

Arab Nationalism and Islamism: Rupture and Continuity

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ABSTRACT

There is a tendency in the West to place Arab nationalism and Islamism in opposition. This misapprehension was starkly evident in 2003 when the regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled by the United States and its allies. In fact, their opposition, albeit violent at times, expresses a refusal to compete much more than theological or even political differences ...

Keywords: Arab, Islam, Nationalism, Islamism, US, Palestine

El nacionalismo árabe y el islamismo: ruptura y continuidad

RESUMEN

En Occidente hay una tendencia a colocar el nacionalismo árabe y el islamismo en oposición. Este malentendido fue claramente evidente en 2003, cuando el régimen de Saddam Hussein fue derrocado por Estados Unidos y sus aliados. De hecho, su oposición, aunque violenta a veces, expresa una negativa a competir mucho más que las diferencias teológicas o incluso políticas.

Palabras clave: Árabe, Islam, Nacionalismo, Islamismo, EE.UU., Palestina

阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义： 关系的破裂与延续

摘要：

西方国家试图让阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义产生对立。这种故意造成的误解自2003年萨达姆·侯赛因政权被美国及其

1 <http://lucien.samir.free.fr/biographie/index.html>

联盟所推翻时便极为明显。事实上，阿拉伯民族主义和伊斯兰主义之间的对立，尽管有时存在暴力，但却表达了拒绝在理论差异、甚至是政治差异之外产生过多竞争。

关键词：阿拉伯，伊斯兰，民族主义，伊斯兰主义，美国，巴勒斯坦

There is a tendency in the West, and particularly in France, to place Arab nationalism and Islamism in opposition. Widely shared beyond the Third-Worldist left and the Gaullist right, this misapprehension was starkly evident in 2003 when the regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled by the United States and its allies. George W. Bush and Tony Blair are often criticized for destroying “the only secular regime in the region” or “the rampart against the Iranian mullahs,” while the current Islamic-Baathist alliance is described as “against nature.” However, the demands of Palestinian nationalism in relation to Jerusalem should have given a few clues. In fact, their opposition, albeit violent at times, expresses a refusal to compete much more than theological or even political differences. . .

Meiji Era Japan at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century² provides a similar example, which, while modernizing institutions, did not reject the theological-political concept of the Emperor’s divinity or the nationalism of Japanese civilization, with its claims of superiority over all others, both of which were illustrated by the sinister memory of racism in Japanese militarism.

In the same perspective, Arab nationalism has claimed to modernize Islam while not separating it from religion in the manner that happened during the French Revolution. For example, it has not rejected the notion of Community (*Ummah*), a synonym for the nation, implying borders that are more religious than territorial in the strict sense (but the same was true of Japanese militarism in justifying its incursion into China).

Land borders exist by default (because you cannot go farther) or are used as a pretext; at least this is what can be observed in the context of the Judeo-Arab conflict, since the main issue raised from the start by the various Palestinian movements revolves less around the need for two states than the recognition of Israel as a sovereign state.

Islamism, in other words the *total* application of Islam as codified from the start, has held onto the idea of religious borders, which are therefore infinitely extensible territorially, without having the need to copy the institutions of democratic political structures originating in the West that differentiate between the

2 Illustrated by *The Last Samurai* (2003), with an excellent performance by Tom Cruise.

temporal and the spiritual: the Leader of the Faithful combines the two, and as a result, there is no need for an ecclesiastical hierarchy in Sunnism, since the caliph is also the Supreme Guide. He resolves all problems because he is juridically endowed with a necessary and sufficient tool: Sharia.

This distinction aside, Arab nationalism and Islamism share the same values as Japanese militarism, particularly in all that concerns civilizational superiority; something that was also shared by Hitler's National Socialism, although, in that case, race was a more biological than metaphysical concept,³ contrary to Arab nationalism and Islamism in general. History has nonetheless amply proven the strong overlap between them, if only in the ties between the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Hitler and the support shown by Nasser and the Syrian Baath party to certain Nazi dignitaries.

However, while the countries where these totalitarianisms emerged have admitted their misguided ways in terms of this sense of superiority and, ultimately, of racism, even when it was only "metaphysical," Arab nationalism and Islamism have not had to do the same, and still have not done so, much the opposite. Why? Because Arab nationalism is founded on Islam and has only claimed to modernize its institutional and social appearance. In other words, its claims to superiority over Judaism, Christianity, and in fact every civilization, cannot be questioned because the truth of the past, present, and future is supposed to be written in black and white in the Koran.

By making its supposed prerogatives sacred, the outrageousness of these claims leaves critics without a means to respond. It has still not been challenged or, at least, it does not receive the same critical treatment as so-called European anthropocentrism—with the recently inaugurated Musée des Arts Premiers in Paris as its standard bearer.

Nevertheless, the human will to power and its excesses should not be reduced to its Western realization, as many other civilizations in Asia and Africa have shown this imperialist inclination, including, in fact, Muslim civilization (but since it uses sacred texts as justification, critics do not dwell on it ...). Moreover, this expansionist concept cannot be confused with the positive dissemination of the universal expressed through the spirit of the Enlightenment (in particular the early Enlightenment thinkers who, like Maimonides⁴ and Abelard, did not oppose faith and reason). We should not forget that when the European Renaissance posited the uniqueness of humanity as a race, it admitted at the same time its multiplicity as History, while supposing in fact that for certain questions or problems, some solutions are better than others. Like democracy. Free trade. The rule

3 Heidegger gives an example of this distinction when analyzing the Nietzschean conception of race to which Nazism sometimes referred: "Just as Nietzsche's thought of will to power was ontological rather than biological, even more was his racial thought metaphysical rather than biological in meaning" in *Nietzsche's Metaphysics III* 230–231.

4 <http://www.medarus.org/Medecins/MedecinsTextes/maimonide.html>

of law. It implies that a culture cannot be turned into a museum, that a culture can change, prosper, or decline. A culture is a living being and its innovation and refinement cannot be prevented under the sole pretext that sacralization casts it in stone forever In any case, the many forms of this questioning do not seem to have massively, or even marginally, affected Islamic civilization, in particular its so-called “Arab” variant (the quotation marks signaling the ambiguity between metaphysics and ethnology).

Had it occurred, it would have been immediately observed, for example in 1948 when the UN voted for the partition of the country known as Palestine (according to the Roman terminology). It would have been sufficient, at the time, to recognize Israel’s right to exist as an independent entity, even if it meant contradicting the Koran, which formally prohibits it, and calling into question fifty years of intense national-Islamism, unquestioned by even those intellectuals who protested the most against so-called Western supremacy. Yet far from being a minor aspect, this connection between political meaning and theological possibility revealed itself to be of capital importance from the Arab and Islamic point of view.

The Egyptian Gamal Abdel Nasser, the uncontested leader of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, made the following claim about Islam: “(...) We never said (...) that we rejected our religion. We declared that our religion was a socialist religion and that Islam, in the Middle Ages, accomplished the first socialist experiment in the world,”⁵ while adding that “Muhammad was the imam of socialism.”⁶

This “socialist” continuity should therefore not be considered according to the European terms of socialism (the same is true of nationalism, as I demonstrated above), but as a modernized Koranic institutionalization; in other words as something that always encompasses politics, economics, culture, customs, in short, *more or less* Sharia. Islam is, for example, the *state religion* in most so-called Arab countries, with the exception of Tunisia, while accepting some formal adjustments criticized by Islamism: The President of the Republic is not officially the Caliph, or Leader of the Faithful. Yet, as a whole, Islam is endowed with a definitive theological and political superiority. Didn’t Michel Aflaq, the (Christian) founder of the “secular” Baath⁷ party, say that “the breath of the Prophet will always give life to Arab nationalism”?⁸

5 November 12, 1964, cited in Paul Balta, *L’islam* (Paris: Marabout/Le Monde Éditions, 1995), 116.

6 Balta, *L’islam*, 115.

7 Arab Resurrection Party (1943 and 1953) founded in Syria by the Christian Michel Aflaq, the Sunni Muslim Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and Zaki al-Arsuzi, a Syrian who studied at the Sorbonne in 1920. Aflaq added: “Arab nationalism, wrote Michel Aflaq, is not a theory but the source of theory; it does not feed on thought because it feeds all thought, it cannot be used by art because in it all art takes its source and soul; between it and freedom, there can be no opposition because it is freedom in that it follows its path.” In Jamil Chaker, “Philosophie du parti Baath,” *Travaux et Jours* 10, June–September (1963), reprinted in *Algiers: Revue de Presse* 78, October (1963). It should be noted that Didier Julia, a current UMP deputy, is still a member of the Baath party ...

8 Balta, *L’islam*, 115.

It is true that, today, Leila Shahid, one of the leaders of the PLO, does not (always) wear a veil. Nevertheless, the current Syrian Baath party has joined forces with Hamas and Hezbollah, while Palestinian nationalism, which is also presumed to be secular, not only refers to Jerusalem as the third holy city of Islam, but also claims *the entire city* as its capital. As Emmanuel Sivan explains so well in his famous book, *Mythes politiques arabes*,⁹ Jerusalem only gradually became a reference point for Muslims once they realized its importance for Christians and Jews. In 1099, when Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders, the Muslim chroniclers of the time, Sivan notes, “were satisfied with reporting on the event in a neutral tone, in an anecdotal manner”...

It would take more than five centuries for it to acquire a theological role, in particular under the joint influence of new converts of Jewish origin like Rav Akiba (K’ab al-Ahbar), the fervent presence of Christian hermits, and more generally the symbolic need to anchor Islam in the very heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition which it claimed to not only inherit, but also correct. In other words, without this *physical* heritage (in the Greek sense of *physis*, or the totality¹⁰ incarnated), this justification would collapse and Islam would appear as it did to many observers when it emerged: *Another Christian heresy*¹¹ (which itself was a Jewish heresy ...).

Contrary to appearances, and especially today, it is therefore not a tactical alliance between sibling rivals, despite the past and present conflicts between Nasserians and the Muslim Brotherhood or between Saudi Wahhabism and jihadists. The reason is that they have never disagreed on the crux of the matter, the return to former greatness, and only dispute the means of bringing it about: Renaissance (*Nahda*) for the former, taking inspiration from the modernization efforts promoted in the early nineteenth century by some intellectuals living in Europe¹²; the return to the imitation of pious ancestors for the latter (*al-salaf al-salih*), which led to Salafism and its variants found in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Wahhabism, and Palestinian Hamas, and, despite its Shiite rather than Sunni

9 Emmanuel Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), Chapter II, 67 et seq.

10 <http://membres.lycos.fr/patderam/physics.htm>

11 Joseph Cuoq, in *L’Église d’Afrique du Nord du I^{er} au XII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1984), 118, observes as follows: “Let me make a first observation: In the Islam imported by the invaders, Christians at the time saw less a new religion than another heresy like Arianism, Monophysitism, or Donatism. Didn’t Saint John of Damascus, a Christian official in the Caliphate of Damascus and Father of the Church, consider the religion of the new masters of the East to be a Christian heresy? Under these circumstances, it is easier to understand how Berber Christians turned to Islam, like Qusayla, to save their lives or to keep some advantages.”

François Decret in *Le Christianisme en Afrique du Nord ancienne* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 262, makes the same observation: “The climate of the conquest was that of jihad, in other words, a holy war: War was waged to bring people to Islam. And in this new, imported religion, many Christians only saw a Christian heresy, one of many that already existed in Africa. This aspect explains why some, out of fear or self-interest, passed to Islam while believing they were remaining faithful to a form of Christianity.”

12 For example, al-Tahtawi and Abdo (Egyptians), in Balta, *L’Islam*, 64.

roots, Lebanese Hezbollah too. They do little to hide the pan-Islamist tendencies of some religious movements, of which Khomeinism is the latest example and the most recent diatribe of the current Iranian president the final diatribe. Especially when he declares that the coming conflict in the so-called Holy Land will be the final battle of a war that began centuries ago ...

This declaration should not be taken lightly, including on the theological-political level (not separate in Islam), since total supremacy over this region would confirm Islam as the sole *authentic* religion of the Book (which should not be confused with the Bible or the Torah, which are erroneous texts for Islam, since it is the very idea of the Word, the divine word of which the Koran alone is the Discernment [for example, the surahs III-3, III-4, ...]).¹³

Without this territorial dispute, Jews and Christians would only appear to Muslims as vestiges of heretical sects that nonetheless need to be maintained as archeological proof of the dark past of the Force.¹⁴ It led to the need for Dhimmitude,¹⁵ Islamism asserted (Maimonides was, for example, the designated doctor of Saladin, something that would be unthinkable today ...), unlike national Arabism, which has thought more about eradicating it, especially since the creation of Israel, with more than one and a half million Jews deported from Arab countries.

13 <http://www.resiliencetv.fr/modules/news/article.php?storyid=237>

14 Joseph Cuq gives the following account in *L'Église d'Afrique du Nord*, 164: "Under the pretext of being as faithful as possible in accordance with the law, the 'ulama' fell into abuses contrary to co-existence with other believers. Some, for example, refused to eat meals with them or even to shake their hands, probably for fear of contracting a legal impurity. The faqih Ibn Abi Zayd went even further: 'If a Christian or a Jew greets you,' he writes in his *Risâla* (Bercher edition, 312-13), 'you must only respond: 'Alayka' ('and to you' without adding al-Salâm). You can also respond, since according to one opinion it is licit: 'Alayka al-silam (=may stones fall on you).' There is a play on words between salam and silam." This segregation can be compared to what is happening today, for example in Seine-Saint-Denis, in France (*Le Figaro*, May 11, 2004, 10, survey 6).

15 In his preface to the book by Moïse Rahmani, *Sous le joug du Croissant: Juifs en terre d'islam* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Institut Sépharade Européen, 2004), 15, Yves Kamani wrote the following: "Suffering discrimination and all kinds of daily humiliations related to their condition as dhimmi meant in particular making way for Muslims in the street, dismounting from the only mount allowed to them (the donkey), a prohibition on drinking wine in public, praying, or mourning their dead in aloud. (...)" Kamani observes that Jews were subjected to "massacres, forced conversion, confiscations and arbitrary taxation, false accusations, and vexing and humiliating laws." He cites Albert Memmi who asserts that every "passing Jew was susceptible to receiving blows to the head from any Muslim he encountered. At each crisis, at each important event, the populace descended and burned Jewish shops." In an epigraph, Kamani cites the work by Memmi, *Juifs et Arabes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974): "All of the victims of the Russian, Polish, and German pogroms probably do not exceed all of the small, successive pogroms perpetrated in Arab countries." The many works of Bat Ye'or on the topic could also be cited. And finally, I would note that Pierre Goinard in *Algérie, l'œuvre française* (Nice: Éditions Jacques Gandini, 2001) described the same vexations (pages 48 and 113); he observes, for example, that it "must never be forgotten the state in which the majority of Jews languished under the Turks, much lower than that of the Muslims, to measure their joy at the arrival of the French liberators." Goinard shares this testimony: "Note 2: We lived in the valley of shadow and death Now the sun has risen. (Address by Albert Cohn to the King of France in 1846, reported by Richard Ayoun and Bernard Cohen in *Les Juifs d'Algérie* (Paris: JC Lattès, 1982)."

Thus the Truth, embodied in Islam for national Arabism and (pan-)Islamism, got back on track in 1923, the year of the fall of the Sublime Porte, which did not occur by means of Mongol attacks but by these theologically and therefore territorially surpassed heretics, which was doubly intolerable ...

Does this obsession with the past and the difference in approach make Islamism an avowed adversary of the *Nahda* of Arab nationalism, in other words the concern about modernization expressed by several Arab intellectuals in the early nineteenth century and in the following century, as Paul Balta thinks?¹⁶ Nothing could be less certain.

First, because this Islamism insists “on the vital role of Arabs in the implementation of Islamic reform” as Menahem Milson observes.¹⁷ Next, Arab nationalism, in its Syrian or Egyptian interpretations, did not emerge as an ideological break with religion (as I indicated above), unlike the Jacobin, Leninist, or Nazi revolutions, all of which intended to oppose Judeo-Christianism completely, albeit in different ways. In Algeria, Arabism and Islamism were constantly linked,¹⁸ and historical proof of this was recently found.

Of course, the Koran was burned in the streets during the Iraqi revolution of 1958, as Gilbert Meynier highlights,¹⁹ but it was less a question of indicating a rupture than of asserting the doctrinal superiority of Arabism against the attempts—seen as outmoded—to reproduce the first and original Islam literally. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood allied itself with the Egyptian Free Officers Movement that overthrew King Farouk in 1952, in particular when one of them, Gamal Abdel Nasser, dismissed his official representative, General Naguib, and launched a vigorous anti-Jewish and then anti-Coptic campaign,²⁰ while protecting the Muslim Brotherhood, although he had some of them hung when they attempted to challenge him. Sadat continued the Islamization and anti-Christianism, even though he signed the peace treaty and was killed for it.

In short, the Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism of the Ummah, outside some cosmetic concessions, did not go nearly as far as Atatürk or Bourguiba, since the body of its doctrines was fed constantly by an Islamist reading of History that posits the past as an eternal present,²¹ while combining this perspective with Marxist and Leninist historiography that bases capitalism on imperialism, in other words

16 Balta, *L'Islam*, 104.

17 See note 31.

18 A fusion present since the start of the FLN movement in Algeria. See Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 220, 221, 223, 505. He demonstrates the presence of Islam at the very foundation of the Algerian “revolution.” Recently, Ali Benhadj, former number two of the FIS, spoke of 1954 as the first moment of the jihad to be continued today.

19 Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 220.

20 Masri Feki, “Le malaise égyptien,” in *A l'ombre de l'Islam, Minorités et minorisés*, with Moïse Rahmani and Lucien Samir Oulabbib (Brussels: Filipson Éditions, 2005).

21 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 35.

the primitive accumulation or pillaging that the Crusades brought back to the West, although it was marginal, and rarely the primary motive.²²

The idea of the caliphate as brandished, for example, by Saddam Hussein—undoubtedly an Arab nationalist—(and still today by his partisans) is therefore not only a tactical perspective aimed at rallying Islamism in its very last moments as some have said. It continues the vague desire for a great caliphate expressed from the 1920s to 1940s (with British support), following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire,²³ then blocked by Saudi Arabia with the creation of the Arab League in 1945. It was relaunched at the end of the 1950s with two attempts to create a United Arab Republic, the first including Egypt, Syria, and practically Iraq if the alliance between the first two had not failed in the meantime, the second including once again Egypt and Syria, and also Libya, until 1977.

These attempts (which were also supposed to include Algeria and Tunisia) were unsuccessful (and, especially after 1967, allowed the rise to power of Saudi Wahhabism and its billions of dollars) for a decisive reason: This union could not take place on a democratic foundation implying a plurality of decision-making centers and institutional counterpowers, because such a foundation is contrary to Islam.

It therefore adopted the unique forms of Muslim empires, which are in fact the classic historical forms of the constitution of an empire with the centralization of power and therefore the hypertely of a center,²⁴ in this case Cairo, but to the detriment of the periphery. At the time, this appeared inconceivable in practical terms for the military-business caste dominating these different countries that in reality did not want to abandon these temporal prerogatives, even for the sake of a restored caliphate. Nevertheless, and to compensate or even Arabize the people concerned with prosperity in this anti-democratic approach, this caste increasingly used Islam as a superstructural means of symbolic domination, while protecting themselves individually (for which Islamism criticizes them ...).

The broadly Islamic foundation of their institutional structures, such as the overlapping of decision-making spheres between politics and religion (the latter being bureaucratized with state mosques, for example in Egypt and Algeria) prevented the autonomous emergence of secular political attitudes, in the same way as it did for culture and customs.

One of the criteria that makes it possible to verify this comes from the analysis of these regimes of Arab nationalism by the late “new Arab left,” which was met with some enthusiasm in the 1950s and 1960s.

22 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 220.

23 See the site <http://www.refractaires.org/1dhimmi5.htm>.

24 For a detailed analysis of the democracy/empire opposition, see Jean Baechler, *Démocraties* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1985).

Emmanuel Sivan describes it in the following terms, highlighting two points²⁵: “First, this movement dedicated itself to a critique of the so-called ‘revolutionary’ or ‘progressive’ regimes (Nasserism, Baath parties in Iraq and Syria). It attributed the lack of real socioeconomic changes to the attachment of these regimes to the values of Islam (at least those that serve to manipulate the masses) and their refusal to adopt the values of modernity in political terms and in terms of individual freedoms. Second, the movement was supposed to end in a re-evaluation of the contribution of Arab thought in the twentieth century (...). For these authors, traditional thought was guilty of spreading empty beliefs according to which the recent past was a period of decadence due exclusively to the influence of external factors (...).”

For someone like Saddam Hussein, when it became clear that the construction of a United Arab Republic had snagged on the democratic need for its future construction (like the European Union, for example), in any case opposed to the continued and updated Islam promoted by Arab nationalism, the result was instead to reconnect with an old political form: the caliphate incarnated by its golden age (seventh to ninth centuries).²⁶ Moreover—and especially after the defeat in 1967 sounding the death knell of purely political nationalism as the spearhead of Arab revival—it had the advantage of connecting all the Islamist movements to itself with the exception of the Shiites, whom Saddam had failed to conquer in their main movement embodied by Iran.

In this sense, Saddam’s increasingly discernable attachment to the conquering history of Islam (and not only the Mesopotamian and Babylonian past), not only *preceded* the first Gulf War—instead of resulting from it as has been claimed by some—but was already present in the war with Iran.²⁷ Under these conditions, when he invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, it was less an expansionist annexation than a strategic step in the transition towards the construction of a caliphate, which would then necessarily pass through the capture of Mecca and Medina to legitimize his dominant control of “the Arab and Islamic world” by means of sacralization. It triggered a frightened call to George Bush Sr. by the Saudi Wahhabi regime, which preferred not to see “infidels” trample their “sacred” land.

A lack of understanding of this (formerly) Husseinian (and now Bin Ladenist) strategy aimed at reconnecting with classical Arab-Islamism (since the democratic path is antithetical to the very idea of a caliphate) in order to capture, first,

25 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 141-42.

26 According to the Lebanese historian Nabih Amin Faris quoted by Sivan, decadence began from the “ninth to eleventh centuries” (Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 59).

27 The Islamologist Mohamed Ibn Guadi explains this point: “Saddam Hussein constantly harassed his adversary by invoking the Arabness of Islam and therefore the foreignness of a people like the Iranians in the original Islamic sphere. Hussein even went so far as to invoke the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah in the conflict. And with reason, since it was during this battle that the Arab Muslims defeated the Persian armies” in *Le réveil de la nation islamique*, <http://www.reinfo-israel.com/documents/showthread.php?s=da8af6b9789fed590c50eefc830f5f27&threadid=3812>.

Muslim holy sites and then, second, continuing the uninterrupted jihad with the West (with the necessary weapons ...), explains why the illusion of its “secularism” still persists in the fashionable opinions of the dominant interpretation, especially in France.

To clarify this last point, we should first note that the emergence of Islamism, for the most part, occurred in the mid-nineteenth century.

It is therefore a much more recent phenomenon than the Arabist idea of *Nahda* mentioned above. Islamism is based on medieval precursors, for example Ibn Taymiyyah, a fourteenth-century Syrian commentator of the Koran (who also inspired in the eighteenth century Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the Saudi founder of Wahhabism and then all the Islamist movements). Nevertheless, the main contemporary Islamist movements have also, or mostly, drawn on a stunted reading of European historicizing literature from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century that proclaimed the rationalist and scientific superiority of Europe, the historical right to reconquer, or only indicated the greed behind Western incursions into the Middle East, neglecting their religious basis.

Emmanuel Sivan has admirably demonstrated²⁸ how the use of the terms “crusaders” and “crusades” only increased in the second half of the nineteenth century²⁹ after these readings of Arabizing historiography by identifying them as the major causes of decline (Zionism would be a modern example), while the Arabizing chroniclers of the period in question did not use this aspect to mark the course of History in the Middle East, nor did they use these terms to designate the Western actors.³⁰

In the same way, Menahem Milson³¹ explains clearly how Jamal al-Din Afghani (educated in Kabul and Iran) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (Egyptian) only emerged in the mid-nineteenth century by calling for a pan-Islamism claiming to “reform” Islam by purifying it of its foreign elements (laws, ideas), according to the following maxim “There are no flaws in Islam; the flaws are among Muslims” (which implies a priority on killing the latter, for example in Algeria when the FLN crushed Messali Hadj’s MNA, or today with the Shiites in Iraq). They referred to Ibn Taymiyyah (cited above) in oscillating between a love-hate relationship with the West and total rejection of it, calling for a return to the imitation of “pious ancestors” or Salafism. At the same time, they opposed Sufism using this “popular Islam,” as Paul Balta notes,³² whose mystic approach made up of meditation, ecstasy through dance, and obsessive recitation—in short, preferring illumination to

28 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 30-31.

29 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 24-26.

30 Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, 69.

31 Emeritus professor of Arabic literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. See his excellent report on the subject: <http://www.memri.org/bin/french/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sr&ID=SR3404>.

32 Balta, *L’Islam*, 36.

deduction—appeared to them incapable of forging the tools necessary to resurrect the “Arab” golden age (even though it was much more Muslim—including Kurds, Persians, and Babylonians—Jewish and Berber-Andalusian).³³

By promoting pan-Islamic unity as a tactic, Afghani had more success than ‘Abduh, who sought to fight industrial and urban modernity through the imitation of pious conduct, for example by combatting polygamy. His direct disciple, Rashid Rida, a Syrian, distanced himself and turned instead to Afghani to translate Salafism into political terms, transforming the idea of imitation into a desire to reproduce the very conditions of Muhammad’s capture of power (retreat from and rejection of surrounding society, exclusive recruitment of warriors; Ibn Tumart, founder of the Almohads, imitated him)—for example, by fighting the Jewish “invasion” of Palestine in the early twentieth century, because the Jews should remain submissive as predicted in the Koran. Al-Qassam (who gave his name to the rockets that Hamas rains on Israel) continued Rida’s interpretation by assassinating Jewish and British people *chosen at random*. Another disciple of ‘Abduh, Abd al-Raziq, who adopted on the contrary a distance between religion and state (1925), was promptly sidelined in favor of Amin al-Husseini (great-uncle of Arafat) who became famous as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and an avowed Nazi (he made an alliance with Hitler).

The Muslim Brotherhood, with the slogan “Islam is the solution” and founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, took inspiration from the strictly political interpretation of Salafism advocated by Rida, forgoing the pious and imitational reading of ‘Abduh, while endorsing a rigorous hunt for Jews, the “Trojan Horse of the crusading West,” with help from the Syrians³⁴ and the Christian Arabs, who were the main pan-Arabists of the early twentieth century. They hunted down Jews, a “decide” people, outdoing everyone in terms of Arabism to be accepted by the Muslim and Islamist nationalist ideologues. Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian, advocated the same position, and was a perfect example of the porous boundaries between Islamism and pan-Arab nationalism, since he started in the 1940s as an Egyptian nationalist before ending up a zealous jihadist after a trip to the United States, declaring any non-Islamic law to be apostate.

This sentiment has historically been carried by a single group, “the” Arabs, who see themselves, since Muhammad, as a sort of supreme and ultimate

33 André Miquel recounts the following in *L’islam et sa civilisation* (Paris: Colin, 1990), 158, about the Baghdad of the tenth century (fourth): “Baghdad is, as has been said, the point of gathering of old cultures: India of the mathematicians, astronomers, and doctors; Iran and the ethic of kings; and finally Greece, with Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Plato, Galen, Ptolemy, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, and many others, all finally organized under the banner of the uncontested master, Aristotle.[...] It should also be noted that the neo-Platonic tradition lived in the Middle East even before the appearance of the Arabs. Sasanian Iran had a famous school in Gundeshapur, Mesopotamia, in particular a medical school, which relied first and foremost on the works in the Syriac language by Nestorian Christians, great transmitters of Greek books.”

34 <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-13476.html>

caste to which one must belong or be marginalized, for example by paying heavy taxes like the Christians and Jews (Dhimmis ... *until the arrival of Westerners*), and by performing all chores in certain domains. There was therefore a desire among conquered peoples to convert as quickly as possible, and to be the most proselytizing (like the Berbers in Morocco and Algeria still to this day, but it has become increasingly controversial), to the great dismay of the leaders at the time (for example, the Umayyads) who attempted, throughout the seventh century,³⁵ to discourage this practice, leading to a sharp decrease in tax income and an increased scarcity of labor. This latter aspect explains the rise in slavery in Islamized countries, in particular slaves from Africa (from twelve to eighteen million over a millennium³⁶) when slaves from Slavic countries ran out.

From the beginning, Balta observes,³⁷ “Arabs developed a symbiosis between faith and ethnicity, Islam and Arabness. They believed (and some still believe) in their preeminence over other Muslims. (Note 1: It is true that Bukhari cites this hadith of Muhammad: ‘The debasement of Arabs is the debasement of Islam’).” This fusion between people and religion is certainly not exclusive to Arabs, but unlike the Jewish people, there is a desire to impose Islam as the only true religion and also the belief that there is no need for anything other than Islam.

The corollary question is not to ask if Islam and democracy, or Islam and development, are compatible but whether Islam needs their singular definitions in order to exist. The answer is “no” according to nationalists and Islamists, outside their specific forms. And pushed to the extreme, this interpretation allows an understanding of why it is possible to read today in school manuals in Saudi Arabia (which finances, with the utmost legality, a number of structures in France, Holland, and Belgium ...) not only that this country, archetypically Arab “today plays a leading role in the Muslim world,”³⁸ but also that the “religion of Islam is the true religion and all other religions are false. The religion of Islam is noble and prevails over all (other) religions. God accomplished His promise, because since the sun of Islam rose over the land, it is far above the other religions,”³⁹ and that the “religion of Islam [...] replaced the religions that preceded it,”⁴⁰ while Jews are “the very essence of maliciousness.”⁴¹

Reading this text, which in no way goes against the statements made by Nasser or Aflaq, we can see that Islamism is a religious nationalism transmitted by

35 <http://www.herodote.net/histoire11041.htm> and <http://www.herodote.net/07491030.htm>

36 <http://www.herodote.net/histoire09141.htm>

37 Balta, *L'islam*, 102.

38 *La démocratie en danger, l'enseignement scolaire saoudien*, with a preface by Antoine Sfeir (Paris: CMIP-France/Berg International, 2004), 33, “Éducation nationale,” CM2, 1999, 40.

39 *La démocratie en danger*, 44; “Commentaire du Coran,” ninth grade, 2000, 88.

40 *La démocratie en danger*, 44; “Géographie du monde musulman,” eighth grade, 1994, 18.

41 *La démocratie en danger*, 80; “Exercice de langue, Facilité les règles de la langue arabe,” ninth grade, part 2, 1999, 24.

a leadership caste, the “Arabs,” that has always been constructed on a racist/absolutist basis and not a secular one. And in the twentieth century, it has found justification—without having to answer for it, as I said in the beginning, because it was endowed (and continues to be in Palestine and elsewhere) with the anti-colonialist struggle—in brandishing the example of German nationalism and its National Socialist extreme rather than the English, American, and French nationalisms, and their specific but real acculturation in the democratic regime.

This *theoracist* conception of History, and it is hard to see how it could have civilized the West,⁴² explains the ties established with Nazi Germany in the 1930s⁴³—symbolized, let us remember, by the allegiance of Arafat’s great-uncle, al-Husseini (Grand Mufti of Jerusalem), to Hitler, as well as the admiration of some Nazi writers for Islam⁴⁴; without forgetting the support that Abdel Nasser gave to the Nazi effort. Nasser had *Mein Kampf* translated into Arabic and declared on May 1, 1964 to a German newspaper: “During the Second World War, our sympathy was with the Germans.”⁴⁵ He also believed that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, translated by the Arab League, was a credible document. “This text proves without any doubt that three hundred Zionists, who all know each other, decide the fate of the European continent,” declared Nasser in 1958 to an Indian newspaper.

In this perspective, the founding text of the Algerian Front de libération (1955) that advances the notion of the “Arab race” is symptomatic:

“Article 4: Algeria is Arab by race and Muslim by faith and will continue to be so. It also respects other religions, beliefs, and races. It condemns all racist and colonialist doctrines. Article 5: Algeria is an integral part of the Arab Maghreb, which is part of the Arab world. Its aspirations to pan-Arabism and its collabora-

42 Even by inspiring mathematics, like algebra, since Roger Caratini shows—in Bordas, *50/51 mathématiques, les nombres et l'espace*, 511.3, B, 19)—that Diophantus was only repeated by Ibn al-Khwarizmi, a Babylonian; Diophantus himself had reiterated a symbolism that came in reality from India. Paul Balta rebels against this idea of “Arab civilization” as a “go-between” (54), although he concedes that zero was “invented by the Indians” (55). But could this be because he was confusing Arabs and Muslims? Avicenna was Persian, Averroes and Ibn Khaldun were Berber. Moreover, the idea that the Christian of the Middle Ages was a barbarian compared to the Andalusian marvels overlooks the fact that Byzantium (which only fell under the Ottoman yoke in 1453), Venice, Naples, and especially Northern Europe continued to develop. See on this topic, Henri Pirenne, *Histoire économique et sociale du Moyen-âge* (Paris: PUF, 1969), 13.

43 Feki, *Le malaise égyptien*. The author speaks of groups like Young Egypt and the Green Shirts, both inspired by the Nazis.

44 For example, the book by Sigrid Hunke, *Le soleil d'Allah brille sur l'Occident* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001). Hunke wrote for the magazine *Rasse*, presented as an ideological showcase for the Nazi regime. The Institut du monde arabe does not shy away from citing him: <http://www.imarabe.org/perm/mondearabe/theme/docs/4.html#4-02>. The same is true of Assia Eliane Katib on the Oumma website: http://oumma.com/article.php3?id_article=945.

45 Deutsche National Zeitung (“Während des Zweiten Weltkrieges unsere Sympathien den Deutschen gehörten” cited by Masri Feki, *Le malaise égyptien*).

tion with peoples and governments as well as with the Arab League are completely normal.”⁴⁶

It should be noted that the “respect” mentioned in Article 4 should be understood in the Muslim context, i.e., as *Dhimmitude*, or second-class citizenship, thus inverting colonialism but not abolishing it in principle. This conception should not be seen as a temporary element that is mainly due to a struggle for vengeance against France, but rather the very foundation of Arab-Islamism. And it is not a coincidence that the pan-Turkism that was established on the model of German nationalism starting in 1909 with the “Young Turks” movement resulted in the Armenian genocide that began between 1894–1896 under Abdul Hamid II and ended in 1915⁴⁷ with the blessing of its ally, Germany. Arab nationalism and Islamism, or *national-Islamism* are in reality two faces of a same superiority that has to protect itself from the foreign by reducing it or removing it.⁴⁸ As a result, it prohibited, from the start, any concession on the spiritual and *therefore* on the territorial level.⁴⁹

Forgetting this aspect would condemn us to misunderstanding the major causes of the simultaneous and successive failures of democratization in countries dominated by the institutionalization of Islam, since the latter has a response to everything. It also explains the permanent impossibility of finding a solution to the Judeo-Arab conflict.⁵⁰

The creation before our eyes, of a *national Islamism* whose patent racism remains the only one that has not justified itself, given its halo of anti-colonialism and Third-Worldism, is not the consequence of the Judeo-Arab conflict as some claim,⁵¹ nor of the first two wars in Iraq, but it is on the contrary their *leading cause*.

46 Fathi Al Dib, *Abdel Nasser et la révolution algérienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), 52.

47 It took place under the authority of Talaat Pasha.

48 Benjamin Stora does not see this when, in his article on the position of Algerian Jews (in Benjamin Stora and Mohammed Harbi, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010), 313-4), he endorses on the one hand the rise of pan-Arabism “born of the stinging defeats of 1967,” which is false, and, on the other hand, he speaks of a “radical and xenophobic Islam” when it is more generally a question of a racist political-religious movement that required Jews to fall under the banner of the FLN to return, in reality, to their position as *Dhimmis* that they had under the Turks.

49 Pierre-André Taguieff has demonstrated, in his monumental work on *Les protocoles des sages de Sion* (Paris: Berg International, 1992) T. 1, 279-80, that the “‘arrogance’ of the formerly ‘tolerated’ deeply shocked the good Muslim, affecting his honor and faith, because the absence of humility—of ostensible marks of humility—of the ‘Zionists’ embodied a violation of the order desired by God.” See also further in his text the racist Palestinian vision of the Judeo-Arab conflict (page 284).

50 Abdel Razak Abdel Kader, in *Le conflit judéo-arabe* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961) uncovered as early as the “thirties” (page 42) the “racist, reactionary” character of “Arab propaganda” about the creation of a national Jewish home, a racism based on secular “disdain” of the “Negro” and the “Jew” (page 45).

51 One only has to read the Palestinian National Charter to realize this:
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-original-palestine-national-charter-1964>.