reform activity.

The present situation and the immediate future look bleak indeed (particularly in the aftermath of the Gulf War). Yet the struggle will go on, sustained by a strong belief that in the long run there is no acceptable alternative to the comprehensive transformation of Arab society. As a first step toward transformation, we turn now to analysis of the fundamental building blocks of Arab society.