



Course of

SUPERVISOR

CO-SUPERVISOR

CANDIDATE

Academic Year

Abstract

This thesis examines Nasserism as a political and ideological phenomenon rooted in Nationalism, the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and its political impact. It explores whether Nasserism is a coherent ideology or simply an extension of Arab Nationalism, analyzing its structural elements and relevance today.

The thesis is structured in three chapters. The first provides a theoretical and historical overview of Nationalism, from European theories to Middle Eastern contexts, highlighting how Nasser's vision is grounded in these ideas. The second focuses on Nasser himself, analyzing his rise as a leader and key policies like the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Pan-Arabism, and anti-imperialism, framing Nasserism as a deliberate ideological path during the Cold War. The third chapter studies the domestic influence of Nasserism on Egypt's constitution, education, religion, media, and arts, showing how ideology was both promoted and contested internally.

The analysis uses Michael Freeden's morphological approach and Quentin Skinner's concept of political action to evaluate Nasserism as both an ideological system and a political practice. The thesis concludes that Nasserism uniquely blends nationalism with a charismatic leadership model, which limited its lasting institutional strength. Finally, it reflects on Nasserism's legacy and potential relevance in the contemporary Middle East.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction to the Thesis	5
Nationalism from Europe to the Middle East	12
Introduction.....	12
Origins of Nationalism.....	13
Gellner, Kedouire, Hobsbawm, a more contemporary approach to Nationalism.	16
Not only Industrialization: the Case of Islam.....	20
Turkish Nationalism	23
The Critics to Gellner.....	24
Gellner's potential Nationalism	25
Anderson: a First Introduction	26
Nationalism and Education	28
Colonialism and Nationalism	29
The role of Colonialism in shaping Nationalism	30
Anti-Western Doctrines of Nationalism	31
Nationalism in the Middle East	32
Nationalism and Pan-Nationalism: the case of Panarabism.....	39
Nationalism in Egypt.....	41
Conclusion.....	45
Nasser from the Shores of the Suez Canal	48
Introduction.....	48
Nasser Biography.....	49
From Soldier to Statesman	51
The Free Officers Movement	52
Historical context: the Palestinian war of 1948.....	53
The Free Officers coming to power	54
Philosophy of Revolution.....	55
The Three Circles Theory.....	59
The Arab force	61
The road to Suez.....	63
From History to Ideology	65
Element One: The Israeli Factor.....	66
Element Two: The Americans Between Israel and the Aswan Dam	67
Element Three: Soviet Influence Through Arms and Oil.....	69
Element Four: The non-alignment doctrine and Baghdad Pact.....	72
Better than Non-alignment: positive neutrality.....	74

Summing up: the Arrival to Suez.....	75
Suez, finally.....	77
The Personalization of the Conflict.....	80
Reactions and Multilateral attempts.....	81
Conclusion.....	89
Nasserism: A Domestic Perspective	91
Introduction.....	91
Constitution(s).....	92
The Fundamental Principles of the State: Its Form	95
The Fundamental Principles of the State: Religion	106
Economy and Constitution	113
The Role of Education.....	124
The literary field and media.....	131
Conclusion.....	137
Conclusion to the Thesis and Further Research.....	140
Bibliography.....	150
Acknowledgements	157

Introduction to the Thesis

When interrogating global dynamics, such as the contraposition between the Global North and the Global South, a multitude of factors are brought into discussion. A visual image to grasp the difficulty and the importance of delving into the complex process of analysis is that of the orchestra. Like a musical composition, the global order is shaped by many instruments, each playing a distinct role. It is not only the melody that defines the composition, but also the underlying harmonies and accompaniments that give it depth and coherence. In this sense, the tension between North and South, though not always heard in the foreground, remains a crucial structural element, an undertone needed to understand the full symphony of global relations. This reflection aimed at introducing the underlying necessity that will drive this thesis: it will be an ear training exercise to discover the musical theme behind the Postcolonial dynamics. In order to study the development of the tension between the two Global poles, it is crucial to delve into the ideologies that shaped today's relations on this subject during the XX century, and thus the Cold War. Given this introduction, it should be clear the reason why to focus on Nasserism specifically.

Continuing on the orchestra metaphor, Nasser's ideology has played the accompaniment rather than the melody when looking at the bigger picture. This thesis fully acknowledges that in music, as in politics, there is no hierarchy between the main theme and the background harmony: they are both equally necessary to give life to the composition. However, it is interesting to reflect on how Nasser composed his ideological score: was it meant to remain in the background, or was it originally intended to take center stage in the melody? The answer to such a question could not be found in a single dissertation, however, this thesis intends to furnish initial material to reflect on. Thus, initially, the most suitable research question might be "What are the elements of Nasser's ideology?". This question assumes that Nasserism can be approached as a coherent ideological structure, yet in addressing it, the very nature of ideology itself will also be brought into question. Therefore, in a way, the research question is double: Is there an ideological framework in Nasserism, or does it merely reflect Nationalism? And thus, can Nasserism be properly understood as an ideology, or should it be seen as a political phenomenon derived from Nationalism? This last question is intended to shed light on the contemporaneity element of this thesis, precisely: Could Nasserism revive in today's Middle East? Why, actually, is that not the case?

To properly answer the aforementioned questions an analysis of Nasser's thought is mandatory. Therefore, it is important to clarify that this thesis aims to offer a study in the history of political thought, rather than an account of contemporary history. Thus, the focus won't be on the chronological order of events, but rather on their meaning for the ideological composition. This sort of disclaimer is intended to introduce the reader to the chosen order of the dissertation, meaning that in the course of the research, the temporal line will be reduced and expanded to help the ideological analysis. This does not mean, however, that a precise segment is not outlined. Indeed, the analysis will span from the Free Officers' ascent to power in 1952 to the beginning of Nasser's decline in 1968. Scholars attempted to divide Nasser's period into phases; for example, Lenczowski identifies four main periods in a span of twenty years: Egyptocentrism (1952–1954), the pan-Arab phase (1955–1958), the domestic socialist phase (1958–1961), and the pan-Arab socialist phase beginning in 1962. This classification might be useful in introducing the research work; indeed, the three chapters will be constructed on this macro-division.

As anticipated above, this thesis is composed of an introduction, three main chapters, and a conclusion. The contents and the aims of each section are now exposed. It seems appropriate to begin from the first chapter, titled “Nationalism”. Given the complexity of analyzing an ideology such as Nasserism, an area still lacking comprehensive scholarly exploration, it seems appropriate to begin with some fixed reference points. In the case of Nasserist ideology, one of the more established pillars in literature is the notion that Nasserism either originates from or is fundamentally rooted in Nationalism. Thus, it appeared a convenient choice to start from the concept of Nationalism. The chapter will present a nested structure, going from the general to the particular. Indeed, the beginning of this section consists of a literature review on Nationalism, specifically from its origins. Thus, briefly, the views of philosophers and scholars such as Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, and Mill will be presented. This will serve as an introductory framework for the rest of the chapter, since this part will be followed by a focus on three contemporary theories on Nationalism, particularly the ones of Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson. The decision to include these three authors reflects the intention to present different, yet mutually coherent, approaches to Nationalism. Indeed, Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson respectively emphasize the roles of education, industrialization, and colonization in the shaping of Nationalism. These three different concepts will allow a multifaceted analysis of Nationalism, which will then be applied to the specific case of Nationalism in Egypt. The nest structure of the chapter moves thus from the theoretical general framework to a more specific field, which is Nationalism in the Third World. In this specific section, Anderson’s theory is used as the main basis since it consistently focuses on the influence of colonialism on Third World Nationalism. Looking at this phenomenon in the Third World is meant to gradually introduce the reader into the Middle Eastern context, since some features of Third World Nationalism will then be found in the Arabic panorama too. However, in this section, a paragraph will be devoted to the so-called “Anti-Western doctrine of Nationalism” exposed by Eckert. This part is fundamental in creating the element of contrast in the analysis: indeed, through the chapter, the necessity of properly contextualizing Nationalism in a geographical area will arise. Subsequently, the chapter will thus be focused on Nationalism in the Middle East, explored thanks to the theoretical and historical frameworks of Roshwald and Dawn. In this section, a new crucial term for this thesis will be introduced: “Pan-Nationalism”. Indeed, it is in the geographical area of the Middle East that the phenomenon of Pan Nationalism has been fully represented. Thus, a concise focus will be given to the case of Ottomanism and its influence on modern Pan-Nationalism. In a way, it is specifically this term, “Pan-Nationalism”, to be used as a bridge between the Middle East and Egypt’s Nationalism. In Nasserism, Pan Nationalism will be articulated in Pan Arabism, and it will constitute a pillar of Nasser’s ideology, as this dissertation will show. In discussing the evolution of Ottomanism in the Middle East, a small paragraph is devoted to the case of Pan Turkism and the case of Turkish Nationalism; thus, the figure of Atatürk will be introduced in the first chapter but will then return back in other sections of the thesis as an element of comparison. Finally, Nationalism in Egypt is analyzed both from a historical and theoretical point of view. This paragraph constitutes the only exception to the above-defined chronological timeline of the research: here, some elements of modern history of Egypt will be given to contextualize the evolution of Nationalism in the country, first, under figures such as Al-Afghani, Mustafa Kamil, and Muhammad Abduh, and later on with the coming of the Free Officers, under Gamal Abdel Nasser. In conclusion, the first chapter “Nationalism,” will aim at providing a theoretical overview that spans from the Western origins of Nationalism to

its unique and distinctive manifestation in the Egyptian context. This chapter thus serves a dual purpose: it offers a literature review on Nationalism, essential for introducing Nasserism, while also laying a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of other key dimensions of Nasser's ideology.

If the first chapter serves as a static foundation for initiating the analysis, the same might not be said about the one now analyzed. Indeed, this second chapter is notably more dynamic in structure and moves directly into the ideological study of Nasserism. The chapter is composed of two main sections: a first, preliminary part is centered on giving an overview of the figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Rais. As stated above, since this thesis is not on contemporary history, this section briefly addresses the major events in Nasser's life to support the contextualization of the phenomenon. The biography's section is deliberately not explored in depth, in order to maintain focus on the chapter's central aim; however, particular attention is given to Nasser's military career, as the army would exert a lasting influence on the development of Nasserism. The objective of these first paragraphs is to give elements to comprehend the rest of the section, dealing with one of the main sources when studying Nasserism: the opera by Gamal Abdel Nasser, "Philosophy of Revolution". Nasser's book stands midway between a pamphlet and a manifesto, both in terms of length and subject matter. The first part of this chapter will therefore undertake an in-depth examination of the concepts presented in *Philosophy of the Revolution*. As stated above, the opera results in a very short pamphlet in which Nasser attempted to answer some pressing questions that could arise from the people. In this section, thus, some initial definitions of concepts in Nasserism will be given, starting from the delineation of what a nation is, and how it should revolve against occupiers and colonizers. A musical metaphor may help to illustrate an essential feature of Nasserism: if the ideology were a lyric opera, the character of Nasser would be introduced on stage by a recurring musical theme evoking anti-imperialist and anti-colonial rhetoric. In this chapter, an important Nasserist theory is then presented, the three circles theory will be deeply discussed and finally linked to the crucial Nasser's analysis of the "Arab force": What makes the Arabs fundamentally different from the West in particular, and what is the strategy for rising to the position they are destined to occupy?

The second section of this chapter is entirely dedicated to the Nationalization of the Suez Canal; in a way, this represents the chosen scenography of the opera, the ideology. The decision to use this historical event as the backdrop for the stage is directly inspired by the account of Heikal, one of Nasser's closest friends and collaborators. Indeed, this section largely follows the narrative path traced by Heikal in his book *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, where he describes the dynamics and circumstances that led to the escalation surrounding the Nationalization of the Canal. Four main factors will be identified as crucial elements to the realization of Nationalization. Specifically, these are the Israeli conflict, the American influence, as well as the Soviet one, and the need for arms, and finally, the peculiarity of the non-alignment doctrine, articulated in "positive neutrality" in Nasserism. This part will be built on a double track: each of these factors is strictly linked with an ideological aspect of Nasser, and thus the narration of historical events serves solely to give a context for further analysis.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a focus on the analysis of political discourse, particularly on the speech given by Nasser on the occasion of the Nationalization, 26th July 1956. Commenting on the Suez Canal speech provides a natural conclusion to the chapter, as it synthesizes the themes discussed throughout the section while adding

further nuances and complexity to the figure of Nasser, and thus to Nasserism itself. In conclusion, the main sources for analyzing the ideology in this chapter will be the script by the Rais *Philosophy of Revolution*, Heikal's opera *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, and the words of Gamal himself during Nationalization.

The second chapter, thus, will be entirely set in the foreign policy scenario: it will observe the Egyptian leader through the eyes of the *étrangers*. This point of view will be particularly useful in highlighting how the Rais wanted his ideology portrayed to the outside world. Indeed, in delving into the study of political thought, it seems crucial to report on the different perspectives from which the same ideology could be looked at and the various fields in which it took shape. The decision to begin with the presentation of Nasserism in the realm of foreign policy, rather than its application in domestic affairs, stems from the idea that it will be easier to initially situate Nasser's character in a scenario more familiar to most readers, namely, the nationalization of the Suez Canal. In this way, the chapter aims to offer a smoother entry point into the study of Nasserism. The third chapter, by contrast, will provide another perspective on Nasser's ideology: that of domestic policy. Therefore, a substantial change in sources will occur between the second and the third chapter. Indeed, the preceding chapter will rely on both documents intended for external audiences, in which Nasser was always looking at the foreigners, and reports on the Rais interacting with *others*. Contrarily, the third chapter will have another package of sources, entirely related and generated for the people itself, the Egyptians. This variation in sources will thus allow for a transition of perspective in the study, which will follow a new *fil rouge* traced by the Constitutional documents. This chapter intends to provide an analysis of the development in constitutions and how it reflected on the Egyptian society, thus the ideology will be observed in action in the home governance.

At the beginning of the chapter, a historical introduction on the constitutional process under Nasser will be given, to offer sufficient elements to approach the ideological analysis. Indeed, the study will take into account the four main Constitutional documents produced during Nasserism: the 1954 temporary Constitution, the 1956 Constitution, the 1962 National Charter, and the 1964 Constitution. Through the course of the chapter, the main evolutions in this process will be highlighted, paying particular attention to the decision on the wording of the different articles. The idea here is that ideology passes through various channels, and thus, the chapter will explore its representations in the internal contexts. Specifically, the main observed fields will be: the definition of the form of the state, and its fundamental principles, the economic development throughout the constitution, and the evolution of crucial rights such as education, free speech, and freedom of information. Particular attention will be given to the study of religion in Nasserism, its role and its limits; this section aims to answer a specific question, central in defining Nasser's ideology: is secularism a fundamental element of it?

In this chapter, the most dynamic section is probably constituted by the one focusing on the evolution of social rights and freedoms. This part is opened by a detailed examination of the role of education in Nasserism, starting from the constitutional principle that guarantees the right to free education and delving into the sociological effects of it. This paragraph is thus strictly linked with the preceding presentation of Hobsbawm's theory and the role of education in Nationalism. Indeed, as will be further demonstrated, this third chapter aims to serve a sort of reconciliation with the opening one, reflecting on the exposed theoretical basis. In the conclusion of the chapter, a final area will be explored: the cultural and media domain, closely connected to freedom of expression and the

press. This final focus will add another layer of analysis, also providing an opportunity to reflect on the reliability of certain sources and the role they played in shaping Nasserism. In conclusion to this latter evaluation of the cultural field, this study will provide a portrayal of Nasserism in music, as it offers another shift in perspective: while the previous analysis focused on how Nasser wanted his ideology to appear to his people, this section explores whether the people were able to see the ideology beyond the person. The main authors consulted in this section will be two pillars of Egyptian music culture: Abdel Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum.

This third, and last, chapter, rather than focusing solely on the definition of concepts, will thus open to explore the different channels through which the message was spread. In this, it will inevitably reconnect to the theoretical notions given in the first chapter on Nationalism, so ascertaining the nationalistic character of the ideology. An additional element is finally given by the focus on the realm of communication and education, which allows for further reflection on Egyptian society.

Until now, the analysis has focused primarily on the structure of the thesis, concentrating on the main topics and themes explored throughout the dissertation. The following paragraph aims to provide a broader overview of the research as a whole, highlighting the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis. While the first chapter draws on the previously discussed concepts of Nationalism, this is not the case for the subsequent sections. In particular, starting from the second chapter, the framework of reference shifts to Michael Freeden's work, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. Freeden's theory will be introduced at the end of the second chapter and will serve as the basis for evaluating the ideological nature of Nasserism, specifically, whether or not it can be considered an ideology according to Freeden's model. Therefore, the first chapter does not directly address the question of what an ideology is; contrarily, it attempts to establish a solid basis for the analysis by doing a literature review on Nationalism. The aim here is thus to evaluate whether or not Nasserism might be depicted as an independent ideology, or whether it is solely a variant of Nationalism. In line with this aim, the thesis will present two different theoretical frameworks: the first one, on Nationalism, and the second one on the definition of Ideology. The choice of referring to Freeden's theory will be extensively explained in the course of the thesis. In this first introduction, it might be useful to underscore that Freeden's framework appears to be suitable for analyzing ideologies clouded by "vagueness and elusiveness"¹. Indeed, he defines ideology as "a wide-ranging structural arrangement that attributes *decontested* meanings to a range of mutually defining political concepts". Thus, this last definition links the concepts with politics; this process is particularly useful in this dissertation since it allows for the distinction between the two realms: the one of political acts and the one of ideological thought. However, it seems legit to preannounce here, in the introduction, that the aforementioned Freeden's framework will not entirely satisfy the aim of this thesis. Indeed, while concluding, an opposite and antithetical theory will be explained to finally answer the question "Is there an ideology behind Nasserism?". This inverse framework is the one of Quentin Skinner, which focuses on political acts rather than ideologies, standing in clear contrast to ideological analysis. Thus, over the course of the research, a silent shift takes place: it moves from Freeden's morphological framework of ideologies, which attempts to grasp the immanent within the dynamic, to Skinner's theory, which takes movement itself as its point of departure. While Freeden focuses on concepts as the foundation of ideological

¹ Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56.

analysis, Skinner begins with what can be observed prior to concepts: political actions and speech acts. In this final sentence, the conclusion of this research can already be glimpsed.

In conclusion, the thesis aims to explore Nasserite ideology, starting with and defining the concept of Nationalism, which is a foundational element of it. It then develops and explains the ideology through various channels. First, by framing Nasser's figure, then by analyzing one of his greatest endeavors, the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Another avenue through which to observe the ideology will be the analysis of political discourse. Finally, attention will be given to domestic policy, with an analysis of constitutions from which the main concepts defined by Nasserism will be extrapolated. At the end of this thesis, three key questions will be addressed. First, whether Nasserism can be considered a form of Nationalism. Second, whether there is something beyond this Nationalism thus, whether a distinct Nasserist ideology exists. Third, what does this mean for a potential revitalization of Nasserism in the Middle East.

Nationalism from Europe to the Middle East

*Nations themselves are narrations.*²

Introduction

History is the evolution of paradigms, institutions, and reference points; therefore, identifying and classifying history's events and agents into categories is crucial. Taxonomy in history has not always enjoyed a positive reputation, as Donald Sassoon noted in the introduction to Hobsbawm's *On Nationalism*: "history challenges beliefs to an extent unequalled in other disciplines."³ Hobsbawm himself warns historians by reminding them that they have a major responsibility on their shoulders since without proper care events may be labeled and cataloged incorrectly, causing a dangerous spiral of political-ideological beliefs. One of the main perilous effects of history is what Sassoon defines as "myth-making", and in this regard the author quotes Thucydides: "Old stories of occurrences handed down by tradition, but scantily confirmed by experience, suddenly ceased to be incredible"⁴. In this passage, Thucydides expounds on the capacity of history to render comprehensible events that previously appeared enigmatic. This phenomenon elucidates Sassoon's apprehension that history is often distilled and simplified to facilitate swift comprehension of an event. It has been observed that the more frequently a phenomenon occurs in history, the more simplified its explanation tends to be. However, this simplification can lead to the misclassification of significant and minor events. The challenge with simplification is that it treats the dynamics of history as static, as if they were photographs. To fully comprehend a phenomenon, it is often necessary to consider its evolution and compare it to other similar cases. This process is particularly evident in the context of Nationalism, as there are numerous examples of this phenomenon, yet there is a limited understanding of its underlying causes and implications.

History, in particular, has the potential to become a weapon in the hands of ideologies, precisely through the process of mythmaking and simplification. As Hobsbawm himself asserts in his 1998 work "On History": "History is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, like poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction."⁵ Nationalism is nourished by history, just as history is nourished by Nationalisms; this is part of what emerges from the many different analyses that have been written on the history-Nationalism relationship. There are several forms of Nationalism, and the term has been defined in a variety of ways by historians and political scientists. An intriguing perspective on the genesis of Nationalisms is offered by Hobsbawm, who contends that historians are instrumental in shaping the past, thus rendering history and its practitioners pivotal elements of Nationalism.

² Said, Edward W. *Culture and imperialism*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1993.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *On Nationalism* (New York: Little, Brown, 2021), 8

⁴ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (London: J.M. Dent; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1910), 1.23.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *On Nationalism* (New York: Little, Brown, 2021), 10

This chapter aims to offer a comprehensive literature review on the subject of Nationalism in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Egypt. The objective is to provide a nuanced understanding of Nationalism, avoiding oversimplifications and misinterpretations, such as those often associated with Nasserism. To achieve this, the chapter will begin with a preliminary discussion of the notion of the nation, recognizing that a full understanding of Nationalism hinges on the broader discourse surrounding the concept of the nation. Philosophical perspectives from thinkers such as Rousseau, Fichte, Mill, and Herder will be briefly examined, as their theories on the development of nations and Nationalism have significantly shaped subsequent scholarly discussions.

The chapter will then turn to three foundational authors in the study of Nationalism: Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson. These figures were chosen for their ability to illuminate critical aspects of the developmental processes of Nationalism, particularly in relation to comparative analyses of Western and Eastern Nationalisms. While the chapter will outline the central theses of these scholars on Nationalism, the focus will be on their perspectives on Eastern Nationalism, especially as articulated by Gellner and Anderson. Additionally, the chapter will address critiques of Gellner's framework, particularly the Eurocentric bias attributed to his theory, which is largely grounded in industrialization. Breuilly's contributions will be highlighted as part of these critiques, as they offer valuable insights into the limitations of Gellner's approach. This critical engagement with Gellner's work will serve as a launchpad for exploring how other scholars have approached the study of Nationalism in the Middle East and Eastern contexts.

The second part of the chapter will shift its focus to theories of Nationalism outside the West, emphasizing the link between Nationalism and anti-Western ideas, as well as colonialism. The presentation of Anderson will be particularly useful in avoiding oversimplification of the phenomenon, and also thanks to the analysis of authors such as Ecker, Roshwald, Halliday, and others. The objective of this chapter is to transition from the general to the particular, commencing with a comprehensive examination of the concept of Nationalism in the West and concluding with a detailed analysis of Panarabism, the Middle East, and Egypt. This examination will delve into the specific nuances of Panarabism, emphasizing its historical and philosophical underpinnings while maintaining a focus on its political dimensions. As previously mentioned, the objective of this chapter is to provide the fundamental concepts and understanding necessary to analyze Nasser's policies; thus, to discern the distinctive characteristics of this policy and to determine its comparability to other Nationalisms of the same period in Europe, given its similar rhetoric and objectives.

Thus, the structure of this chapter mirrors that of a matryoshka doll, starting with the broad and generalized context of Western Nationalism and its philosophical foundations, then opening successive layers to focus on the specific case of Nationalism in Egypt.

Origins of Nationalism

A preliminary investigation into the subject of Nationalism and its theories must be preceded by an examination of the intellectual origins of this concept. According to Benner, in modern social science, "Nationalism" is employed to denote any movement that aims to align state boundaries with self-proclaimed nations' ones. This definition underscores a value-neutral stance. While it does not necessarily align with any particular political

ideology, Nationalism does embody certain core values, including internal freedom and autonomy, resistance to domination, and the assertion of national self-determination. The term “Nationalism” itself emerged in the English academic community during the First World War, and it was not widely used prior to the 20th century. The philosophical underpinnings of the first iteration of Nationalism can be traced back to the works of Rousseau, Herder, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Mill. These scholars developed a distinct and influential discourse on Nationalism, articulating its foundational values.

The notion of Nationalism emerged from the concept of the nation, although not all contemporary authors concur with this perspective, as will be elaborated in the paragraphs below. Nevertheless, Rousseau’s approach is predicated on the concept of nation, a concept with deep-rooted origins in our societal fabric. The term “nation” is derived from the Latin word “*natio*” which translates to “place of origin”. However, the original meaning of “nation” was not simply a geographical term, but rather one that encapsulated the concept of sovereignty. This normative idea of sovereignty was possible because the concept of nation as a “birthplace” was closely associated with the Latin term “*gens*”, which translates to “people”. Consequently, the nation was then identified with the people who were entitled to hold ultimate authority within a polity. Rousseau was the first writer to dedicate significant attention to the concept of nationhood in political legitimacy. In his seminal work, *The Social Contract* of 1762, Rousseau advanced a voluntarist form of civic nationalist ideal. He conceptualized the nation as a group of individuals who, in a deliberate manner, establish their own governing authority without regard to factors such as birth, religion, or wealth. Rousseau’s perspective emphasized that historical, cultural, or religious affinities may serve as a complement to this agreement, but they cannot supersede it. Accordingly, Rousseau contended that any people who choose to constitute themselves as a nation have moral claims to independence that must be taken equally seriously, irrespective of their size, military strength, or cultural characteristics. Indeed, Rousseau rejected all teleological theories that gave unequal rights to independence or territory on the basis of claims to superiority in civilization. For Rousseau, the right to self-determination extended to each people, and he thus came close to presenting justification for what Benner defines as “ethnic Nationalism”. This is an ideology that considers national identities in exclusive terms by grounding them in characteristics or sentiment that are said to be natural.

Another foundational concept in the development of the nation and the subsequent rise of Nationalism is the theory developed by Herder. A German philosopher, Herder built upon the ideas of Rousseau, but he proposed a new, non-contractual conception of nationhood. Herder embraced the egalitarian concept espoused by Rousseau and explicitly rejected the notion of European civilization as superior. A notable aspect of Herder’s thought is his assertion that nations are formed through shared linguistic bonds. As Benner notes, Herder’s position, akin to Martin Luther’s, posits that vernacular languages, being more aligned with nature and divine principles, should be prioritized. This notion marks an innovation within the philosophical discourse, as no predecessor had previously proposed that linguistic identities should be regarded as the fundamental source of political authority. In Herder’s thought, language is not merely a medium of expression for a people’s spirit and distinctive virtues; it is also a conduit for the projection of power. For instance, the French language held a dominant status in Europe, which contributed to France’s cultural predominance. The connection between Herder and modern Nationalism is

evident; indeed, he applied his idea of cultural authenticity to Germany⁶, which at the time was divided among different principalities; Herder was convinced that Germans should be proud of their culture and tradition and thus unite in its name.

It is noteworthy to observe that the concept of a national language can give rise to contentious debates when it is employed for narrow and self-serving objectives. Indeed, it is interesting to note, however, that Herder has sometimes been accused of being the father of modern European ethno-Nationalism, thus giving rise to the ideas of Hitler and his *Volke*. As Fukuyama noted, this criticism is quite unfair, since Herder clearly stated in his work that there is only one human species, and he attacks authors who create hierarchies among races, which is quite reasonable for an author who lived before genetic scientific research⁷. Moreover, Fukuyama emphasizes that Herder was one of the first authors to focus on non-European cultures, and before the beginning of colonialism, he warned Europeans by saying, “Let it not be assumed that human art and ingenuity, along with their tempestuous arbiters, can suddenly transform a foreign land into Europe.”⁸

Continuing on the linguistic approach of Herder, Fichte has been one of the first authors to argue explicitly that language communities have a right to self-government, for him: “whenever a separate language is found there a separate nation exists which has the right to take independent charge of its affairs and to govern itself”⁹. Fichte’s philosophy of nation and Nationalism has been accused of predicting the rise of extreme ethnic Nationalism in Germany.¹⁰ Fichte did believe that intentional policies, like the educational system, should be used to implant a sense of nationality in the people in order to foster a common cultural identity. Many authors, including Hobsbawm, Gellner, and to a certain extent Anderson, have acknowledged the significance of the educational system in Nationalism; these will be examined later.

John Stuart Mill is another writer who must be mentioned in order to provide a comprehensive account of the beginnings of Nationalism; he attempts to assess national claims in light of broad principles rather than specific political agendas¹¹. It’s interesting to note that Mill viewed the integration of diverse populations into a single national state as a prerequisite for national independence. According to Mill, nations like Hungary, whose populations are highly diverse, should endeavor *to make virtue of necessity*. The fact that Mill made a distinction between European and non-European colonies, however, is even more intriguing. Since colonial control was eventually unsustainable, Mill foresaw that the indigenous people would eventually call for self-government. As a result, Mill encouraged the European nations to try to use their “superiority” to get non-European peoples ready for a higher level of development, which would eventually include self-government. Accordingly, Benner observes that Mill’s standards were more accommodating to non-European aspirations for independence than they were to the less advanced European nationalities.

⁶ *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018, 77.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 76.

⁸ Herder, Johann Gottfried. *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. Translated by Frank E. Manuel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, 183.

⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. R. F. Jones (New York: Harper & Row, 1968)

¹⁰ Erica Benner, *Nationalism: Intellectual Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

¹¹ *Ibidem*

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept of country and Nationalism developed significantly, and numerous writers depicted the topic in a variety of ways. A brief overview of Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, and Mill was valuable because it's interesting to notice how contemporary authors have evolved from their specific concepts and traits, highlighting, in turn, the importance of education and language, the differences in Nationalism outside of Europe, the willingness value, and the controversies. Because of this, it now appears reasonable to offer Hobsbawm, Gellner, Kedouire, and Anderson's theses.

Gellner, Kedouire, Hobsbawm, a more contemporary approach to Nationalism.

Following an examination of the conceptions of Nationalism and nation by authors of the 18th and 19th centuries, the chapter will proceed to the presentation of additional perspectives. It appears that a suitable point of departure for the analysis of Nationalism would be the works of more contemporary authors, with Hobsbawm serving as a representative example. What is clear from his work "Lessons for the Twenty-first century" is that *orthodox* Nationalism in Europe was born in revolutions, the result of class struggles, evolutions and developments that imploded and exploded with the French Revolution; whereas Eastern Nationalism, outside the borders of Europe, seems to have a foggy structure. Non-European Nationalism is closely linked to the phenomenon of decolonization and, in a sense, limited to it. Speaking of this division between Eastern and Western Nationalism, one of the cornerstones of the analysis of Nationalism must be introduced: Hans Kohn. Kohn draws a sharp distinction between Western and Eastern Nationalism. The former is the product of nations, especially Britain, France and the United States. The second is the result of multi-ethnic and heterogeneous states, so the driving factor here is the need for independence, not only from foreign occupiers, as Hobsbawm's explanation points out, but also from their different identities.

What many political scientists agree on is what Kedourie restated in his book "Nationalism", published in 1993: Nationalism was born in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century¹². The Eurocentric view of historical-political matters led to an almost immediate identification of a beginning for the paradigm of Nationalism; and to a certain extent it was believed that Nationalisms had ended with the defeats of 1945. With the end of history previewed by Fukuyama, people believed they had defeated not only Nationalism, war, and history itself, but it turned out differently. Indeed, the cyclical nature of history highlighted by Thucydides in "The History of the Peloponnesian War" manifests itself in the reproduction of apparently similar and intrinsically different Nationalisms in the part of the world that cannot be defined as Western.

In the aftermath of World War II, the great colonial powers, Britain and France, experienced a period of gradual weakening, due to a lack of economic stability that hindered their ability to maintain strong control over their overseas empires¹³. Concurrently, the emergence of the two superpowers that followed the war, the United States and the Soviet Union, positioned themselves as opponents of colonial possessions. This created a favorable environment for the development of independence and anticolonialist sentiments. The first indication of this paradigm shift was India's independence from Britain in 1947, which initiated a domino effect that led to the

¹² Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960)

¹³ Donald Sassoon, "Introduction", in *On Nationalism* by Eric Hobsbawm (New York: Little, Brown, 2017), 12

decolonization process, continuing until the late 1960s, and in the case of the Portuguese colonies, until 1974. This process resulted in the convergence of anti-colonialist sentiments with those of Nationalisms that had been steadily emerging in these regions for an extended period. The tension between the conceptions of nationhood and independence in the context of Asian and African Nationalisms was articulated by Kedourie. He identified two approaches to Nationalism during the period of decolonization. The first approach identifies Nationalism as arising from a sense of national identity. The second approach identifies Nationalism as a tool for generating power and sentiment to establish the nation-state. The notion that the concept of the nation is derived from Nationalism, rather than the inverse, is one that Kedourie propounds.

This last perspective is, at least partially, shared by Gellner, a seminal figure in the field of literature, particularly renowned for his pivotal work “Nation and Nationalism.” However, Gellner also posits that the concept of Nationalism is in fact a product of modernity, rather than the other way around. In order to comprehend the concept of Nationalism, it is imperative to understand the role of modernity in Gellner’s theoretical framework. According to Gellner, Nationalism does not originate from capitalism or class ideology. Consequently, Gellner refutes the Marxist thesis and commences rigorous research into the role of modernity in shaping Nationalism. An interesting reflection on Gellner’s theory is that proposed by Fukuyama in his book *Identity*. In fact, Fukuyama emphasizes that Nationalism was also born out of the pressures of industrialization on people. Fukuyama’s and, by extension, Gellner’s ideas are also reflected in literature, as exemplified by Mann’s novel *Buddenbrooks* and Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*. Indeed, these works tell of the anxieties of men preparing for the new industrial society, a transition that for millions of Europeans meant a profound identity crisis.

This research culminates in his seminal works, namely his books “Thought and Change” of 1964 and “Nations and Nationalism”, published in two versions, 1983 and 2006, respectively. Gellner’s thought is pertinent to the understanding of non-Western Nationalism insofar as he focuses on the value of transition in human history: “It is only in transitional situations that is really true that men learn nothing from history: they cannot. They have to invent sociology instead”.¹⁴

The role of industrialization and education

Gellner and Hobsbawm emphasize two external factors as primary catalysts of Nationalism: industrialization and education. In this section, these elements will be examined to provide a more comprehensive overview. Gellner’s theoretical transition pertains to the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society, a period which has given rise to the conceptions of nations and Nationalisms.

According to Gellner, identity is predicated on culture, which in an industrial society is in constant flux. In the context of agrarian society, the cultural identity of an individual was primarily defined by their unique role within that society. Instead, in an industrial society there has been a shift towards a more “context-free communication” model, where individuals are expected to function within a broader, more fluid social and cultural landscape. In this new world, Gellner contends that a range of skills become fundamental for survival, with literacy being paramount among them. Literacy has been identified as a fundamental aspect of Nationalism, and indeed, the

¹⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), 66.

ability to read and write is considered a prerequisite for national identity. The process of standardizing literacy is therefore crucial for achieving mass literacy. Education is instrumental in facilitating this process, providing universal access (or nearly universal) to all segments of the population. Consequently, a standardized cultural identity, characterized by a uniform language, emerges as an expression of the convergence of state, population and culture. According to Gellner, this process is instrumental in the transition from industrial society to the rise of Nationalism. The argument of Gellner posits that Nationalism functions as a transformative force, metamorphosing what are often termed “folk cultures” into “high cultures”. By “high cultures”, Gellner alludes to instances where a written vernacular is present within a culture that is connected to an effective state, thereby facilitating the dissemination of culture across all societal strata. Illustrative examples of high cultures, according to Gellner, include Britain, France, and the United States. The transformation of folk culture into high culture necessitates the establishment of a written vernacular and, most crucially, the modeling of national history and traditions to foster national identity. Gellner, in this case, employs the term “unification Nationalism” and cites the examples of Italy and Germany. However, an examination of the Turkish case, which will be done later in this chapter, reveals that similar factors can result in divergent outcomes.

The pivotal function of literacy and mass education in the process of nation-building and Nationalism is also acknowledged by Hobsbawm. Indeed, Hobsbawm explains that from 1870 until 1914 throughout Europe there was an increase in primary education that led not only to the teaching of writing and reading skills but more importantly enabled the circulation of so-called national values.

Gellner identifies some principal features of industrial society: “universal literacy and a high level of numerical, technical, and general sophistication”¹⁵. The significance of these characteristics lies in the necessity for efficient and expeditious communication within industrial society. Hobsbawm and Gellner concur on the pivotal role of the educational system in facilitating this process, with Gellner emphasizing its indispensability in accessing the “written word”.

While Gellner acknowledges the necessity of developing this capacity for efficiency reasons, Hobsbawm emphasizes the utility of common language and the written vernacular in disseminating national values, a perspective that Gellner does not concur with, as he attributes the origins of nationalist sentiments to different factors. Gellner places significant emphasis on the role of teachers and the educational system within industrial society. According to Gellner, the shift from an elite-controlled written word to a more democratized form of communication has significant implications for society. This transformation, Gellner contends, has led to a decline in the perceived uniqueness and irreplaceability of teachers. Indeed, for him “Modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture”¹⁶. Gellner’s argument asserts that within a standardized culture and language, the presence of a dominant “mamluk class”¹⁷ within the bureaucracy is nonexistent. Consequently, the bureaucracy is able to draw from the general population during the recruitment process. Gellner’s summary of this phenomenon is encapsulated in the phrase “exo-socialization, education, and proper are

¹⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 140.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 243.

¹⁷ John Breuilly, "Introduction," in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 40.

now the virtually universal norm". The educational system is characterized by its high maintenance requirements for the state, yet the state remains the sole infrastructure capable of ensuring its sustainability. The state's ability to control culture, which has become an integral part of society, is paramount. However, challenges emerge when education is controlled by private entities, such as religious organizations. Gellner refers to these organizations as "shadow-states", exemplified by the Church, which wielded significant influence over education in various regions. It is noteworthy that Anderson persists in his examination of the evolution of what he called "imagined communities", tracing the trajectory of languages and their associated processes. The development of a language education system occupies a pivotal role in this inquiry. Anderson concurs with Hobsbawm's assertion that the advancement of schools and universities is indicative of Nationalism. However, Anderson's perspective is limited to the context of 19th century Europe, disregarding the applicability of this correlation to other periods and geographical regions.

What is a nation: Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson

To understand the theories of Nationalism espoused by these authors, it is essential to examine their conception of the nation. Moreover, it is particularly interesting to compare these views with the concept of nation presented by earlier authors, such as Rousseau, previously mentioned.

According to the theories of development of Nationalism proposed by Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson, it is possible to understand their conception of nations. Indeed, while Gellner considers industrial society to be intrinsic to the nation, given its capacity to flatten heterogeneity, Hobsbawm does not subscribe to this viewpoint. Indeed, Hobsbawm's position is that individuals can self-identify as members of a nation even in the absence of linguistic and cultural commonalities. Hobsbawm's thinking is particularly akin to that of the late 19th century French thinker Ernest Renan. Renan is particularly renowned for his seminal question, "What is a Nation?"¹⁸ (*"Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?"*). In essence, Renan's conception of a nation is characterized by greater malleability and adaptability in comparison to Gellner's. It is noteworthy that this attribute is shared by Renan and Hobsbawm, thereby aligning their respective visions. Indeed, the response to the initial question posed by Renan serves to stimulate further research: "the existence of a nation is like a daily plebiscite"¹⁹. Renan's response can thus be interpreted as a perpetual search for the nation; for the French thinker, the concept of the nation is not static, but rather dynamic, affirming national unity. In contrast, Gellner acknowledges that the nation represents the culmination of a transitional process.

Gellner's position is that modernization leads to a homogeneous nation, while for Renan and Hobsbawm, this is not the case. Indeed, for Renan, the nation is defined as a continuous process in which the elite and the people are equally essential. This perspective resonates with the 19th century context, as articulated by Sassoon, who asserts that "the new sovereigns of the nineteenth century adorned themselves with the patina of popular legitimacy"²⁰. Examples of this change are the new titles that rulers chose for themselves and their people: Napoleon, for

¹⁸ Renan, Ernest. *What is a Nation?* Translated by Edward K. Brown. In *Theories of Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 19–34. London: Routledge, 2012

¹⁹ *Ibidem*

²⁰ Donald Sassoon, "Introduction", in *On Nationalism* by Eric Hobsbawm (New York: Little, Brown, 2017), 25.

instance, proclaimed himself “Emperor of the French”, and subsequently, in 1830, Louis Philippe D’Orléans was crowned “King of the French”. This shift signifies an elevated priority being accorded not solely to the individual representing the nation, but above all to the consent of the people. This phenomenon was aptly encapsulated by Renan with his concept of “continuous plebiscites²¹”.

The notion of continuous plebiscites is a concept that diverges significantly from Gellner’s theoretical standpoint. Gellner’s theoretical framework posits the existence of several catalysts for group formation, including will, voluntary adherence, identification, loyalty, and solidarity. However, he also acknowledges the role of fear, coercion, and compulsion in group formation. In contrast, the concept of the “continuous plebiscite” appears to extend beyond the mere expression of the will of the people. Gellner does not exclude the possibility that a nation may be based exclusively on one of the elements. However, for him, this is quite rare; the majority of groups, for Gellner are based on a mixture of loyalty and identification with incentives made by hopes and fears. As Anderson articulated, the notions of nation, nationality, and Nationalism are inherently intricate concepts, defying facile definition. Indeed, as Heugh Seton-Watson, author of “Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism” of 1977, asserts, the scientific conceptualization of nation remains elusive, as the nation merely constitutes a phenomenon in his theoretical framework. Anderson’s position, while aligning with that of Heugh Seton-Watson, endeavors to delineate the concept of a nation as an imagined political community. In his seminal work “Imagined Communities”, Anderson expounds upon his definition of nation. Primarily, a nation is conceptualized as an imagined entity, given that, even within the most diminutive nation, its constituents will invariably remain unacquainted with one another. In this regard, Anderson’s perspective diverges significantly from that of Renan, who propounds the notion that, within a nation, its members possess a common bond with one another. Furthermore, a divergence of opinion may be observed between Gellner and Anderson. Gellner’s perspective posits that the nation emerges as a consequence of a process of homogenization. Conversely, Anderson’s position eschews this notion, asserting that the formation of nations is not contingent on such a process. However, in his work “Thought and Change”, Gellner clarifies his position, emphasizing that Nationalism does not stem from the awakening of primordial forces, but rather, it is a conceptual *invention* that gives rise to nations that are not inherently present. In conclusion, Anderson’s concept of a “imagined community” is predicated on the notion that, within each nation, there exists a pervasive horizontal comradeship among the population. This fraternity, in turn, engenders a sense of community from that particular entity.

Not only Industrialization: the Case of Islam

Given the chapter’s primary objective of examining Nationalism in the Middle East, it is noteworthy to highlight one of Gellner’s most salient insights in the realm of Nationalism outside of Europe. Specifically, Gellner dedicates a section of his analysis to examining Islam as a pivotal element in understanding Nationalism in the Middle East.

According to Gellner, the advent of Nationalism, consequent to industrialization, has the potential to forge nations where they were previously nonexistent. Gellner identifies several factors that are instrumental in the cultivation

²¹ Renan, Ernest. *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?* 1882.

of Nationalism, which include: written vernacular, territorial state, distinctive religion²². Still, Gellner contends that Nationalism is not exclusively the consequence of industrialization; it can also be instrumentalized to achieve modernization. In the introduction to the last edition of “Nations and Nationalism”, Breuilly highlights that Gellner acknowledged a notable exception in the relationship between Nationalism and industrialization, namely the case of Islam. In Breuilly’s words, “Islam manages to serve as the functional equivalent of Nationalism in a way which has not been possible for Christianity (p. 65). The role and capacity of Islam in nation-building has been a particularly salient inspiration for Gellner, who in 1994 wrote “Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals”. In this work, Gellner undertakes a comparative analysis of four sociopolitical ideal types: premodern segmented society, civil society, communist society, and Islamic society. Gellner’s argument posits that the establishment of a nation does not inherently result in the emergence of a civil society, but rather, it may give rise to a communist or Islamic order. According to Gellner, Islamic society is characterized by the sacralization of daily life, wherein economic ideals are considered secondary to moral ones. Gellner’s work also explores the concept of *Umma*, and he even considers communist society to be a “secular Umma.” In fact, as Lapidus argues in the modern context, the concept of umma is often invoked to denote the idea of a transnational solidarity among Muslims that transcends nation-states, although it remains an ideal that is more theoretical than practical²³. From a legal point of view, the umma corresponds to the Islamic community that observes the Shari’a²⁴ but from a sociological one, the umma is a community that is not only religious, but above all social, transcending geographical barriers in the name of collective solidarity²⁵. Since the concept of civil society employed by Gellner draws from Ferguson’s 18th century ²⁶notions, centering on capitalism and commerce, he observes that Islam’s growing prominence in the 20th century coincided with the increasing integration of Islamic countries into the global capitalist economy²⁷. However, Gellner does not consider Islam as a functional equivalent of Nationalism, since in his opinion religion cannot completely overshadow Nationalism, this has a clear reference to the case of Egypt for example²⁸.

Gellner’s acknowledgement of the distinctive nature of Islam in the context of nation-building is pivotal for comprehending the characteristics of Nationalism in non-Western regions, notably the Middle East. The Middle Eastern region has been profoundly influenced and transformed by the adoption of the concept of nationhood. Islam has functioned as both a catalyst and an impediment to the attainment of national unity, as demonstrated by the manifold experiences of Nationalism in the Middle East. Fukuyama devotes a paragraph to Gellner and his analysis of Islam noting that Gellner had already understood that modern Islamism should be viewed through the lens of modernization and identity. Fukuyama’s intent is to actualize Gellner’s analysis to today’s problems between Nationalism, identity, and religion. Indeed, the author notes that both Nationalism and Islamism have their origins in modernization. Indeed, the transition from agrarian to industrial society also occurred in the Middle East at different times. However, many Muslims have only experienced modernization by migrating to the West, or have

²² John Breuilly, “Introduction,” in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 60.

²³ Ira M. Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” *Past & Present* 151, no. 1 (May 1996): 3–27.

²⁴ Khadduri, Majid. *The Islamic State and the State of Islam*. 1994

²⁵ Esposito, John L. *Islam and Politics*. 3rd ed. 1998

²⁶ Ferguson, Adam. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Edited by Duncan Forbes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966.

²⁷ Kurzman, Charles. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. 1995

²⁸ John Breuilly, “Introduction,” in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 70.

been reached by the Western world through media and globalization. For Fukuyama, this is where the problem of identity and thus the clash between Nationalism and religion arises. Picking up on Gellner's thesis, Fukuyama notes that in this identity struggle in the case of Muslims, what prevails is religious identity, and not national identity: "For some Muslims today, the answer to this confusion has not been membership in a nation but membership in a larger religious group: an umma"²⁹. Building on this analysis, Fukuyama makes a brief review of the genesis of Islamist political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Then the author compares major Islamist parties with nationalist parties: both often abide by democratic rules, but harbor potentially illiberal tendencies because of their ambitions toward unity. Fukuyama concludes by saying that therefore Nationalism and Islamism can be seen as examples of identity politics. However, he himself says "stating this does not do justice to the full complexity or specificity of either phenomenon, which nevertheless have a great number of similarities." (p. 89) Both in fact arise at times of transition and both ideologies give comfort to lonely and confused individuals, both finally claiming recognition of their identity.

Gellner and Breuilly: Debating Nationalism Between Industrialization and Empire

It is important to acknowledge that Gellner considers the possibility of Nationalism without industrialization, as evidenced by the case of Türkiye. Indeed, Gellner also posits that Nationalism can function as an ideology of industrialization, citing Marxism in the Soviet Union as an example. A potential issue with this example is that it suggests that to be the driving force of industrialization, Nationalism requires a supporting ideology, such as Marxism. In contrast, the case of Türkiye appears to be an example where Nationalism served as the primary catalyst for industrialization and modernization. Breuilly identified two issues with the link between Nationalism and industrialization. Firstly, not all instances of pre-industrial Nationalism necessarily result in industrialization. For instance, numerous third-world nationalists espouse a rejection of Westernization and industrialization. Furthermore, many nationalists engage in actions that appear to retard their countries' progress, as evidenced by the case of Cambodia. As Breuilly noticed, Pol Pot's regime targeted individuals with Western educations, illustrating this phenomenon. In the context of Breuilly's analysis, Nationalism and industrialization are regarded as pivotal agents of social transformation³⁰. For the author, this asserts the existence of two distinct scenarios. The initial scenario posits industrialization as a natural process that engenders homogenization through the proliferation of a dominant cultural paradigm. According to Gellner's proposition, in the presence of cultural diversity within a society, Nationalism emerges as a consequence. Consequently, in this initial scenario, Nationalism functions as a medium for the articulation of a standardized and homogenized culture within the context of industrial society. In the second scenario, industrialization is the desired outcome of the nationalists. In this case, the nationalists implement cultural standardization to achieve standardization. Gerschenkron and other economic historians have argued that many cases of industrialization were the result of Nationalism³¹. Gellner himself cited Friedrich List as the first nationalist advocate of industrialization. However, in List's 1841 work, "*Das nationale System der politischen*

²⁹ Fukuyama, Francis. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018, 84.

³⁰ John Breuilly, "Introduction," in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 73.

³¹ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Ökonomie” (The national system of political economy) the concept of modern Nationalism as defined by Gellner is not explicitly referenced. Instead, List’s work focuses on the notion of nation-states developing an industrialized society to compete on the global stage. Furthermore, as Breuilly contends, the evidence suggests that Nationalism may be more indicative of a pursuit rather than a consequence of industrialization over the past 150 years.

An important point that Hobsbawm makes in this regard is to emphasize that Arab Nationalism is a product of the 20th century and came about as a result of modernization: “It came out of the cities, not the nomadic encampments”, he claims. While it is easy to agree with Hobsbawm that Arab Nationalism is the result of gradual modernization, as Gellner would say, it must be remembered that, especially in the Mediterranean region, Nationalism has been used as an instrument of modernization rather than vice versa. A striking example is the case of Turkish Nationalism, which differs from Arab Nationalism in terms of ethnicity and identity but is united by its religious and social context.

Turkish Nationalism

In the context of discourses on non-European Nationalisms and modernization, it is advantageous to examine the case of Turkish Nationalism. This is primarily because it offers a paradigm of the confluence of Nationalism and the endeavor to establish a nation. Hobsbawm explores the divergence between nation-building and nationalist ideology, positing that the two phenomena rarely align. Indeed, Hobsbawm invokes the paradigm of Bismark’s Germany to illustrate this point, remarking on the Prussian unifier with the assertion that “He was a German, but not a German nationalist, probably not even a ‘Little German’ nationalist by conviction, although he actually unified the country”.³² In this vein, Hobsbawm contends that Italy serves as a prime exemplar of the divergence between Nationalism and nation-building. Indeed, prior to 1860, the Italic region had been devoid of any centralized administration, with the exception of the Roman Empire. The Italian case is particularly salient due to the absence of a common language and a homogeneous culture. This observation lends support to Gellner’s thesis that the emergence of a nation, as exemplified by Italy, does not necessarily align with the immediate advent of Nationalism. However, the Italian case prompts further reflection on the Turkish case, particularly with respect to understanding the differences between nations and Nationalisms across different geographical regions. The Turkish region coincides with the epicenter of the Ottoman Empire, and following the dissolution of the latter, the European powers engaged in the process of partition. In order to defend himself against the new colonizers, Mustafa Kemal embarked on a threefold venture: to establish the Republic of Türkiye, to create the Turkish people, and to modernize it.

The historical figure known as “Father of the Turks” emerged as a symbol of both national unity and the enduring nationalist sentiment that continues to define contemporary Türkiye. This transformation was precipitated by a radical secular-nationalist shift, accompanied by profound and far-reaching reforms that delved into the Ottoman Empire’s past, effectively overthrowing it. The beating heart of the Ottoman Empire, the embodiment of Islam, transformed into a secularized republic. A notable development was the official dissolution of Islam as the state religion as early as 1924, followed by the formal establishment of secularism as one of the six guiding principles of

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *On Nationalism* (New York: Little, Brown, 2021), 71.

the republic in 1937 ³³. Another reform spearheaded by Atatürk in the Turkish region was the compulsory introduction of the Latin alphabet at the expense of the Arabic alphabet in 1928 ³⁴. This reform, while having formal implications, also had profound cultural and societal ramifications, impacting civilizations at their fundamental levels. The replacement of an alphabet is a profound transformation, one that impacts identity, thought, and culture; as Herder asserts, “Each nation speaks in the way it thinks, and thinks in the way it speaks” ³⁵. It is noteworthy that Gellner’s criteria for identifying the emergence of Nationalism in Türkiye seems not applicable in this case, since the modernization was probably not the main driving factor of Nationalism. In essence, the Young Turks did not merely establish a geographical nation; they forged a national identity through a robust nationalist ideology. Consequently, it can be argued that, in this case, the formation of both the nation and the people contributed to the modernization process.

The Critics to Gellner

In the following discussion, the focus will be on the critiques leveled at Gellner’s theory of Nationalism. These critiques will be examined in the context of the case of Nationalism causing industrialization. This examination will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the development of Nationalism in regions outside of Europe, particularly in the Middle East.

One of the criticisms that Breuilly has levelled at Gellner is that the latter’s thought is at risk of becoming overly focused on industrialization as the primary subject of the theory, rather than on its role as an explanatory factor of Nationalism. This argument is particularly salient when Gellner’s theory is applied to Nationalism in non-Western countries, particularly those in the Global South, where the objectives and origins of Nationalism differ significantly from those of industrialization. For Gellner, however, the effects of Nationalism in history tend to be confused with the other consequences of industrialism. For him, Nationalism is only one effect of industrialism, not the only effect. To avoid the potential conflation of industrialization as a consequence of Nationalism with industrialization as a consequence of other factors, Gellner dedicates a section of his work to the distinction between reformism and Nationalism. It is interesting to note that for Gellner the relationship between reformation and Nationalism is particularly evident in the Arab world because of the presence of Islam. According to Gellner, reformism signifies a reversion to the foundational sources of Islam, namely, the Qur’an and the Sunna, through a rational and contemporary interpretation, thereby diminishing the influence of traditional or superstitious practices. Thus, for Gellner, the cultural history of Arab countries is a history of victories of reformism that occurred through Islamic Protestantism that supported scripturalism and hostility to spiritual brokerage. Because of this common development due to pre-modern Islam (spanning from 17th to 18th century), the history of modern Arab Nationalisms for Gellner cannot be separated from each other. The idea is that even under modernity Islam has the ability to preside what Gellner calls “anonymous community” and this hindered the possibility of developing Nationalism as in the West.

³³ William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* (London: Routledge, 2013), 180.

³⁴ *Ibidem*

³⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772; trad. inglese, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Breuilly also identified the weaknesses inherent in Gellner's theory, commencing with what he refers to as the "abstract and sociological form of Gellner's model"³⁶. Indeed, for Breuilly, the problem in this case is related to the difficulty of establishing a link between theory and real cases. This is probably due to the fact that Gellner's treatment of the state and politics is "cursory" as Breuilly defined it (p. 81). However, this criticism could be refuted by Gellner's own analysis of the relationship between colonialism and Nationalism. Indeed, in analyzing this, the author takes historical reality and political facets into consideration, showing that he recognizes that the Nationalism-industrialism link was able to develop as a unicum in history, which is the case of Western nations during the first wave of industrialization.

Gellner's theoretical framework encompasses a nexus between Nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, and decolonization. The period spanning from the 15th to the 20th centuries, characterized by widespread global conquest, was considered an anomaly by the author. Typically, Gellner contended, political empires emerge from military domination. Conversely, he perceived the European colonization of other continents, particularly Africa, as driven by industrial and trade interests. This perspective suggests a potential link between Nationalism, colonialism, and industrialism. By noting this, Gellner's argument provides a compelling insight: the European domination did not necessarily result in the adoption of European values or the internal contamination of populations. Gellner's perspective on decolonization, spanning from 1905 to 1960, is not regarded as the sole catalyst for Nationalism in these regions. Instead, he posits the influence of other factors. Nonetheless, he acknowledges the impact of colonialism on the various Nationalisms within these territories.

Gellner's potential Nationalism

Gellner acknowledges the perceived weakness of Nationalism, and in introducing this topic, he reminds the reader that the number of Nationalisms that failed to develop is far larger than those which did, yet the latter captured all the attention. The author has indeed specified that even during the age of Nationalism, Nationalism exhibits some feebleness. Since Nationalism is defined as the striving to make culture and politics congruent, one of the weaknesses of Nationalism is the failure to define culture. An acceptable criterion of culture can be the language, and by doing this hypothesis, it is easy to see that the number of languages in the world is more and more big than the number of nations. These can be defined as "potential Nationalism". However, Gellner proposes that additional factors can stimulate potential Nationalisms, as evidenced by the Scottish case. Through this line of reasoning, Gellner seeks to underscore that, for each prevailing Nationalism, there are *n* groups with a shared culture that have the potential to evolve into homogeneous industrial communities without necessarily actualizing their potential Nationalism. One significant critique of Nationalism is its tendency to promote the imposition of homogeneity. Indeed, throughout history, numerous regimes have successfully maintained peace and order while simultaneously tolerating diversity, as evidenced by the Ottoman Empire's millet system. Gellner's theory posits that the number of cultures benefiting from Nationalism is unpredictable, thereby resulting in the formation of a homogeneous culture under a political entity. This assertion is supported by historical evidence, as even during the era of Nationalism, most cultures did not experience tangible benefits from this ideology. Gellner's perspective on

³⁶ John Breuilly, "Introduction," in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 80.

Nationalism as a catalyst for the awakening of “an old, latent, dormant force”³⁷ is a contentious one, as it contradicts the prevailing notion that Nationalism serves as a unifying force. As Sassoon speaks of the danger of “myth-making”, Gellner’s work also cautions against the fabrication of myths from historical narratives. In his own words, “We must not accept the myth”, to underscore the understanding that nations do not align with the natural order and should not be regarded as the ultimate destination of cultural groups. Gellner’s primary critique of Nationalism hinges on its conception as a non-destined concept, rather than an inevitable one. He contends that the affirmation of “each and every nationality” often falls short in its capacity to ensure the success of the nation in question: “so, ironically, in its own terms Nationalism is astonishingly weak” as Gellner put it. Moreover, the author speaks of the so-called “great, but valid, paradox” consisting in the awareness that nations can be defined only in terms of the age of Nationalism, meaning that this latter is not simply the sum of the awakening and political self-assertion of nations.

What’s more is that for Gellner is Nationalism that engenders nations, meaning that Nationalism uses the pre-existing historical cultures and transforms them to serve its ideology. For this reason, Gellner asserts that “Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself” (p. 290), Gellner highlights the fact that the cultures that Nationalism pretends to defend are often its own inventions or are modified out of all recognition. To better explain this concept Gellner juxtaposes Durkheim’s idea of religions indeed, as for Durkheim religions worship the camouflaged image of society, so for Gellner Nationalism creates and worships the very society it is building. Therefore, for Gellner, Nationalism can come to have the same distorting force as religion. One of Gellner’s harshest judgments to Nationalism is that Nationalism creates an anonymous, impersonal and individualistic society. In reading this part of the work, it almost seems as if the author sees in Nationalism the faults that other intellectuals and scholars have seen in industrialization. The point that Breuilly also tried to make is that Gellner’s theory on Nationalism at times becomes a study of industrial society and that is all. In this particular passage of the work, in which Gellner argues that Nationalism divides and isolates men, it is evident that, in his view, the one-dimensional man so described by Marcuse is equally a product of industry as of nationalist ideology. However, it remains challenging to discern when, according to Gellner, the responsibility for these outcomes lies with one or the other.

Anderson: a First Introduction

In order to provide a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent analysis of Nationalism in regions outside of Europe, it is crucial to introduce the seminal work of Benedict Anderson. Anderson’s perspective is particularly pertinent for this study, as he offers a novel and insightful approach to the development of nations, communities, and Nationalisms. This approach is instrumental in the analysis of Nationalism in the Middle East. Anderson analyzes the concept of Nationalism from the “anomaly”³⁸. His starting point is that nationality, and thus Nationalism, are cultural artifacts; indeed, the title of his work is “Imagined Communities”. Anderson introduces the concept of Nationalism by quoting Nairn’s definition of the term: “Nationalism is the pathology of modern

³⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 320.

³⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006, 4.

developmental history, as inescapable as neurosis in the individual”³⁹. Anderson’s point is that it is a mistake to treat Nationalism as an ideology. In the initiation of his analysis, Anderson poses a question to the reader: “What makes the shrunk imaginings of recent history generate such colossal sacrifices?”⁴⁰; the final answer for Anderson lies in the cultural roots of Nationalism. Anderson’s position diverges from Gellner’s in the sense that he does not seek to draw parallels between Nationalism and religion. Furthermore, he emphasizes the necessity of articulating that Nationalism should not be construed as a consequence of the decline of religion, opposed to what Gellner, to a certain extent, might imply. Anderson’s theoretical framework challenges the conventional understanding of Nationalism as an ideology or a religion; instead, he proposes that Nationalism should be conceptualized as a cultural system that emerged and evolved alongside preexisting cultural frameworks.

In particular, Anderson’s analysis focuses on the decomposition of two cultural systems: the religious community and the dynastic realm. In the context of the religious community, Anderson, as Gellner, expresses particular astonishment at the remarkable concept of Umma. However, while Gellner contemplates Umma’s potential as a unifying reference point for its constituents, Anderson’s focus lies in the linguistic aspect of Umma. As previously mentioned, the Umma signifies the global community of Muslims, extending from Morocco to Japan⁴¹ and transcending national boundaries. This suggests that within the Umma, a multitude of languages are spoken, with the sacred language serving as the sole unifying linguistic element. According to Anderson, this distinguishes older communities from modern nations. The sacred language of Umma is classical Arabic, a language that is neither spoken nor understood. Despite its non-vocal nature, members of Umma are able to comprehend one another’s ideographs. Furthermore, classical Arabic can be regarded as the “truth language”⁴² because the Qur’an has historically been accessible only through Arabic. To a certain extent, this is analogous to Latin in the Church, despite the fact that the majority of Christians were not versed in Latin.

In his analysis of the dynastic realm, Anderson examines the premodern empires and kingdoms that maintained their rule over heterogeneous populations. He argues that these empires were able to sustain their rule not only through warfare, but also through what he terms “sexual politics”⁴³, referring to dynastic marriages. Beginning in the 17th century, the automatic legitimacy of monarchy in Western Europe began to decline, and new rules emerged, such as the principle of legal primogeniture, which stipulated that the eldest male child of the ruling family would inherit the throne. For Anderson, however, the emergence of imagined communities is not the result of the replacement of monarchical loyalty and religious communities. For Anderson, the fundamental change that led to the formation of nations remains in the new modality of apprehending the world. For him, the idea is that with the decomposition of all the other systems, the sociological organism emerges that moves calendrically, that is, in a homogeneous way in empty time: this begins to be perceived as a solid community in history.

³⁹ Nairn, Tom. *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1977, 329.

⁴⁰ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006, 8.

⁴¹ Although Anderson uses this expression, it is not entirely correct to state that the Umma goes from Morocco to Japan, since Islam is not present in Japanese society. One could say that this expression is more symbolic than objective.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 14.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 20.

From this introduction it is clear why for Anderson the resulting nations are imagined communities, since a member of the community will never meet or even know the other members but will have complete confidence in the anonymous community. Finally, Anderson argues that the very possibility of imagining the nation emerged historically only as three fundamental cultural conceptions declined: first, the idea of a script language for ontological truth. Second, the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centers. Third, a conception of temporality in which the origins of the world and of human beings are essentially identical.

Nationalism and Education

Like Hobsbawm and Gellner, Anderson sees the origins of national consciousness in the educational process, although he captures a different shadow of that process. Indeed, it is interesting to note that for Anderson the root of the educational process is the capitalist enterprise of book publishing. Anderson makes a historical excursion into the publishing process in the capitalist era. For Anderson, the revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism in Western Europe was given by three factors. The first was the change in the character of Latin, which took on an esoteric meaning different from that which it had in the Church. In fact, with the publishing industry, Latin became esoteric because of what was written, not because of the language itself. The second factor was the impact of the Reformation. In fact, by 1517, the internal lines of communication within the Church had changed. From 1520 to 1540, three times as many books were published in German as in the previous two decades. Finally, the third factor was the spread of the vernaculars in the administrative centralization of certain absolutist monarchs. Anderson takes as an example the case of England, where there was a fusion between the language of the ruling class, Norman French, and Anglo-Saxon: this fusion led to the new language of early English (p. 47). Although he finds these factors and explanations for the emergence of national consciousness, in the end Anderson asserts: “The element of fatality is essential” (p. 45). Anderson’s point is that the self-conscious process is still the result of “the explosive interaction of capitalism, technology, and human linguistic diversity”.⁴⁴ Anderson gave the example of the Turkic-speaking communities in what is now Türkiye, Iran, Iraq, and the former Soviet Union; indeed, this family of languages was comprehensible within an Arabic orthography but has lost that unity as a result of national manipulation. As explained earlier, Atatürk’s Nationalism imposed compulsory romanization in order to reduce Islamic identification⁴⁵. Anderson’s point is that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language has created a new imagined community. Anderson recognizes that all modern nations today have a national print-language, and some nations share their print-language, so “contemporary nation-state is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-language”⁴⁶, this because different political entities between 1700 and 1800 emerged in the West and provided new models of what a nation should be. However, as Anderson expounds, the nation’s inception marked its genesis as an invention for which patenting was inconceivable. As Anderson elucidates in his book, the nation and the Nationalism that emerged in disparate temporal and geographical contexts possess distinct characteristics. A notable aspect of his analysis is the allocation of two entire chapters to the nexus between colonialism, imperialism, and Nationalism. He asserts that

⁴⁵ Kohn, Hans. *The Age of Nationalism: The First Era of Global History*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962

⁴⁶ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006, 49.

the post-World War II states possess characteristics that defy comprehension within the frameworks examined previously. Indeed, Anderson's analysis further reveals that a significant proportion of these states adopted European languages as their official languages, a development that, according to Anderson, resulted in the adoption of "ardent populism from linguistic European Nationalism and a Russifying policy orientation from official Nationalism."⁴⁷ However, it is important to state that this is not the case for all colonies: the fact that India and Algeria adopted respectively English and French does not allow for a generalization of the phenomenon. Indeed, Egypt and Japan, among other examples, constitute a countermodel to this process.

Colonialism and Nationalism

Anderson's analysis revealed a salient difference between the colonial Nationalisms and the one developed in the antecedent imperial administrative union. The distinction can be attributed to the fact that the geographical boundaries of the 18th century colonial empires were influenced not solely by metropolitan absolutism, but also by substantial challenges related to communication, transportation, and technological underdevelopment. As time progressed, the administrative centers underwent development, accompanied by the evolution of bilingual identities within each center. Over time, these entities transitioned from colonial states to national states. According to Anderson, this transformation was primarily driven by the robust continuity of personnel. It is broadly acknowledged that the intelligentsias played a pivotal role in the rise of Nationalism in the colonial territories. In many cases, economic power was either consolidated by the colonialists or allocated to the politically marginal class of non-native businessmen. The intelligentsias' role stemmed from their bilingual proficiency, which, according to Anderson, facilitated access to modern Western culture and its models of Nationalism, nationhood, and the nation-state. In both the West and the colonies, the term "youth" conveyed notions of dynamism, progress, selfless idealism, and a spirit of revolution. Nevertheless, for Anderson, the concept of youth in the colonies was particularly associated with the first generation that had access to a substantial European education. To elucidate this process, Anderson employs the case study of Indonesia, highlighting the pivotal role of various factors in the development of national identity. He argues that while the centralized administrative hierarchy, the rise of industrialism, and the educational system contributed significantly to the formation of a national consciousness, the most profound catalyst was the legacy of colonialism. Notably, the educational system was profoundly impacted by colonial rule; for instance, the establishment of lycées was concentrated exclusively in the capital. This concentration facilitated urbanization and fostered the emergence of ideas and nationalist sentiments among bilingual individuals, thereby serving as a critical factor in the development of a cohesive national identity. However, Anderson argues that the designation of a national language does not inherently validate nationalist ideologies. He posits that the existence of a national language should not be a criterion for measuring the authenticity or legitimacy of a nation's Nationalism. For instance, he contends that Ghanaian Nationalism is equally legitimate as Indonesian Nationalism, despite the former's use of English rather than a native language such as Ashanti. This assertion challenges the notion that the language of a nation is a definitive marker of national identity or sentiment, indeed he states: "It is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologies

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 115.

treat them, as emblems of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest”.⁴⁸ Thus, for Anderson the role of language in this process is to generate imagined communities. Indeed, In his chapter titled “Last Wave”, the author elucidates the significance of multilingual broadcasting in shaping the identities of populations possessing diverse mother tongues. Furthermore, Anderson critically examines the role of bilingualism in Europe, arguing that it has often been employed as a foundation for Nationalism, leading to the fragmentation of communities rather than fostering unity among them. However, the distinction in the role of bilingualism between colonial states and Western contexts can be attributed to the nature of this bilingualism itself. As Anderson noted, in colonial states, bilingualism often symbolized dynamism and modernization, typically featuring a native language alongside the colonizer’s language. Conversely, in Western contexts, the relationship between the two languages tends to reflect an internal hierarchy rather than an external one, which can lead to a division within the community. Therefore, it was often more straightforward for colonized populations to adopt and use two languages, one of which was imposed by an external authority, compared to Western societies, where the imposition of a second language by someone perceived as equal was less readily accepted.

The role of Colonialism in shaping Nationalism

In the new edition of “Imagined Communities”, Anderson acknowledged one of his myopic assumptions about the link between Nationalism and colonialism. Specifically, he said that he initially believed that official Nationalism in the colonized worlds of Asia and Africa was directly modeled on that of the colonial states of the 19th century. Later, however, he admitted that this view was rather superficial. In fact, Anderson goes on to say that actually three institutions of a colonial nature were at the origin of Nationalism in the colonial states: the census, the map, and the museum. In his analysis of census data, Anderson acknowledges that during the colonial period, the categories of the census became increasingly marked by racial and religious identities, while the concept of religious identity gradually disappeared. These identities, as imagined by the colonizers, became labels that permanently marked the population. As Anderson explains, “the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one, and only one, extremely clear place” (p. 149). The census categories also played a pivotal role in the establishment of the new educational, legal, health, and bureaucratic systems, ultimately giving rise to the ethno-racial hierarchy. Anderson’s analysis of the role of cartography in shaping Nationalism in colonial states reveals a significant observation. He noted the existence of boundary markers and stones prior to Western colonization, but their proliferation was particularly notable along the “western fringes of the realm”(p. 151). These maps, reminiscent of censuses, employed a totalizing classification system that guided the actions of bureaucrats, resulting in policies that had profound revolutionary implications. Furthermore, Anderson contends that a nexus exists between maps and censuses, particularly in contexts where the census data serves to supplement and elaborate upon the formal topography depicted on the map, as evidenced by the case of Sri Lanka.

Anderson’s analysis of the proliferation of museums in colonial states reveals a curious phenomenon. Up until the early 19th century, colonial rulers in the East exhibited minimal interest in the antique monuments of the civilizations they had colonized. However, following the decline of commercial-colonial regimes, there was a

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

notable development in archaeological efforts. Anderson interprets this shift as being inextricably linked to Orientalism. However, he acknowledges the presence of additional factors that may have contributed to this phenomenon. Anderson's observations revealed a striking congruence between the timing of the archeological initiative and the advent of the first political struggle concerning the state's educational policies. This period was marked by a dichotomy between progressives, who advocated for substantial investments in modern educational institutions, and conservatives, who expressed apprehension regarding the long-term implications of such educational initiatives and advocated for the preservation of traditional cultural practices. In this context, archeological restorations can be interpreted as a conservative educational program, serving not only to preserve cultural heritage but also to counter the progressive agenda. Furthermore, there has been an increasing association between monumental archeology and tourism. This has led to the colonizer being perceived as a guardian of both general and local traditions. Anderson concludes this chapter on censuses, maps, and museums by asserting that monuments were "*museumized*" in this manner, thereby being repositioned "as regalia for a secular colonial state" (p. 189).

Anti-Western Doctrines of Nationalism

The study of Nationalism in non-Western countries is typically conducted in conjunction with anti-colonialist sentiment and, by extension, anti-Westernism. Indeed, as Erckert emphasizes, in the academic field there is a prevailing assumption that Nationalism is a Western invention. Consequently, non-Western Nationalism is often studied in comparison to the model of the West. According to Erckert's postulation, "Nationalism was regarded as one of Europe's most extraordinary contributions to the rest of the world" ⁴⁹. From this premise, the majority of historians of colonialism concurred that Nationalism was introduced from Europe and that it emerged from the rejection of Westernization in the name of authentic cultural tradition. This theory evolved particularly during the 19th century, when new nations were emerging in the colonized regions of the world. Eckert's argument suggests that, at first glance, Nationalism and colonialism might have been perceived as European exports. However, he contends that over time, Nationalism emerged as the predominant ideology in these regions, gradually displacing other ideological frameworks. A key point of Eckert's analysis is the distinction between the varied expressions of Nationalism, not only across East and West, but also within the non-Western world. To illustrate this, one need only consider the significant ideological differences between Indian and Egyptian Nationalism. Accordingly, it would be a simplistic approach, as Anderson would argue, to attribute the emergence of Nationalism in these regions exclusively to colonial influence. Eckert observes how the global expansion of the nation-state during the 19th century influenced the processes of globalization, and vice versa. McKeown also highlights how increases in global mobility influenced discourses of Nationalism, as noted in his work "Global Migration 1946-1940". Eckert's assertion, derived from this observation, posits that the specific manifestation of Nationalism and the representation of the nation-state around the 1900s were not merely the product of arbitrary traditions, but rather, to a considerable extent, the consequence of globalization. However, Eckert also recognizes the ambiguity of the spread of Nationalism out of the West. On the one hand, he argues that this spread was the

⁴⁹ Eckert, "Anti-Western Doctrines of Nationalism", in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56-75.

effect of the Westernization of the world. On the other hand, he acknowledges that Nationalism in non-Western countries has destroyed the Western overseas empires. Eckert acknowledges the presence of anti-colonial sentiment within certain Nationalisms in these regions, yet he places greater reliance on Rothermund's assertion that anti-colonial Nationalism was a pivotal driving force behind the decolonization process, rather than being a consequence of it⁵⁰. Finally, an alternative perspective is presented by Frederick Cooper, who cautions against the misperception of Nationalism as merely a consequence of the struggle for national independence. This misapprehension, according to Cooper, results in an incomplete analysis of the social issues pertinent to the nation. Eckert's perspective, as outlined in the introduction to his chapter "Anti-Western Doctrines of Nationalism" in the Oxford Handbook on Nationalism, offers a nuanced interpretation of the concept of Nationalism in the non-Western world. In this chapter, Eckert puts forth the argument that nationalist movements in the non-Western context cannot be reduced to a simple opposition to Western values or the uncritical adoption of the Western model of Nationalism. In order to substantiate his thesis, Eckert proffers two cases that exemplify the ambiguities of non-Western Nationalism: Gandhi and India, and Senghor and Senegal. By means of a concise analysis of the two divergent types of Nationalism that Gandhi and Senghor cultivated, Eckert accentuates several distinctive characteristics of these Nationalisms. The case of Gandhi demonstrates that not all of his ideas and activities promoted national unity; a considerable proportion were directed towards the peasants. The case of Senghor and his Negritude exemplifies the ambiguity of Nationalism in Africa concerning language, as Senghor acknowledged the significance of French as an administrative language, yet he advocated for the proficiency of every African in their respective languages. Senghor's Nationalism promoted a form of Pan-Africanism that was distinct from the nationalistic ideologies derived from the West and characterized by anti-Western sentiment. Furthermore, Eckert contends that it would be a misinterpretation to perceive the indigenous traditions invoked by Gandhi and Senghor as mere non-Western variations of a prevailing Western trope of anti-modernism. It is accurate to assert that both phenomena, Nationalism and colonialism, were informed by a critique of the West. However, their particular conceptualizations of Nationalism could be characterized as a "kind of bricolage"⁵¹, representing an ongoing endeavor to navigate and balance traditional and modern, indigenous and imported elements. In the context of this field, Chatterjee's perspective merits particular attention. Chatterjee challenges the prevailing notion, espoused by Anderson, that the concept of Nationalism, particularly in East Asia, emerged as a direct response to European influence. According to Chatterjee, the spiritual identity of these populations was not merely a consequence of colonialism; rather, it was a fundamental catalyst for the formation of nationalist movements.

Nationalism in the Middle East

A review of the major theories on Nationalism, from its intellectual origins to its most recent developments, reveals a striking difference between the forms of Nationalism in the West and in the East. This discrepancy is particularly evident in the context of research conducted on the subject. In order to adequately capture the main forces of Nationalism in certain regions, it is essential to label the phenomenon with the appropriate term. This research will focus on the Nationalism in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, and will present different theories on

⁵⁰ Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2006)

⁵¹ Eckert, "Anti-Western Doctrines of Nationalism", in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56-75.

colonialism and Nationalism. The aim of this presentation is to demonstrate that there are different approaches to studying Nationalism specifically in the Middle East. Eckert and Anderson's approach, as outlined in their work, involves a nuanced examination of the interplay between colonialism and Nationalism. They contend that a one-dimensional analysis, which views these concepts as a simple, unilateral relationship, does not fully capture the complexity of the historical and social factors that shape the relationship between these two phenomena. In this regard, Gellner's contributions are particularly noteworthy. He is among the first in this field to underscore the pivotal role of Islam and the concept of the Umma in the formation of Nationalism in this region. These elements, when taken into consideration, contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of Nationalism in the Middle East, it would be beneficial to explore the insights of Roshwald on the subject of "Nationalism in the Middle East 1876-1945"⁵².

As the title of the chapter indicates, Roshwald's primary focus is the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic until the conclusion of the Second World War. It is during this historical period that the seeds of Nationalism in the Middle East were first sown and subsequently nurtured. In the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Ottoman Empire witnessed the loss of its territorial holdings in the Balkans. This was followed in 1882 by Britain's occupation of Egypt, a pivotal event that significantly contributed to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent rise of Nationalism, not only in Egypt but also throughout the Middle East. It is important to note that Egypt had already achieved a significant degree of autonomy from the Ottoman Empire by 1805, when Mehmet Ali assumed the title of "*khedive*", signifying "vice-king". This development indicates that Egypt had already attained a greater degree of independence compared to other regions under Ottoman rule. However, Roshwald noted that with the arrival of the British in Egypt, Cairo became a "safe haven" for many of the harshest critics of Sultan Abdülhamid II. It was in this city that the Islamic modernist school of thought was articulated, with the first exponents of Arabism and Arab Nationalism. Islamic modernists sought to establish a harmonious relationship between Islam and modernity by asserting that Islam is a religion that is made to be reinforced by reason and to clash with it. The fundamental premise of this ideology is that, in the absence of a deliberate effort to adapt Islamic traditions to the contemporary era, the ummah is at risk of misinterpreting these traditions. Roshwald's assertion that Islamic modernist ideology sought to harmonize Islamic identity with educational, economic, legal, and political reforms underscores this concern. During the 20th century, the ideology of Arabism emerged from the school of Islamic modernism, with a prominent figure being Rashid Rida. Rida acknowledged the pivotal role of the Arabic language in Islam, particularly as the medium through which the Qur'an was revealed. Consequently, he posited that the decline of Islamic civilization was attributable to the foreign conquest perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks. Consequently, Rida cultivated a sense of Arab pride, emphasizing its connection to Islamic civilization rather than to a specific nation. Roshwald underscores how this sentiment of pride later evolved into a form of Nationalism, particularly in the context of the potential replacement of the Ottoman Empire with an Arab caliphate. According to this perspective, the Arab national pride emerged from the Islamic foundation, initially directed towards the Umma and not towards a specific

⁵² Aviel Roshwald, "Nationalism in the Middle East, 1876–1945," in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 220–240.

nation-state. This is a crucial aspect to consider when examining the development of Nationalism and Panarabism. Najib Azouri and other Christian Arab intellectuals, who were often educated in the West, articulated this Arab pride in a secular way. Azouri believed that because Arab culture was closely bound together by a common language and history, the Arabs might substitute a secular connection for the religious one. Since there are many different dialects of Arabic spoken in the region, it may be necessary to note that the shared language in Arab civilization is actually somewhat imprecise. In fact, these peoples only shared a literary language, the language of the Qur'an. In order to eventually eliminate the Ottoman Empire's discrimination of Christian minority as second-class citizens, Christian thinkers argued for the establishment of a secular Arab nation state. It's interesting to note that Azouri's proposal for an Arab state was comparable to the Panarabism project that Nasser eventually realized from 1958 till 1961 with the United Republic of Arab; in fact, Azouri advocated for the establishment of an Arab state that would stretch from Egypt to Syria. By highlighting the influence of the Christian elite on the development of Arab Nationalism, Roshwald likely aims to demonstrate how the secular-nationalist vision that emerged in the area was the result of a blend between Islamic modernism, articulated by Rida, and secular Nationalism: this perspective appeared feasible with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the First World War.

However, an examination of the historical record reveals a robust connection between Ottomanism and Arabism, ultimately contributing to the emergence of new Arab Nationalism. Indeed, the events of 1973 demonstrated the profound roots of Arab Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire. In his seminal work, *Dawn*⁵³ elucidated the multifaceted currents of Ottomanism, demonstrating how they ultimately converged with Arabism. The Turkish reformers (*Tanzimat*) and the Islam modernists acknowledged the need for reform based on the European model while maintaining traditional Islam. Additionally, some Ottomanists, such as Al-Shidyaq, acknowledged Western superiority in material wealth but criticized Western materialism and industrialism. Al-Shidyaq articulated this perspective by stating, "Without doubt, the peasants of our country are more fortunate than those people"⁵⁴. Dawn's theory posits that, despite their divergent perspectives, Arabists, Tanzimat and Ottomanists conservatives, with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, perceived a shared issue: the decline of Muslim society due to the corruption of authentic Islam. As previously mentioned, Christian intellectuals such as Azouri attributed this corruption to foreign influence. However, alternative theories existed. An additional example is the perspective of the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh, who espoused the notion that Islam is the perfect religion because it is based on reason. However, Abduh identified a problem when Muslims ceased to exercise reason, this is due to what he defines the perversion of science. By the close of the 19th century, the majority of intellectuals in the Ottoman Empire recognized the issue and disseminated their ideas throughout the region. They proposed a solution that entailed reverting to a pure form of Islam and attempting to adapt it to new Western institutions. The return to a more fundamentalist form of Islam, often termed the "Arab revival", was a central tenet of this reformation. Indeed, the reform efforts initiated by the Ottoman sultan under the influence of Rida resulted in a resurgence of Arabic studies and the dissemination of the Arabic language, indeed for Rida it was necessary to spread the Arabic language rather than Turkish, since it is the language of religion; in essence, for Rida the Arab revival was the sole

⁵³ Dawn, Clarence Ernest. *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973.

⁵⁴ Al-Shidyaq, Ahmad Faris. *La vie et les aventures de Fariac*. Paris, 1855.

means of reviving Islam, and thus its civilization. However, other manifestations of this concept can be identified. For instance, Al-Kawakibi vehemently criticized the Ottoman modernists, perceiving their imitation of the West as a form of intellectual infantilism, akin to children idealizing their parents. Despite his incisive critique, Al-Kawakibi, along with Abduh and Rida, was guided by his diagnosis of the ills afflicting Islam, leading them to underscore the Arab identity and pride. Consequently, the theoretical underpinnings of Arab Nationalism emerged from the modernist ideologies of both Arabs and Ottomans. As previously mentioned, Christian Arab intellectuals also played a significant role in this process, as evidenced by the contributions of Azouri. The sentiment of Arab pride has also permeated the community of Christian Arabs, effectively transcending its initial Islamic foundation. This suggests that, despite its genesis as an Islamist movement, the Arabist and Ottomanist factions effectively fostered a more inclusive and unified movement. As Dawn asserts, the common thread that bound Arabist and Ottomanist ideologies—both modernist and conservative—was a shared conviction in the inherent dignity and cultural sophistication of Eastern societies, juxtaposed with the Western notion of cultural superiority. It is crucial to underscore that Arabism and Ottomanism emerged as a reaction to Western influence, not as a direct opposition to Christianity. Ultimately, it could be argued that while Arabism and Ottomanism attempted to address the same issue that Europe presented to the Ottoman Empire, their conceptions of nationality were entirely different. The Arabists aimed at creating a single people, the Arabs, to protect the east and Islam, whereas the Ottomanists tried to create a single nationality with the various ethnic groups of the Empire. The Arab Nationalism that emerged from these two ideologies will replicate these contradictions. To conclude on the link between Arabism and Ottomanism, it is useful to cite the words of Dawn “Arabism developed from modernist Ottomanism and like modernist and conservative Ottomanism was a reaction against the failure of the Ottoman civilization to keep pace with Europe”⁵⁵.

In order to comprehend the complexity of Nationalism in the Middle East, it is essential to delve into the historical context preceding 1908. This era witnessed the emergence of the Young Turk organization, a pivotal moment in the evolution of Ottomanism and proto-Nationalism. As Hanioglu elucidates in the seminal work “The Origins of Arab Nationalism”⁵⁶, the ideological underpinnings of the Young Turk groups were marked by a perception of racial inferiority among the Arab populace, despite their shared religious affiliation. This racial dynamic, compounded by the activities of Arab committees in North Africa and the Levant, further fueled the sentiment of separatism. A notable example of this dynamic is the establishment of an Arab organization, the “Turkish Anarchist Committee”, in 1902 with the objective of achieving Yemen’s separation from the Empire. According to Hanioglu, the crux of the issue concerning the collaboration between Arab committees and Young Turks stemmed from the Turks’ assertion of inherent superiority, which they believed entitled them to greater rights. For Hanioglu, this dynamic ultimately contributed to the perception of the Turks as oppressors by the Arabs after 1908, leading to the Young Turks’ aspiration to dominate the Arab peoples.

⁵⁵ Dawn, Clarence Ernest. *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973.

⁵⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

Indeed, deep social, sectarian, and ethnic divisions brought about by pan-Islamism and Panarabism presented challenges for Middle Eastern Nationalism. By etymologizing the Arabic word for Nationalism, Roshwald attempts to understand this tension. In fact, until 1918, the Arab word for nation was often *ummah*. Later, it was replaced by one of two terms: *qawmiyyah*, which denoted Nationalism in a pan-Arabic sense, or *wataniyyah* which denoted Nationalism aimed at a particular state⁵⁷. At first, university students and others of the intelligentsia sought to reconcile these two concepts by supporting the idea of a broad political union of all Arabic-speaking nations. It's interesting to note that Egyptian Nationalism did not initially highlight its linguistic affinities with Arab nations; rather, it was only after World War I that the concept of Panarabism gained traction in Egypt as a result of their realization of the potential benefits of cooperation. Despite the attempts to reconcile the *qawmiyyah* and the *wataniyyah* tensions emerged and led to a political legitimacy's crisis in many Arab states.

As Muhammad Muslih reveals, the emergence of local Nationalisms (*wataniyyah*) has posed significant challenges to the pan-Arabist movement (*qawmiyyah*), particularly within the Arab East. While acknowledging the role of imperialistic powers such as Britain and France in this context, Muslih identifies internal factors that have impeded the expansion of the Young Arab Society in the East. These factors, according to Muslih, are inherent to Syria and its regions, underscoring the complexity of external influences on internal developments. Firstly, Muslih expounds on the historical context of the Young Arab Society (*Al-Fatat*), initially emphasizing its primary focus on achieving equal rights between Arabs and Turks rather than Arab independence. However, as the war years unfolded, the society witnessed a shift in its political program, leading to the pursuit of full independence for the Arab provinces. This shift was precipitated by the widespread violence that characterized the period. Consequently, the concept of Nationalism evolved, taking an Arab rather than a specific national form. The advent of Panarabism during this era was influenced by three factors. Primarily, the concept of *umma*, signifying a sense of communal belonging and allegiance to a shared prophet, played a pivotal role. Secondly, the preeminent position of the Arabic language within the societal structure is noteworthy. The Arabic language served as the primary medium of communication for Islamic civilization, contributing to the dissemination of Panarabism. Thirdly, the Panarabism movement was reinforced by the perception that the Ottomans regarded Arabs as a homogeneous group, subject to a unified governance, and often treated as second-class citizens. However, as Muslih⁵⁸ expounds, a notable rise in local Nationalism coincided with the looming threat of a French invasion in Syria. Indeed, the prospect of a French invasion overshadowed the tenets of pan-Arab unity. Secondly, the Syrian elite harbored significant reservations regarding the transition from an Ottoman Empire to an Arab one. This opposition to Arab Nationalism, as articulated by prominent Syrian figures such as Al-Khatib, Shahbandar, and Arslan, consequently led to a dual-front struggle against both France and the elites of Damascus.

These crises were exacerbated by the outbreaking of the second world war; indeed, Nazi Germany's management of the Middle East encouraged radical nationalists. Pro-Axis feeling was popular among the public and elites,

⁵⁷ Aviel Roshwald, "Nationalism in the Middle East, 1876–1945," in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 220–240.

⁵⁸ Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

particularly in Egypt⁵⁹. Following the war, Britain in particular realized that the administration of His Majesty had to appear less repressive toward these states in order to withstand Arab Nationalism. Roshwald claims that the British supported the establishment of the Arab League in 1944 specifically for this purpose. However, believed that the end of European imperialism and the apparent triumph of Arab Nationalism left the problems of modernization, secularism, and religious identity unresolved rather than reducing the tension between Nationalism and Panarabism.

Fred Halliday's analysis ⁶⁰of the development of Nationalism in the Arab world since 1945 is characterized by a consideration of the ideological turmoil precipitated by the transitions in the global landscape, notably the conclusion of colonialism following the termination of the Cold War. He observes that during the 1940s, there was a pronounced transition from a nationalist orientation to a liberal ideological framework in the Arab world. However, during the 1950s and 1960s, a revolutionary pan-Arab perspective emerged, one that drew upon Islamic references and challenged the dominance of liberal ideas. As Halliday notes, by the conclusion of World War II, only two countries were considered truly independent: Yemen and Saudi Arabia. However, neither played a significant role in the Arab internal relations. Syria, Egypt, and Iraq were the primary actors in this arena. Britain granted Egypt independence in 1922 and Iraq in 1932, yet these were formal independence, as both nations remained dependent on British forces. Consequently, from 1945 onward, the predominant concern for the Arab world was the struggle against colonial domination. In the aftermath of the war, the pro-Western monarchies that were established experienced a relatively brief period of existence. The Egyptian monarchy was overthrown in 1953, followed by the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, with similar subsequent developments occurring in the other monarchies. The replacement of these monarchies by nationalist military regimes, led by Nasser in Egypt and Qasim in Iraq, marked a significant shift in the region's political landscape. Two critical issues of Egyptian Nationalism for Britain were the incorporation of Sudan into Egypt and the Suez Canal crisis of 1956. The Suez Canal crisis was a significant moment in the history of European colonialism, and Halliday considers it to be the final act of colonialism. However, Halliday's argument is internally contradictory, as he later asserts that the Palestinian question remains an unresolved legacy of colonialism in the region. Halliday asserts that the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Al-Fath movement marked the re-emergence of the Palestinian movement as an autonomous force, thereby restoring a degree of normality to Palestinian Nationalism and its association with Panarabism. In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, the formation of a unified Arab front served as a response, though its impact was brief. The Yom Kippur War of 1973 led to a significant shift in the balance of power within the Arab world. According to Halliday's analysis, Egypt's primary objective in the war was not the liberation of Palestine, but rather the recovery of its national territory. This perspective suggests that Egypt subsequently pursued the Camp David Accords of 1978 as a means to achieve its goals, marking a shift in its role as a leader of the Arab world and potentially signifying the demise of the Panarabism ideal. Furthermore, a shift in the ideological character of the Palestinian movement became evident

⁵⁹ Aviel Roshwald, "Nationalism in the Middle East, 1876–1945," in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 220–240.

⁶⁰ Fred Halliday, "Nationalism in the Arab World Since 1945", in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 435–453.

from 1967 onward. This shift was marked by the adoption of secular Nationalism and subsequently transitioned to an Islamist ideological framework following the establishment of Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1987. According to Halliday, the displacement of secular ideologies by religious beliefs was part of a broader regional trend, which was the rise of Islamism in the Arab world.

Indeed, Halliday's analysis indicates a trend of Arab socialism from 1950, with the Egyptian "Nasserist" and the Syrian and Iraqi "Baathist" variant. This trend persisted until the late 1960s. Prior to 1958, the Egyptian model appeared to hold the potential for unifying the Arab countries, as evidenced by the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR). However, following the dissolution of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958 and the subsequent reconciliation between Egypt and Israel in 1978, which resulted in Egypt's expulsion from the Arab League, there was a noticeable decline in the prominence of Arab socialism. Following these failures, in the context of these regions, particularly Egypt and Libya, there has been a discernible shift in national ideology, marked by a decline in Arab identity and a concomitant rise in nationalist sentiment. However, Halliday's analysis may overlook the fact that even during the 1990s, despite Egypt's shift in allegiance, the remaining Arab states continued to uphold the Palestinian cause as a central tenet of their Arab identity. This suggests that, to a certain extent, the pan-Arab sentiment has undergone a resurgence. Nevertheless, Halliday is convinced, and his macroanalysis supports his conclusion that the Arabs had failed to unite. However, he asserts that "the supposed failure of the Arabs to unite into one state is not really that different from that of other postcolonial continents. The reason is, in essence, very simple: once distinct state, and economic, interests are established, it is very difficult to merge them. This is also, evidently, the case in the European Union. Instead of asking why the Arabs 'failed' to unite, it would be more appropriate to why they *should*." Halliday, in the last part of his chapter, operates a sort of deconstruction of the Pan-Arabist utopia. In his idea, the supposed addiction of the Arabs to utopian projects can be found in many other countries in the world, and in a certain sense also in the European Union. Moreover, Halliday, contrary to other political scientists and historians (as was said above of Gellner and Anderson for example) does not recognize the peculiar character of Islam: "the relationship of Arab Nationalism to Islam is neither as mysterious nor unique as some commentators allege" (p. 445). Halliday argues that Arab Nationalism has been closely linked to Islam due to the political and historical significance of Islam as both an ideology and an organizing principle for states. Additionally, the rise of interest in Arab Nationalism called for a unifying language for these states, which was Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. Most likely, authors such as Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson would agree with this reasoning, as they recognized the importance of written language, beyond just the vernacular, in shaping Nationalism.

It is noteworthy that the language of the Qur'an has influenced the development of concepts related to nation, community, Nationalism, and people in the Arab world. As Halliday observes, numerous Qur'anic terms have been adopted in contemporary secular and modern state terminology. Noteworthy examples include the term "umma" (أمة), translated as "national community", and "watan" (وطن), translated as "homeland". Another term, "risala" (رسالة), can mean "letter of the alphabet", "message", or "mission".⁶¹

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 444.

Halliday argues that the claim that all Arab Nationalism is inherently Islamic is completely unfounded, as demonstrated by the historical overview provided earlier. He believes that Arab Nationalism is not a religious movement; in fact, “if anything, it was the other way around.: the national captured the religious”,⁶² as the rise of Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood and FIS proved.

The key idea presented by Halliday is that there is no inherent mystery surrounding Arab Nationalism when analyzed through the appropriate lens, which he defines as rejecting Orientalist myths. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of examining the relationship between Nationalism and Panarabism in this context. Halliday argues that a modern approach to the topic should focus on understanding that there has been no decline in Panarabism, as it is an integral part of Arab Nationalism. In a certain sense, this is similar to the thesis presented by Rosita Di Peri and Francesco Mazzucotelli in their work “Guida alla Politica Mediorientale”⁶³. They argue that the development of Nationalism in the Arab world has often been explained as a response to the collapse of Islam and the rise of European colonialism. However, the idea that Arab Nationalism and Panarabism are linked, as proposed by Halliday, is partly rejected by Owen⁶⁴, who contends that these two movements have always been in contrast. Owen’s thesis could be strengthened by the example of the Yom Kippur War. In this conflict, as Halliday notes, Egypt acted on national interests while stressing Pan-Arab sentiment, ultimately undermining it. Owen supports Malik Mufti’s thesis of “defensive unionism”⁶⁵, which suggests that Arab countries unite only when they feel weak or threatened. However, Di Peri argues that the tension between national and pan-Arab aspirations cannot be attributed solely to this concept; the influence of religion must also be considered.

Nationalism and Pan-Nationalism: the case of Panarabism

A preliminary investigation into the peculiarities and history of Egyptian Nationalism must be preceded by a reflection on pan-Nationalism, and consequently, Panarabism. As Cemil Aydin reports⁶⁶, any history of modern Nationalism must confront pan-nationalist projects, particularly in the context of the colonized world, where there is an interconnection between Nationalism and pan-Nationalism. According to Aydin, the study of pan-Nationalisms can be facilitated by examining the diverse ways in which political communities have been conceptualized from the era of imperialism to the mid-nineteenth century. He proposes the delineation of three distinct categories: pan-African, pan-Asian, and pan-Islamic movements. In the chapter dedicated to pan-Nationalisms, Aydin undertakes a detailed examination of the evolution of these initiatives from 1882 to 1919, commencing with the conceptualization of pan-Nationalism during the imperialism era. Pan-Nationalisms are defined by Snyder as politico-cultural movements that aim to bolster and promote the solidarity of individuals united by shared language, cultural affinities, and historical legacies. Aydin’s observations reveal a notable absence of a pan-nationalist vision in Asia and Africa prior to the onset of the 19th century. This dearth of a unifying identity is attributed to the preexisting regional and religious identities that existed among diverse communities in

⁶² *Ibidem*, 453.

⁶³ Rosita Di Peri e Francesco Mazzucotelli, *Guida alla Politica Mediorientale* (Milano: Mondadori, 2021).

⁶⁴ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2000), 105–130.

⁶⁵ Michael Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Panarabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996)

⁶⁶ Cemil Aydin, “Pan-Nationalism of Pan-Islamic, Pan-Asian, and Pan-African Thought,” in *The Oxford Handbook on Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 672-694.

these regions. However, the advent of Eurocentric knowledge systems in the field of human geography, coinciding with the broader processes of globalization, is seen by Aydin as a pivotal factor in the emergence of these pan-nationalist identities. He acknowledges the existence of Muslim networks prior to the emergence of Panarabism in the Middle East; however, these networks should be understood within the context of the Umma concept rather than as a localized phenomenon.

Aydin's analysis of Panarabism posits that the initial pan-movements in the Middle East were characterized by the emergence of Pan-Islamic movements, which emerged as a means of reconciling the emerging international order with racial and religious identities. The first Pan-Islamic magazine was published by Afghani, who would subsequently be regarded as a foundational figure in the development of Panarabism⁶⁷. Pan-Islamic ideas were also a way to respond to the perceived oppression by the Christians. Exploring this subject, it is intriguing to analyze how Muslim modernist intellectuals responded to Ernest Renan's views ⁶⁸on Islam and progress. Renan was convinced that scientific development in the Muslim world occurred *despite* Islam, rather than *because* of it. He argued that Islam was incompatible with modernity. In contrast, many Muslim intellectuals refuted Renan's ideas and participated in various Orientalist congresses to challenge his assertions. However, Pan-nationalist ideals were not generally considered to be realistic, as there was no imperial or international power to implement these projects. Despite this, Pan-Nationalism led to achievements in the cultural field and the formation of anti-colonial counter-public opinion. Pan-Asianism and pan-Islamism were similarly instrumental in the formation of counter-narratives against the Eurocentric view of human history and the global future.

It is important for Aydin not to assume that all pan-nationalists in colonized countries opposed Westernization. In fact, there have been movements that advocated for embracing European concepts of modernity, as the case of Atatürk showed. Additionally, as Halil Halid⁶⁹ pointed out, anti-colonial pan-nationalists could exhibit racist tendencies towards other groups, even while rejecting European theories of race.

As noted by authors cited above, there has been a shift in the Middle East since 1945, when pan-Islamism declines, and Panarabism begins to emerge. Aydin suggests this transition, but is interesting to point out that while authors like Roshwald and Dawn view Islamism as a component of Panarabism, Aydin considers pan-Islamism to be the precursor to Panarabism. In general, Panarabism emerged as a secular cultural movement based on the concept of Nationalism rather than the idea of umma. As mentioned earlier, the first significant pan-Arab organization was the League of Arab States, established in 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon. The concept of Panarabism gained widespread popularity during the presidency of Nasser in Egypt. However, this aspect will be addressed in the second chapter, after discussing the origins of Nationalism in Egypt and the figure of Nasser.

The focus of this section, however, is the relationship between Panarabism and Pan-Islamism, both of which have gained influence in the Middle East today. As Aydin points out, the Arab League has continued efforts to promote

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*

⁶⁸ Ernest Renan, "Islamic and Science," in *Orientalism: Early Sources*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London: Routledge, 2000)

⁶⁹ Halil Halid, *The Crescent versus the Cross* (London: Luzac & Co., 1907).

cooperation among Arab countries. Meanwhile, a broader concept of Islamic solidarity was revived in the 1970s with the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which currently has 57 member states. Additionally, new Islamist ideologies are emerging throughout the Muslim world. Aydin also asserts that groups like Al-Qaida and similar organizations are a response to the perceived humiliation of Islamic identity.

Nationalism in Egypt

The phenomenon of Egyptian Nationalism is distinguished by its unique characteristics when compared to other Nationalisms in the Middle East. As Jankowski points out in his chapter on Egypt and Early Arab Nationalism, “Arab Nationalism is not a monolithic construct”⁷⁰. The author provides a detailed analysis of the development of early Egyptian Nationalism from 1908 to 1922. The initial formulation of Egyptian Nationalism encompassed two conflicting loyalties: the first being a sense of historical uniqueness, and the second being external loyalty to Egypt’s formal sovereign, the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, during the 19th century, Egyptian nationalists diverged in their perceptions of Egypt’s geographical entity. Some regarded Egypt as a distinct geographical entity from the rest of the former Ottoman Empire, while others asserted a powerful sense of allegiance to the Ottoman Empire and the historic Islamic Umma. As Jankowski emphasizes, the most significant element of this analysis is the observation that there was an absence of Arab influence in the early Egyptian form of Nationalism, a point that was previously highlighted. Indeed, an examination of Egypt’s economic interconnection with Europe reveals that the nation had a more significant economic relationship with Europe compared to other countries in the Middle East. Overall, the presence of Europeans in the bureaucracy fostered a sense of affinity between the Egyptian elite and Europeans.

Jankowski asserts that two significant developments contributed to this characteristic: the introduction of European nationalist ideologies and the rediscovery of Egypt’s substantial pharaonic heritage. These phenomena, influenced by orientalism, have led to a weakening of the connection between Egyptian identity and the Arab-Muslim identity. Clarifying certain historical information is necessary to better understand the cause of this dynamic. Indeed, it is important to keep in consideration that Egypt incurred significant debt following the British and French-financed building of the Suez Canal in 1869, which ultimately caused it to go bankrupt in 1876. The establishment of *Caisse de la Dette Publique* to oversee the Egyptian debt with British and French staff was the so-called Dual Control that Britain and France imposed in order to guarantee the payment. Additionally, Edouard de Bilginieres was named ministry of labor and Charles Rivers Wilson was named ministry of finance⁷¹. Moreover, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire titled the former *wali* of Egypt as *khedive*, this change gave more autonomy to the Egyptian region because it created a sort of Egyptian line of succession and thus, the Sultan could no longer choose the governor of Egypt. The *khedive* system lasted from 1876 till 1914.

Because of this historical events, already before 1882 Egypt had a political development very different from that of its neighbors, and there have been attempts to replace older Ottoman institutions with local ones. In fact, with the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of European pressures, the Empire went through a sort

⁷⁰ James Jankowski, “Arab Nationalism Is Not a Monolithic Construct,” in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 243-271.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*

of identity crisis. This led to the development of Islamic modernism under the leadership of Al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh.⁷² As mentioned above, Islamic modernism called for a purer Islam, but it did not exclude the influence of Western ideals. At the same time, there is also the development of constitutionalist and liberal thought, clearly Western, which will be the dominant current in the development of the nation-state concept. As noted by Corrao, one of the problems that both the Egyptian and the Ottoman reformers found was the issue of education, in fact the aim was to train functionaries to preserve the old system by using modern instruments. Thanks to the new administrative system, the ulema, the class of functionaries, obtained a solid status and managed to have the monopoly of communication and media⁷³, and thus became the leading class for new movements. Indeed, at the same time, the debate over Nationalism was emerging in Egypt. Corrao distinguished two distinct currents: a secular version of Nationalism, in which the ethnic-linguistic element is central, and a more socio-economic version, in which economic interests are indeed crucial. There was also a more religious current that insisted that the constitution should not go against the Islamic caliphate. This debate was stimulated by the presence of Al-Afghani and other Islamic modernists in Cairo. In 1897, Mustafa Kamil, along with Lufti and Farid, organized the first National Egyptian Party. The party aimed to be more inclusive in representing all faiths in Egypt, including the Copts, and it welcomed different social classes from notables to civil servants. the three pillars of the party were: constitutional reforms, financial reforms and the rule of law⁷⁴, Lufti was convinced that Egypt could not rely on the help of other nations to achieve independence, and inspired by his permanence in Switzerland, he proposed to the Khedive to invest in public education. This in a sense confirms Hobsbawm’s thesis that Nationalism needs education, and when there is an increase in education the ground is best prepared for Nationalism, and as Corrao reported, for Lufti, education was the means to achieve independence. It is important to note that for both Kamil and Lufti, violence was not an acceptable way to get the British troops to leave. For the Khedive, however, it was important not to lower the level of Islamic studies in favor of general public education; in this regard, it is interesting to note that for Lufti, the Islamic faith was not superior to others, and thus, for him, pan Islamism was an ideology doomed to failure, indeed, as he said, “the state is based on common interest, not on common sentiment”⁷⁵.

Moreover, as Jankowski emphasized, after 1882 the British occupation of the region has highlighted the political division from its neighbors: “paradoxically, the British occupation of Egypt reinforced an Egyptian orientation toward the Ottoman Empire at precisely the same time when other Arabs were becoming alienated from the Ottoman polity”⁷⁶. Indeed, Corrao reports the incident in Taba, a region contested between the Ottoman and Egyptian administrations. When the dispute arose, the English sided with Egypt, while the Egyptian nationalist papers sided with the Turks. As Lufti observed, the country was so disillusioned with the occupation that it harbored a strong hate toward the British, even regarding the benefits provided by the occupation⁷⁷. One of the

⁷²Corrao, Francesca Maria. *La Rinascita islamica. Il nazionalismo di Muhammad Farid*. Quaderni del Laboratorio Antropologico dell’Università di Palermo, n. 2, 1985.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁷⁴ Maghraoui, Abdeslam M. *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 126.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 22.

⁷⁶ James Jankowski, “Arab Nationalism Is Not a Monolithic Construct,” in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 243-271. 252.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 23

newspapers of nationalist orientation was Al-Giarida, which was founded by Lufti, Zaghlul and others. Zaghlul played a pivotal role in the Egyptian nationalist movement, particularly through his translation of numerous significant operas, including Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. It is noteworthy that Zaghlul "partly absolves the British of responsibility for occupying the country to attack the local ruling class"⁷⁸. In fact, for him, the decline of society was fault of the ruling class, so national revival was only possible by reforming this class. Zaghlul was later also appointed as minister of education but failed to realize his vision, in fact for him liberal institutions must be created to achieve European progress, but his idea was opposed by other more conservative reformist proposals.

In 1907, the Egyptian political parties delineated themselves, there were three major entities: Al-Watan (National Party), led by Kamil; Al-Umma (Homeland Party), led by Lufti; and Al-Islah al-Dusturi (Constitutional Reform Party), led by Ali Yusuf. All three parties advocated for a constitution, liberal politics, and emancipation. However, they differed significantly in their strategies. Al-Umma supported cooperation with the British, believing it was necessary for progress, whereas Al-Watan rejected this idea entirely. In this regard, it is interesting to note that despite Kamil's rejection of Western influence, he preferred to publish the party's program in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* rather than in the party's official newspaper, *The Standard*⁷⁹. Lufti argued that implementing reforms would be impossible without leveraging the British presence, even if only to gain some know-how. Another debate was on education reform, which Zaghlul also wanted. The idea of Farid, who will be the successor of Kamil was that it was impossible to do this reform unless there was independence first. Farid's intransigence triggered a violent press campaign against the National Party, which was accused of religious fanaticism as it opposed the reform (p. 34).

In addition, the Union and Progress Committee had been formed in 1889; initially, it was a secret organization formed by students from the Istanbul School of Military Medicine, inspired by the ideas of positivism, Ottoman Nationalism and constitutional reforms. Later, the committee presented a political program that aimed at the unification of ethnic groups and the centralization of Ottoman power. As Corrao points out, constitutional reform in Turkey acted as a catalyst for all Nationalisms in the rest of the empire, characterized by pan-Islamic and pan-Ottoman propaganda. However, the wave of Pan Islamism did not make all nationalists satisfied, Lufti emphasized that Pan Islamism is not religious fanaticism but is a European invention (p. 42). Moreover, Lufti asserted that Egypt had already achieved nationhood and therefore did not require a religious affiliation, as it was anachronistic⁸⁰.

The National Party, led by Farid after the death of Kamil, enumerated the main objectives in its program, these included the immediate withdrawal of British troops, a reform in the education system, respect for the neutrality of the Suez Canal, and the drafting of a constitution guaranteeing an autonomous and liberal government.⁸¹ However, as international pressure intensified, the situation in Egypt heated up. From 1908, the situation was so

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

⁷⁹ Maghraoui, Abdeslam M. *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 129.

⁸⁰ James Jankowski, "Arab Nationalism Is Not a Monolithic Construct," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 243-271. 260.

⁸¹ Corrao, Francesca Maria. *La Rinascita islamica. Il nazionalismo di Muhammad Farid*. Quaderni del Laboratorio Antropologico dell'Università di Palermo, n. 2, 1985, 50.

heated that the British Consul General Gorst declared that it was better to keep the Minister of Education under control, because if a reform were to take place there, it would help the nationalists in manipulate the people; this again proved the thesis of the importance of education in Nationalism. After the consul's statement, Zaghlul decided to resign from his position as Minister of Education (p. 65).

In this period, despite the increasing of tension at international level, the Egyptians were not really involved in their question, indeed it could be said that the involvement of the Egyptians in Arab politics prior to the First World War was minimal. For instance, as Jankowski reported at the First Arab Congress in Paris in 1913, the Egyptian observer, Kamil, was rejected by the chair.

The National Party was clearly pro-Ottoman until the outbreak of the war; thus, they vehemently opposed the establishment of an Arab caliphate, perceiving it as a British strategy to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and assert British dominion over Arab territories. The suspects of Farid, and previously Kamil, were demonstrably accurate, as evidenced by the subsequent British plan to pit the Arabs against the Ottomans by offering them a substantial empire under the leadership of the Jordanian king. The British strategy is now well-documented, particularly due to the narrative of Lawrence of Arabia, who was tasked with fostering unity among the Arabs in opposition to the Ottomans.

With the beginning of the Great War, Farid and his party believed that liberation would come soon, and so they prepared a manifesto in which they clarified their intentions: a constitutional regime, with freedom and independence of the judiciary. At the same time, Farid tried to get guarantees from Germany and he met Zimmermann, but this was not really approved by the Ottomans who wanted to avoid the dependence from Germany (p. 71). But, on the eve of World War I, Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, dismissed the Khedive, and imposed martial law, banning all political activity.⁸² The situation degenerated quickly, and in 1916, after the harsh suppression of the Arab revolt led by Husayn, a radical change in the relationship between Arabs and Ottomans occurred. In 1917, the Directorate of the National Party was formed and officially declared that the Ottoman and Arab questions were separate and demanded the right of self-determination for Egyptians.⁸³ However, the National Party lost consensus due to strong internal divisions and Farid's long absence from Egypt. At the same time, a new element was rising, the *Wafd*, meaning delegation. The idea of forming a delegation was initially developed by Lufti, but it was finally formed under Zaghlul in 1918. The National Party died with Farid in 1919, and the hegemony was conquered by the Wafd. The Wafd Party's declaration of 1919 underscored the absence of an Egyptian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, drawing attention to the fact that while Arab Emirates were represented, Egypt was not. The Wafd asserted that Egypt was "infinitely more advanced" than those Arab nations present at the conference⁸⁴. Furthermore, the correspondence directed to President Woodrow Wilson, articulated Egypt's position as superior to all other states located to its east, thereby emphasizing its unique status and aspirations within the geopolitical landscape of the era.

⁸² Maghraoui, Abdeslam M. *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 127.

⁸³ *Ibidem*

⁸⁴ Unsigned letter to President Wilson, contained in *Abbas Hilmi II Papers*, File 106.

After this historical and philosophical analysis of the development of Nationalism in Egypt, it is interesting to add some reflections on the impact of colonial and local institutions in this process. Indeed, as Maghraoui notes, the historical analysis of political institutions in Egypt from 1860 to 1930 testifies to a long tradition of constitutional and competitive party politics. Indeed, as highlighted above, Egypt was much more exposed to Western institutions than other colonies. In this regard, it is interesting to recall the Napoleonic occupation. In fact, Napoleon created the first consultative administrative council composed of nine members elected by the class of ulama. However, the real forerunner of constitutionalism in Egypt was Khedive Ismail, who in fact created the Consultative Assembly of Deputies, although this body had little legislative power. With the British occupation in 1882, new institutions were created that were limited to consultative powers⁸⁵. The aim of this paragraph is to say that the country of Egypt had a long but discontinuous history of experimenting with semi-democratic or semi-parliamentary organization, which in a way fed the debate for Nationalism; this is another element to add when considering the singularity of the case of Egyptian Nationalism in the Middle East framework.

In 1922, with the declaration of independence, the Wafd had already established a strong consensus among different parts of society: students, workers, women. A clear characteristic of the Wafd was its adherence to democratic principles of governance, which, as noted above, were in a sense already part of the country's DNA. For this reason, in its statute under Art. 3 declared that "the Wafd derives its power from the will of the people expressed directly and through their representatives in elected bodies"(p. 121). Finally, in 1923, the newly promulgated Egyptian constitution marked a significant milestone in the country's political evolution by declaring Egypt a sovereign state. However, a critical analysis of the document reveals a notable absence of the Arab dimension in its provisions. The sole exception to this oversight is found in Article 149, which designates Arabic as the official language of the state⁸⁶. This omission raises important questions regarding the representation of Arab identity and culture in the legal framework of early 20th century Egypt. Maghraoui offers some interesting reflections on the constitution of 1923 and its significance for the future of Egypt. In fact, he stated that the constitution was modeled after the Belgian constitution of 1830, because Belgium was also a constitutional monarchy with a strong French influence. What Berque found was that the Egyptian constitution of 1923 was "too closely modeled after a Western pattern"⁸⁷. This wants to add another element of particularity to the case of Egypt and what it will mean for its future in Nationalism.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the objective of this chapter was to establish a foundation for the central examination of Nasser's character and his manifestation of Nationalism. This examination aimed to shed light on the intricate dynamics that have persisted, and continue to be a point of contention, in the Middle East, particularly with regard

⁸⁵ Maghraoui, Abdeslam M. *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 124.

⁸⁶ Constitution of Egypt, 1923, Art.149.

⁸⁷ Maghraoui, Abdeslam M. *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922–1936*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 130.

to the interplay between nation, people, and religion. The preceding excursus sought to underscore the imprudent oversimplification of the phenomenon of Nationalism, particularly within a complex and multifaceted region such as the Middle East. The Arab identity, as theorized by scholars such as Gellner and Anderson, is not solely the result of the intersection of colonialism and anti-colonialist values. Restricting the analysis of Nationalism in the Middle East to the response of Arabs to Westernization risks Eurocentric bias, reducing Islam to a mere religious identity. This limitation can lead to erroneous interpretations of the phenomenon.

As the chapter draws to a close, it seems important to acknowledge the prevalence of divergent perspectives that underpin the analysis of Nationalism's evolution and outcomes in the Middle East. The plethora of illustrative cases does not merely signify the employment of different strategies in addressing a single question, such as the pursuit of autonomy from Western influences and the forging of a distinct national identity. But rather, in the context of the Middle East, the notion of a well-established-shared identity serves as a foundational principle, from which different issues emerge.

In the introduction to the chapter, the emphasis was placed on the necessity of accurate and nuanced historical narrative, emphasizing the importance of avoiding oversimplification and mislabeling of events. This emphasis underscores the significance of adopting a tailored approach to the study of nation-formation and the evolution of Nationalism in the Middle East. Indeed, despite the apparent resolution of the era of Orientalism in contemporary discourse, this approach remains in specific academic domains. The authors discussed in this chapter adopt a dynamic approach to the subject, as evidenced by Anderson's abandonment of the notion that Nationalism in the Middle East is driven solely by anticolonial values during his research. As highlighted by the authors mentioned above, Islam has a role in the process of Nationalism, marking a significant advancement in its analysis. Indeed, recognizing Islam as a pivotal factor rather than merely an element within Nationalism is essential for understanding the evolution of Nationalism in countries like Egypt.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, Egypt is a distinctive case in the Middle East for the study of Nationalism. This is due to the region's plurality of strong identities and its status as one of the world's most ancient states. Furthermore, Nasser's nationalist endeavor to establish an autonomous and robust Egyptian state was intricately intertwined with the ideology of Panarabism. This association was elucidated in the chapter, which tried to offer a comprehensive examination of the interplay between pan-movements and Nationalisms.

In the subsequent chapter, the historical context and the foundational principles of Nasser's ideology will be delineated. This will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the distinctiveness of this ideology and the contemporary perception of Nasserism among the Arab community and its new leaders in the Middle East. As Aburish documents in his book, the idea of Arab peoples is that "Arab leaders can go on trying, but if Nasser couldn't do it, then nobody will ever be able to do it"⁸⁸.

⁸⁸ Said K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).

Nasser from the Shores of the Suez Canal

Introduction

Miguel de Unamuno, a prominent Spanish intellectual of the 20th century, stated: “History is written by great men, but intrahistory is composed of the daily life of the people, which forms the permanent foundation of the nation”⁸⁹. Gamal Abdel Nasser stands as a bridge between history and intrahistory, between the brilliance of the stage and the murmur of the audience. Both his personal and political life were strongly intertwined with the stories of the Arab peoples, extending beyond that of Egypt alone. He is remembered to be a unifier of identities, yet within himself, a mosaic of diverse identities took root, flourished, and quietly told their own stories. As with other prominent political figures, it is impossible to disentangle Nasser’s political thought from the fabric of his personal life, childhood, and cultural influences. To understand his development as a man and statesman requires delving into the historical context in which he was forged and defined.

This chapter seeks to paint a portrait of Nasser while simultaneously breathing life into his political ideology. The necessity of this dynamic approach arises from a common oversimplification made by historians when examining political figures beyond Europe: the tendency to study them as static snapshots rather than as evolving and developing entities. This static approach has led to oversimplification of Nasserism as either anti-Western or third-way Nationalism. Rather than oversimplifying the ideology in this way, the focus should be on the full scope of Nasser’s political thought. This will highlight the ideology’s potential and its continued influence on the Middle East region.

⁸⁹ Unamuno, Miguel de. *Essenza della Spagna e altri saggi*. Edited by Gianni Puglisi e Carlo Bo. Ed. riv. /. Gli anelli mancanti. Milano: Bompiani, 2015.

Nasser Biography

When analyzing a personality as complex and profound as that of Gamal Abdel Nasser, one can hardly know where to begin. His most renowned biographers came from diverse backgrounds, each offering a unique lens through which to understand him. Anthony Nutting, for example, author of “Nasser: A Political Biography” (1972), had met Nasser personally during his time as the British Foreign Secretary. Another important biographer of Nasser was Said K. Aburish, a Palestinian journalist, who indeed emphasized Nasser’s role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the beginning of his work “Nasser: the Last Arab”, he clearly states his difficulty in telling the political biography of Nasser, namely the almost impossibility to separate the personal ambitions from the political ones in Nasser.

Every biographer, from Jean Lacouture to James P. Jankowski, has had difficulty in portraying the figure of Nasser without covering it with oversimplifying labels. The most important and recognized source on the life of Nasser are the biographies written by former diplomats, journalists, and activists, and the titles of these biographies tell a lot about the figure of Nasser: “Nasser: A Political Biography” (Nutting, 1972), “Nasser: The Last Arab” (Aburish, 2004), “Nasser: A biography” (Lacouture, 1973), “Gamal Abdel Nasser: Son of the Nile” (Hamamsy, 1961), “Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic” (Jankowski, 2002). Each of these works highlights an important aspect of the political and human personality that Nasser was. Nasser as the last Arab, understood not only as the last Arab leader, but simply as an Arab man like any other; Nasser as a hero, and not a hero of Egypt, but of the Arab nation; Nasser as a political leader, but also as a son, and a son not of his era, but of the timeless Nile.

Given the abundance of material on the biography of Nasser from individuals who worked and observed him, it would be straightforward to begin with his initial foray into politics and explore his natural environment. However, another significant biographer who is not referenced by journalists or other biographers (who, in different cases, cited each other) is an important figure in Nasser’s life: his daughter, Hoda Nasser. Nasser was a father of five: three daughters and two sons. Despite his relatively brief tenure, all of his sons remember him fondly, indicating that he must have been a sensitive parent. He passed away at the age of 52 due to a heart attack, leaving not only a family, but a nation: the Arab Nation.

Nasser’s life was divided into two distinct identities: the family and the political. Unlike other politicians, he maintained a strict separation between these spheres. As Aburish notes, Nasser’s wife, Thiya, “was not visible, and most Egyptians would not have recognized her walking down a street. It wasn’t a case of religious seclusion, she just was not a public person”⁹⁰. This suggests that Nasser was not interested in presenting his family model to Egyptian society, which was particularly unusual in the Arab world of that time, where the image of a traditional family would have played a significant role in Nasser’s public perception. Furthermore, according to Hoda Nasser, the majority of the pivotal meetings that led to the planning of the coup and subsequent significant actions by

⁹⁰ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 119.

Nasser took place at his residence. There was a notable absence of confidentiality between Nasser and his family, which offers insight into a person who experienced challenges in discerning the necessity of maintaining a clear stance on certain matters.

Another significant intersection of identities within Nasser's figure is the one between religion and secularism. Despite being lauded as the secularist leader of the Arab world and thus considered an adversary of traditional Islam, Nasser received a profound Islamic education and was one of the most exceptional Muslim students in his class. In fact, the *sheikh* used to say, "be like Nasser"⁹¹. Indeed, Nasser was an observing Muslim, despite his vice of smoking. However, his identity as a Muslim is not usually highlighted, and he is remembered as the secular leader of a secular state. This occurred because Nasser resolved the conflict between his religious beliefs and the calls for secularization with the concept of freedom, a term of significant importance to Nasser. He firmly believed in the principle that religious beliefs should not dictate the personal lives of individuals, particularly women. Hoda reports that his father once told to the leader of Muslim Brotherhood: "I told you, Monsieur, you have a daughter in medical school, and she doesn't wear the veil. How do you expect me to get ten million Egyptian women to wear it?"⁹².

At the root of all these identities and labels lies the reality, or rather the realities, in which Abdel Gamal Nasser was born and raised. His grandfather owned a small piece of land, but he had almost no rights because the Egyptian land system was controlled by pashas. Indeed, until the 1950s, Egypt was called a "hydraulic society"⁹³. This means that it depended on the Nile River for its economy because it did not have any other sources of income, beyond agriculture. Despite his family's medium social status, Nasser had the opportunity to receive a good education, starting the secondary school at an American missionary institute. He understood social class differences from a young age, and Aburish reported that he chose to wear the *fez*, the ottoman hat that symbolized the bourgeoisie. The economic and educational prospects of Nasser were presumably influenced by his mother, Fahima, who possessed a substantial inheritance and chose to allocate a significant portion of it toward the education of her four children⁹⁴. Following the death of his mother, Gamal and his father relocated frequently for professional purposes, which lead Nasser to be exposed to the multifaceted social stratification that characterizes Egyptian society. Prior to these changes, his life had been predominantly centered in the rural community of Beni Mur. Subsequently, he resided in Cairo, Alexandria, Katatba, and other urban centers, gaining exposure to diverse social and cultural contexts. This constant mobility fostered a broadening of his horizons, providing him with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse social landscapes that characterize Egypt. As Aburish asserts: "Gamal traveled from one place to another by train, and he must have seen how inhumanely crowded the third-class compartments were and noted the conditions of the poor *fellahin*, or peasants, who traveled in and even on top of them"⁹⁵. Residing in Alexandria undoubtedly constituted a formative experience for the young Nasser. During the 30s, the city boasted a diverse population comprising individuals from various nationalities who communicated in

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 16.

⁹² Nasser, Hoda. *Nasser: Les archives secrètes d'Al-Journal Al-Khass et la question palestinienne*. Paris: Flammarion, 2011, 116.

⁹³ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 14.

⁹⁴ Jean Lacouture, *Nasser: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 20.

⁹⁵ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 17.

French, English, Italian, Greek, and Armenian. Nasser here noticed that the majority of Arabic speakers were *fellahin*, a socio-economic class inhabiting the city's impoverished districts. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the observation of these disparities has prompted Nasser to acknowledge the subordination that existed in Egypt between the local populace and the colonizers, as well as the non-local inhabitants.

From Soldier to Statesman

It is evident that the identity of Nasser was also forged in the context of the military role and hierarchy. During his youth, Nasser endeavored to enroll in the nation's prestigious officers' cadet school. However, at that historical juncture in Egypt, entry was contingent upon the possession of a *wasta*, a term denoting an individual who facilitated the advancement of applicants within the military hierarchy (p.19). This suggests that individuals with familial connections within the military apparatus were at an advantage in pursuing a career in the military. This phenomenon, which can be seen as a manifestation of a pervasive societal problem in Egypt, has persisted throughout history. The issue of corruption is arguably a significant contributing factor to this phenomenon. It is plausible that Nasser's acknowledgment of this issue stemmed from his personal experience and led him to adopt an anti-corruption stance; this will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections. However, Nasser will *mysteriously manage* (p. 20) to meet the secretary of State Ibrahim Kheiry Pasha, who decided to sponsor his second attempt at entering the academy. It is noteworthy that Aburish emphasized the fact that photos of Nasser from his early academy days show a shy side, and "he did not trust the camera", which is not typically associated with a future leader. However, during his time at the military college, Nasser established connections with prominent figures from the aristocracy and the royal family. Still the most important meetings were the one with his comrades, indeed he developed strong relationships with his fellow cadets, including Anwar Sadat ⁹⁶. During his military service, Nasser began to understand the critics and the unhappiness with the state of the country. He realized that he was not alone in these sentiments. Since his youth, even prior to enlisting in the military, Nasser had firmly held views on the state of the nation. Since his school days, he had been keenly aware of the issue of colonialism in Egypt. During his secondary education, he began writing a novel entitled "For the Sake of Freedom", drawing significant inspiration from the ideations of Mustapha Kamel, the founder of the Egyptian National Party. These convictions remained steadfast, guiding Nasser's actions even within the military environment. During his early posting in Mankabad, a significant debate emerged within the comrades concerning the discontent towards the government. In 1941, Nasser was assigned to Sudan, where he established a close relationship with Abdel Hakim Amer. Amer would later play a key role in Nasser's political plans. During this period, the Second World War was underway, and Egypt was a significant theater for the war's development. In 1942, the British ambassador in Cairo, Lord Lampson, instructed the king to appoint a pro-British prime minister, Nahas. This move was seen as a compromise to Egypt's national sovereignty. The figure of Nahas is more complex than it appears. He was the former leader of the Wafd party, a nationalistic, anti-British party in Egypt. He also signed the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, which confirmed British presence in Egypt, especially in the Suez Canal. More information on this treaty will be provided later. However, this event would ultimately lead to Nasser's downfall, as he had placed a great deal of trust in Nahas, who ultimately betrayed him. According to Lacouture, Nasser is reported to have written a letter to his

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

friend saying “I am ashamed that our army has not reacted against this attack”⁹⁷. The sentiments expressed by Nasser were shared by the other officers, including Brigadier Mohamed Naguib, who would later become a competitor of Nasser for power. Naguib resigned to King Farouk as a sign of shame, but the king rejected the request. The missteps of Nahas and the Wafd Party contributed to the subsequent rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Al-Bana. After the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, Nasser will increasingly understand that he is not alone in this sentiment. Indeed, as Gordon described the situation: “Young junior officers like Nasser, who had graduated between 1937 and 1939, grew increasingly frustrated”⁹⁸.

During the period of military formation, Nasser also met with Khalid Mohieddine, a prominent member of the Communist Party, as Aburish notices “How many of Nasser’s socialist ideas came from Mohieddine is impossible to tell, but Nasser listened to him more than to most”⁹⁹. The year in the military field will be a pivotal one for Nasser, but it is not military education that will have the most significant impact on his development. Rather, the numerous meetings and diverse individuals he encountered served to broaden his perspective, contributing to the evolution of the political figure Nasser would come to be. It is essential to understand this aspect before delving into an analysis of Nasser’s personality. While he was a military officer, his interests extended far beyond the military. He aspired to demonstrate his unique perspective to the public, and some of his biographers concurred that he did not favor the integration of military interests into politics. Consequently, he sought to distinguish himself from his fellow officers. This ability to distinguish himself from the other military might also be because Nasser had a vast cultural knowledge in the field of politics and philosophy, his daughter Hoda reported that in his library there were always Voltaire, Rousseau and Victor Hugo, so a great influence from the French culture. In addition, Joel Gordon added that Nasser had already written the biographies of Churchill, Bismarck and Atatürk when he was still a teenager, which will have a strong influence on his strategies and ideology¹⁰⁰.

The Free Officers Movement

At the same time, the issue of the outbreak of war became an important element in Egyptian foreign and internal politics during this period. In fact, rumors of connections between the kings and Germany began to circulate. Finally, in 1942, the British threatened to depose Farouk if he did not appoint a Wafd government, which was seen as another interference in internal politics. In this context, already in 1943, Nasser, al Hakim and several others started thinking of founding the Free Officers, joining the secret military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The assassination of Prime Minister Mahir, in 1945, was a turning point that marked the beginning of the turmoil that the Free Officers would face. At the same time the country was in a post-war economic phase. As Gordon reported, the cost of living had nearly tripled between 1939 and 1945, and the distribution of income remained unequal. The post-war period was characterized by an increase in industrialization and labor force, which in fact led to a series of strikes that paralyzed entire sectors from 1946¹⁰¹. From the countryside to the cities, calls for

⁹⁷ Jean Lacouture, *Nasser: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 48.

⁹⁸ Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

⁹⁹ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*

social reform increased. As mentioned above, the need for land redistribution was imperative for Nasser, who understood the problem of the pasha system. Another problem that became apparent to the people in the post-war period was political corruption, called *hizbiyya*¹⁰². The state authorities failed to maintain peace in the country, with violence and rebellions all over the country. With all these problems arising, Nasser and his closest comrades formed the secret organization “Free Officers” in 1949, a group of patriotic soldiers as Gordon defined them.

It is interesting to note that for Gordon, the two events that convinced Gamal to organize the Free Officers were the defeat in the 1949 Palestine War and the government’s crackdown on opposition movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists. As will be explained later in the analysis of the philosophy of Nasser’s revolution, it is quite inappropriate to reduce the process that led Nasser to play a role in Egyptian politics to two events. Saying that these two events were the last straw for Nasser can become a problem in analyzing his ideology. In fact, as Nasser will explain in his opera, what happened in Egypt in 1954 was not the result of the last disturbances, but rather it was the result of a long process that took place in each Egyptian. It was not the revolution of a state, but rather the revolution of a people.

Historical context: the Palestinian war of 1948

In order to better understand why the Palestinian issue had such a great impact on Egyptian politics, and especially on the formation of Nasser’s ideology, it is necessary to provide a brief historical context. In fact, public opinion became increasingly sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle as early as the 30s. At the same time, Zionist groups were flourishing in Arab societies from the Jewish communities. From the 40s, these communities became the target of violence until 1947. In fact, in November 1947, the United Nations divided Palestine into an Israeli and an Arab state. Although there were complaints against this decision from all the Arab states, the leading role was taken by Egypt as the main representative of the Arab League, in fact the headquarters of the League was, and still is, in Cairo after an interruption of ten years from 1979 to 1990.

Egypt called for a liberation army, and students throughout the Arab world took to the streets, calling on their leaders to arm them and send them into battle, as Gordon reported. However, it seems rather unrealistic that all these men were willing to give up their lives for Palestine; a more reasonable reading of this is that the mood of Panarabism was already sweeping through society, and so people were protesting against a new era of imperialism rather than for the sovereignty of Palestine. The Egyptian army was not ready, and its leaders knew it. So, what happened was a kind of anarchic decision by extra-parliamentary forces, like the Muslim Brotherhood, who responded to the call. The pressure was so strong that in the end the military allowed officers to temporarily resign to join the struggle. This is a very strange decision for a state to take, and in fact it says a lot about the condition it was in at the time: a state that could not afford a war but gave permission to individuals to join an unprepared war, an irresponsible state that failed to take care of its citizens. After a few months, the institutions apparently understood that it was not a good choice to send unprepared men to war without sponsoring that war. Thus, Prime Minister Nuqrashi changed his decision and on May 16, 1948, immediately after the declaration of Israeli statehood, Egypt entered the war. Not only was the result tragedy, but also the development. However, before analyzing

¹⁰² *Ibidem*

Nasser's manifesto, it is interesting to point out that in it Nasser recalls an archetypal moment for him and for the future of the Free Officers, which is the martyrdom of Lieutenant Ahmad Abd al-Aziz, the commander of the Egyptian forces in Palestine, he died during a fire in Jerusalem in 1948; his last words were a prophecy for his comrades: "the real battle wait for you in Cairo"¹⁰³.

The Free Officers coming to power

As mentioned above, the Free Officers finally organized in 1949. While for Gordon the two main events that led to this were the Palestinian question and political instability, for Aburish another factor was decisive. The decisive event was indeed the interrogation of Nasser by the Egyptian Prime Minister about his political activities. As Aburish reported, immediately after the interrogation, Nasser transformed an informal group of officer friends into the Free Officers. The exact number of participants is still unknown, but according to Aburish the number could be between 90 and 100 Egyptian officers. However, the aim of this organization was to end corruption and British domination, there was no real intention to overthrow the government or rule Egypt. However, January 25, 1952, proved to be a turning point. On that day, British forces in the Suez Canal killed 40 and wounded 70 Egyptian policemen in the belief that they were there for a violent protest. The following Saturday, just five days after the incident, people took to the streets of major cities in massive protests against the British¹⁰⁴. This event was then called as the "Black Saturday", for Jankowski this was "the prime indicator of the erosion of the legitimacy of the liberal order in Egypt since the early 1920s"¹⁰⁵ What really was the last straw for Nasser was the fact that the Egyptian government did not take any position: neither that of the protesters nor that of the British. Almost six months later, on July 22, 1952, the Free Officers organized the famous coup d'état. As it is described by Jankowski, after a heated debate among the Executive Committee of the Free Officers, it was decided that king Faruq would immediately abdicate and exile, signing the end of monarchy in Egypt; other authors, such as Aburish consider 1952 the end of the British protectorate in Egypt, however it is quite improper to state that since the formal independence was granted in 1922.

Following the coup d'état a new body was formed: the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) made up of nine member, and Nasser was its chair¹⁰⁶. With the declaration of the birth of the Egyptian Republic in June 1953, Najib became the President. However, from 1952 restrictions were placed on publications and propaganda activities. The ban on political parties arrived in January 1953 and at the beginning it did not apply to Muslim Brotherhood; the idea is that the Free Officers, wrongfully, believed that the Brotherhood was already weakened by the assassination of its founder, al Banna in 1949. However, in October 1954 a member of the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser during a public speech in Alexandria, this event was used as a fair justification to outlaw and oppress the Islamic organization. This event, in a certain way, legitimize the figure of Nasser as a leader. Indeed, the attempt of assassination prepared the stage for Nasser to deliver one of his most iconic speech of his political life; immediately after dodging the bullet aimed at him Nasser responded, "if Gamal Abdel Nasser shall

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁴ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Jankowski, James. *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*

die, each of you shall be Gamal Abdel Nasser”. With this incisive declaration Nasser thus sealed the marriage between his personal identity and that of the entire country, a union that would change the course of the Egyptian people’s life.

Philosophy of Revolution

The objective of this introduction to Nasser is to comprehensively examine the origins of his “Philosophy of Revolution”, which has exerted a profound influence not only during his lifetime but particularly in the aftermath of his death. In his seminal political opera, Nasser himself endeavors to elucidate the genesis of the revolutionary concept within his soul. However, he is unable to ascertain a definitive answer, citing numerous factors that contributed to its formation, including the Palestine issue, colonialism, and class struggle. Indeed, Nasser concluded his introductory chapter by saying “No one is able to determine the date of the first revolutionary leaven in one’s spirit. This leads me to conclude that the roots began to attach from birth and that they were the echo of a stifled hope, transmitted to us by the generation that preceded us”¹⁰⁷. Nasser’s assertion is that the origins of the revolution cannot be attributed to a particular event or set of factors. Rather, the revolutionary sentiment is a cultural heritage that is transmitted from one generation to the next.

In his paper, Lorenzetti emphasizes the critical assessments of Nasser regarding the 1919 revolution¹⁰⁸. In fact, Lorenzetti observes that the 1919 revolution is often regarded as a failure despite its contribution to achieving independence. In his opera, Nasser maintains that the 1919 revolution was not a complete revolution because it lacked two essential elements: a political and social revolution. The absence of these two elements led to a weak unity among the people, as egoism and class struggles persisted. However, Massimo Campanini¹⁰⁹ contests the honesty of Nasser’s assertion that the 1919 revolution exemplifies disunity. He contends that this claim is historically inaccurate, as the Egyptian people first united under the leadership of Sad Zaghlul during the 1919 revolution, marking a significant moment in their history. Conversely, Campanini places the true onset of anarchy during the 1952 revolution, which was under Nasser’s leadership.

However, the judgment of Campanini may be perceived as overly critical of Nasser, as it fails to acknowledge his self-awareness and willingness to express his regrets and uncertainties regarding the revolution. One of the first questions that Nasser poses to himself in his pamphlet is whether there was a genuine necessity for the military to lead the revolution: “There is reason to wonder-since the July 23 event does not constitute a military rebellion or popular uprising-why the army was able to happily conduct a Revolution outside of any other element of the Nation”¹¹⁰. Nasser’s position on the role of the military in a nation’s governance is clear. He asserts that while he has always trusted the army as part of the nation, he believes that its primary duty is to defend the nation’s borders. This suggests a belief that the military’s role is limited in terms of leading the nation as a whole. It is noteworthy that Nasser’s perspective appears to reflect a concern with the challenges posed by military junta leadership, a phenomenon that has been observed in various regions, including South America, Africa, and occasionally, the

¹⁰⁷ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 33.

¹⁰⁸ Lorenzetti, Gianluca. *Nasser e il suo pensiero nella filosofia della rivoluzione*.

¹⁰⁹ Campanini, Massimo. *Storia dell’Egitto contemporaneo: dalla rinascita ottocentesca a Mubarak*. Roma: Edizioni Lavoro, 2005, 64.

¹¹⁰ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 35.

Middle East. This is an initial indication of Nasser's maturity at the inception of his movement. It also reveals his human side, which he likely never sought to conceal.

Nasser fully recognized his initial misjudgment regarding the revolution. At the outset, he had been misled by his own perceptions and believed that the nation was prepared for the revolution, but this was not the case. This is a profound and challenging admission for any leader: "I imagined, before July 23, that the whole nation was prepared, was waiting for the vanguard elements to hurl itself compactly and orderly toward the final goal." Subsequently, Nasser states, "the ranks of the people came in droves, in *disorder*"¹¹¹; by contrasting order with disorder, Nasser seeks to acknowledge and make it clear to both himself and others that, in a revolution, men make mistakes. An interesting analysis of this point is the one proposed by Messina¹¹². Messina does not focus on the human side of Nasser acknowledging these weaknesses. Instead, he tries to show how these statements prove that Nasser understood the sociological lesson of Pareto. Indeed, Messina believes that Nasser, as Pareto, thought that in achieving a collective aim there is the need of an *avanguardia*, meaning an élite to guide the process. Preceding on this analysis, Nasser could be described as an elitist, but this perspective does not consider the importance of unity for him. While it is true that Nasser criticizes mass disorder as a negative element of revolution, it is difficult to agree with Messina's idea. In fact, for the latter, Nasser is inspired by the European revolutionary tradition and therefore views the role of the masses in the revolution negatively. In reading his writing, Nasser's focus on the masses, not only as instruments but as beneficiaries of the revolution, is evident. In the end Nasser himself will say that he did not make the revolution with the people, but for the people. In saying so, one could interpret his thinking as a way of downplaying the role of the mass, but there are reasons to believe that this is not the case. In fact, at the beginning of the book Nasser writes, "If I had been asked in those days what my most coveted wish was, I would have answered: to hear an Egyptian say good things about another Egyptian"; this does not really seem to be an elitist idea. Moreover, what Nasser criticized from the political elite was the saccharine belief that they could be the only ones to solve any kind of problem, he ironically observed, " 'I', solution to the hardest problems, panacea for all diseases"¹¹³. To further discredit the assumption of Nasser as an elitist, it is enough to reflect on the fact that for Nasser there is no specific part of the population, one class, that is capable of leading the entire population on its own. In fact, he himself writes, "Each of us can work miracles in his own area; [...] let each one therefore remain in his place and do his best. Do not take example from us (military), forced by events to go out of the ranks to perform a sacrosanct action"¹¹⁴. Although this idea may seem quite deterministic, Nasser likely aimed to emphasize the importance of each class and order within Egyptian society. His vision seems to be one where society functions like an orchestra, each instrument with its own timing and characteristics, yet all following the same overarching theme. While having very clear ideas about the need for unity and seriousness in a revolution, Nasser acknowledges the mistakes made and analyzes the causes. In fact, shortly afterwards Nasser explains that the chaos of the July revolution resulted from the concomitance of the two revolutions, the political

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, 37.

¹¹² Messina, Antonio. "Una rivoluzione per l'Egitto: il progetto di Nasser (prima parte)." *Il Pensiero Storico*. Last modified February 1, 2025. <https://ilpensierostorico.com/una-rivoluzione-per-legitto-il-progetto-di-nasser-prima-parte/>.

¹¹³ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 39.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 40.

and the social, which were missing in the events of 1919. Simply put, for Nasser the lack of these elements in the previous revolution was the cause of the failure, while the presence of these in the 1952 revolution is the cause of the disorder. Actually, for Nasser, the issue is more delicate than that: he argues that in most countries the two revolutions occur at separate times, as if one prepares the ground for the other. In the case of Egypt, however, these two major events overlapped, resulting in chaos. As Nasser says, “the day we faced the Political Revolution with the deposition of Faruq, we carried out at the same time the Social Revolution with the Agrarian Reform” (p. 45).

If in the first part of his “Philosophy of the Revolution” Nasser focuses on the elements that led to the revolution and what was necessary to achieve it, in the second part he delves into what he calls “positive action”. Indeed, he makes it clear that enthusiasm and passion cannot drive a complete revolution. But even in this part, Nasser does not want to come across as a leader, but rather as an ordinary man with regrets and uncertainties. In fact, Nasser recalls the part of his life when he was driven only by enthusiasm and made big mistakes. Again, this is not something we would expect from a leader. Although it is true that leaders sometimes take the populist strategy and thus end up trying to be similar to the common man, what Nasser did was more. It appears that Nasser is recounting his personal history to his family when he recollects the episode that have led him to relinquish the path of enthusiasm. Indeed, he wrote “I must confess, and the Attorney General would use my pardon, that at that time I had my mind exalted by the idea of political assassination as the only means of securing the future of our country” (p. 49), here Nasser does not hide behind patriotism and ideals, as many other leaders and non-leaders did and still do, but defines what until a few years ago was his political line as an unjustified exaltation. But he goes deeper, telling the story of the attempted political assassination planned by himself. Nasser describes the episode in which his comrades accidentally hit a woman with a child during the assassination attempt. For these two short pages, Nasser momentarily becomes a novelist, writing, “I began to hear the heartrending cries of a woman, the terrified voice of a child, the anguished pleas of those calling for help” (p. 51). “Nasser’s confession here is not merely that of a repentant man seeking consolation or pity. His words become a form of self-psychoanalysis rather than a reflection on the revolution. He does not conceal his sentimentality, just as he does not hide his voracious thirst for revenge and power, to the point that he writes, “the car was running fast, I was in the throes of an orgasm”. By telling this story, Nasser humanizes himself, the ordinary man will probably not find these pages cruel, but rather find an answer to some questions that the people have always had towards the leaders, questions such as: how do they sleep at night? can they make peace with their guilt? do they feel the same as we do? In fact, as an ordinary man, Nasser also wonders “Did I have the right to take that action? Was patriotic love enough to justify my conduct? But was that the way to proceed?” (p. 52). The answer to all these questions was no. Nasser understood this that night when he found himself praying for the life of the man he had tried to kill just hours before. Nasser gave up his enthusiasm and tried to lead a revolution with positive action, but he probably never found the right way. Even here, Nasser admitted his inability to understand the right way, he only knew that he was right to continue with the revolution, but he had no idea what kind of instrument they would need. It is challenging to envision another leader articulating analogous sentiments in their opening remarks. The anticipation is for a heroic act by Gamal Abdel Nasser, yet the book unveils instead the apprehensions and principles of an Egyptian, Arab man, with his missteps and subtleties.

Nasser then dedicates several pages to his audience: Egyptian society. Despite criticizing the Egyptians' selfishness and lack of unity, he acknowledges the uniqueness of his people: "I believe that our people have done miracles and that any other society tried by events similar to ours would have drifted away" (p. 60). Nasser's hypothesis posits that, following a period of considerable upheaval, society will ultimately establish a stable structure. However, he emphasizes the necessity of societal resistance during the so-called "transition period", a time of significant change and instability. This final concept may evoke the sociological process articulated by Sorokin in his 1937 opera, "Social and Cultural Dynamics". In this seminal work, the sociologist posits that societies evolve through periods of crisis and transformation, ultimately attaining a state of stability. Nasser is cognizant of the contemporary crisis afflicting his society, and he recognizes his limitations in addressing the manifold national challenges. As he wrote, "otherwise, I would be a visionary" (p. 62). Aware of this, Nasser's goal is to outline the path rather than reach the destination. Once again, he seems to downplay the situation; reading these words, it becomes increasingly difficult to perceive him as a strong and resolute leader. Nasser then ventures into a rare criticism for his time: that of populism. Here, the Rais argues that while it is easy to appeal to the emotions of the people, one must instead appeal to reason. Yet, beneath this Enlightenment rhetoric, there appears to be a subtle self-reproach, as if Nasser is attempting to justify himself for having followed the sentiments of the masses at the expense of the reason of the few. He continues, "the feelings of the people have uniform characteristics, but not so the minds, different from each other". While this speech initially conveys a sense of Nasser's guilt, a few lines later, he firmly rejects such an interpretation, stating: "We could have *stuffed* the people with sculptural phrases, not even remotely adhering to reality [...] but was this the mission reserved for us by fate?" With these words, Nasser absolves himself of the charge of being a populist and a mere manipulator, labels that could too easily be attached to him.

Finally, a last justification is given by Nasser for carrying out the agrarian reform and thus redistributing the land "I recognize that we discounted especially the large landowners, but it was not permissible for some to own tens of thousands of feddans¹¹⁵ of our land and others to own just enough to make a grave out of it". Indeed, as Tiana reports, by 1950, 1,177,000 feddan, about one fifth of the cultivated land, was owned by approximately 2,000 landowners¹¹⁶. Nasser's agrarian reform was implemented through Decree Law 178 of 1952, which in Article 1 established that "no one may own more than 200 feddan of agricultural land". The properties that exceeded these limits were expropriated for the surplus, and the land obtained was distributed to the peasants on the principle "the land to who cultivates it". The references to this reform are clearly related to a Soviet policy, and in fact this choice in the climate of the cold war immediately made the United States rigid, worried about the way Nasser was taking. However, as will be analyzed later on, Nasser's socialism has left out the Soviet extremists by focusing more on equality than on collectivization. As Messina notes, Nasser in his work tries to exalt the role of institutional reforms in the process of emancipation and revolution, in fact here he recalls the role of the creation of the Council of Production, the Committee for the Revolution which drafted the new constitutional charter, and the reform of the number of officials to avoid wasting money. And finally, he concludes: "It would have been easy to open the

¹¹⁵ The feddan is an area measure used in Egypt, Sudan and Syria. In Arabic *faddān* literally means "a pair of oxen".

¹¹⁶ Tiana, Michele. *Note sulla riforma agraria in Egitto da Giāmāl 'Abd en-Nāṣer a Moḥammed Anwar es-Sādāt*. *Oriente Moderno* 57, no. 5/6 (Maggio-Giugno 1977): 247-258. Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino.

coffers of the State and squander, as others did, the public treasury [...] how simple it would have been to please everyone... but at the price of what sacrifices for the aspirations of the people and the future of the country!”¹¹⁷

The Three Circles Theory

In the final section of “Philosophy of the Revolution”, Nasser expounds his renowned theory of the three circles, a concept that gained prominence following his pivotal address at the Conference of Bandung in 1955. According to this theory, Egypt occupies a nexus between three distinct regions: the Arab world, the African continent, and the Muslim world. By articulating this theory, Nasser seeks to underscore the symbolic significance of Egypt’s location, asserting that its destiny is inextricably intertwined with these three regions.

Before delving into the characteristics of the three zones, it is interesting to note that Nasser’s ideas stem from both geographical and historical determinism. In his vision, Egyptian society is destined to lead others simply because it has always done so throughout history. Here, Nasser aligns with other nationalist leaders who have invoked the legacy of ancient civilizations to justify their nation’s resurgence; examples are hardly necessary.

By presenting Egypt and the broader Middle East as the cradle of civilization, he reinforces Hobsbawm’s metaphor: for nationalists, history is like opium for addicts, an intoxicating force that fuels their ideological vision. However, Nasser does not appear to be merely a passive product of history; rather, he is able to reinterpret Egypt’s historical role in the modern world, abandoning this *nostalgia*. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the deterministic concepts of Nasser Nationalism are also influenced by a geographical determinism perspective. This means that, according to Nasser, Egyptian society is still significantly impacted by the Nile, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean region, which he considered to be the country’s geostrategically significant location. The intersection of historical determinism, characteristic of specific Nationalisms, and geographical determinism prompts further reflection. It can be posited that Nasser would concur with the thesis proposed by Jared Diamond, author of “Guns, Germs, and Steel” (1997). In his work, Diamond utilizes an environmental and geographical framework to elucidate the development of civilizations. In his book, Diamond does not concentrate on Egypt; rather, he utilizes the Egyptian society as an example to explore the subjects of agricultural and technological diffusion. Egypt did indeed develop, particularly due to the Nile, and, according to Diamond, it will continue to be the center of development in the region because of the surrounding courses of water. Moreover, it is evident that the geopolitical significance of the Egyptian region has persisted throughout the Cold War era. This assertion is further substantiated by Eisenhower’s pronouncement that “there is no more strategically important area in the world than the Middle East”¹¹⁸. The contemporary relevance of this statement remains paramount.

However, it is also important to stress here that, among the states of the Middle East, Egypt was among the most advanced, a status that was in place even prior to the arrival of Nasser. In fact, as reported by Yahya, Egypt

¹¹⁷ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 65.

¹¹⁸ Anshen, Ruth. 1956. *Middle East World Center: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956, p. 95.

had a preeminence in education, business, law, medicine, and science¹¹⁹. To a certain extent, it could be argued that Nasser enhanced Egypt's credibility in the region by adding a certain charisma to the nation.

Nasser sees a so-called “latent energy” in the three zones of Egypt, and so he believes that it must be unleashed to give Egypt the necessary strength to emerge as the leader of the three areas. Regarding the Arab world Nasser wrote: “Can we possibly ignore the presence of the Arab area around us, a world to which we belong, and which belongs to us, a territory to which we are firmly and factually bound by common history and identical interests?”¹²⁰; thus, the ingredients for Panarabism seem to be common territory, history and necessities.

Although the Arab world is the first area that is mentioned by Nasser, this is not really analyzed until the end of the book, and then after contextualizing the other two circles. In fact, although it is not very clear from Nasser's explanation, the idea might be that it is precisely in the Arab identity that the three spheres coexist, so it is more straightforward to analyze as the first element what for Nasser is the second circle, namely the African continent: “Can we ignore the presence of an African Continent where fate has willed us to be and on which the hard struggle for its future is engaged, a struggle that, like it or not, will affect us?”; This passage is crucial because Nasser positions himself as a leader of anti-colonialism. By emphasizing the connection between the oppression of African peoples and that of Egypt, he asserts that, although the form of oppression may vary across different regions, its essence remains the same: colonialism. In doing so, Nasser positioned himself as a leader of Pan-Africanism, an unusual stance for an Egyptian leader. Some evidence of Nasser's Pan-Africanism is certainly the support given to wars of independence in various parts of the continent. Emblematic is the support given to the *Mau Mau*, the Kenyan independence fighters. In fact, the first Kiswahili-language radio station was broadcast in Egypt in support of Kenya.

Historically, Arabs have not identified strongly with the African continent; rather, they have often sought to distinguish their origins from those of African peoples. This divide has been particularly stark and oppressive in countries such as Sudan and Mauritania, where Black and Christian populations have historically faced marginalization by Arab and Muslim elites. However, as Lorenzetti points out, Nasser also instrumentalized this shared anti-colonial vision to further Egypt's ambitions of annexing Sudan, a goal that ultimately failed when Sudan declared independence in 1956. Still, it seems clear that even Nasser is aware that there is no real consciousness of Pan-Africanism in Middle Eastern society, for him this is probably caused by ignorance about the customs and traditions of African peoples, and therefore he says his greatest desire is the establishment of an African institute in Cairo to enable this exchange of knowledge.

Certainly, the most mysterious and fascinating area of the three is the Muslim sphere, a reality without physical boundaries and with potential that is almost incalculable: the umma. From this, one can begin to understand the error of labeling Nasser among the anti-Islamic leaders, such as Atatürk. While it is undeniable that Nasser exploits the persuasive and firmly established power of the umma for geopolitical purposes, this does not diminish the role

¹¹⁹ Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 52.

¹²⁰ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), p. 71.

of Islam; rather, it enhances it. “Territories from whose capitals—Mecca, Kufa, Cairo—religious faith radiated and united within a framework shaped by both material and spiritual historical factors” (p. 71). Nasser is not afraid to connect Islam with politics, at least in rhetoric. In fact, he speaks of the necessity of going beyond the religious significance of the pilgrimage to Mecca and uncovering its political force: “Our concept of Pilgrimage needs to be transformed: the sacred visit to the Kaaba should not just be a ticket to Heaven, nor a naive attempt to acquire divine forgiveness. The Pilgrimage can have incalculable political force; the world press should take an interest in it, not exclusively to describe rituals and traditions to its readers, but to consider it a periodic political Congress where the leaders of the Islamic states meet annually” (p. 92). This statement can be interpreted in several troubling ways. One might see it as an exaltation of political Islam, but it is more accurately understood as an acknowledgment of Islam as a political force, on this more it will be discussed later. However, it is interesting to draw a comparison with a project that was actually implemented in 1969: the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This organization was established to promote economic and political cooperation among Muslim-majority countries, and today, it includes 57 member states, including Egypt. One of the fruits of this cooperation is the establishment of the Islamic Development Bank, which, however, has not been particularly successful in achieving its objectives. In general, the OIC’s mission is to promote the growth of its member countries by adhering to the principles outlined in the Qur’an.

The Arab force

In elucidating the theory of the three circles, Nasser places greater emphasis on the Arab world, asserting that it constitutes the most salient of the three circles. This assertion imbues the concept with a hierarchical structure, despite the apparent equilibrium among the circles: “Undoubtedly the Arab sector is, of all the others, the one that has the most importance and is most firmly linked to us” (p. 91) he claimed. In “Philosophy of the Revolution”, Nasser seeks to elucidate the significance of Arab identity for both societies and individuals. Indeed, he commences by recollecting the incident that precipitated the formation of an “Arab conscience” within himself. Nasser is convinced that the Arab identity took shape in him in tandem with the emergence of the Palestinian issue: “I wondered about the reason [...] of my discouragement for a land I did not know, I found in my soul only the echo of a feeling”. Nasser’s position on the Palestinian issue has remained consistent since its inception. He has maintained a steadfast conviction that the conflict is not a matter of foreign politics but rather an internal defense issue. He asserts that the Palestinian campaign of 1948 serves as a “lesson” for the Arab states, emphasizing that all Arab nations participated with unwavering commitment to safeguarding territorial integrity. However, they all exited from the conflict “disappointed, exposed to the same risks and had to undergo the same humiliation and shame” (p. 93). The concept is that for Nasser, the Arab people began to perceive themselves as part of a shared identity upon realizing that events in Palestine had the potential to occur within their territorial borders; as Nasser articulated, albeit in a more dramatic manner: “The same fate may befall my daughter”. According to Nasser this is what actually happened in the Middle East after 1948: “what happened in Cairo, was repeated the next day in Damascus, then in Beirut, Amman, Baghdad, elsewhere”. According to Nasser, this dynamic can be attributed to imperialism and colonialism, and he asserts that Israel is a product of these historical forces: “if Palestine had not fallen under the British Mandate, Zionism would have found no support for the idea of a national homeland, and that project would have remained a chimera, devoid of any possibility of implementation” (p. 81). For Nasser, the

obstacles in the Middle East can all be traced back to the mistakes of imperialism, and this is one of the elements that unites all the peoples from Rabat to Tehran. He describes the imperialist power as a “suffocating and inescapable siege”. Despite this apparently invincible force, the Arab world has a resilience that, for Nasser, is crucial and can indeed put an end to the imperialistic-led-dynamics; but the Arab people need to be aware of their potential. Nasser, like a father with his children, is frustrated with the Arab people for not recognizing their capacity and failing to focus on the real issues: “I will always insist that we are strong but that our major fault is that we do not understand the true extent of our strength” (p. 85). One of the aims of this book is to convince the Arabs to come together and unite around the same issues. It is clear from the beginning of the book, but the Arab identity really emerges in the last pages, and it is here that Nasser wants to define the strength of the Arabs. Starting with the definition: “There is a flaw in our understanding of strength: it does not lie in shouting with a stentorian voice, but in taking decisive action with all the elements that compose it” (p. 86). These elements are three: proximity, geostrategic position and oil; This is why it was said above that Nasser is able to actualize his historical-geographical determinism.

Much has been said about the first two elements in the preceding paragraphs. It is now interesting to focus on the last element: oil. The black gold for Nasser is the most important ingredient of the Arab potential: “Without oil, all these tools would turn into useless pieces of iron” (p. 87) he wrote. In fact, Nasser recognized that the possession of vast quantities of oil can help the Middle East in confronting the economic supremacy of the West. Messina explains that Nasser proved to be a pioneer in this field, being one of the first leaders to realize the importance of oil as a geopolitical arm. This is partly true, because as Nasser writes, Opec is not even a project. However, Messina’s observation can lead to some misinterpretation of Nasser’s idea of oil. In fact, one of the criticisms that is made of Nasser because of this oil argument is that in that period, Egypt had not yet started to pump oil from its soil, and thus, by calling oil an Arab force, Nasser wanted to take control of the oil of other Arab countries as well: it is an accusation of opportunism. To show that this is a false accusation against Nasser, it is enough to look at the oil situation in the Middle East in the 1950s.

The Oil Question

In making a brief excursus on the oil question in the Middle East, one should first recognize that the intensification of the exploitation of the Arab lands happened after the Second World War, so Nasser experienced this situation. In fact, as Leonardo Maugeri points out in his book, the nationalist current that developed in the Middle East in those years led to the discussion of the 50-50 formula of profit. As Maugeri continues, the first Arab state to abolish the 50-50 formula was Saudi Arabia, not Egypt. However, Ryad failed because the discussion ended with the signing of an agreement with the United States that still had the 50-50 formula but reorganized the tax system to give some advantage to the Saudis¹²¹.

To make clear how much the West controlled the oil system, it is also necessary to recall the Iranian issue. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was the third industry for oil extrusion in the world, which made Iran the "first

¹²¹ Maugeri, Leonardo. *L'arma del petrolio*. Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 1994, 25.

dangerous arena for oil crises". Even in Iran, Maugeri argues, Nationalism was the force that led to the emergence of the oil question; in fact, oil became a symbol of power, and thus Nationalism aimed to conquer it. Mosaddeq was the protagonist of this struggle for power, defending Iran's right to benefit from its own soil. In 1954, he succeeded in nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now called the National Iranian Oil Company. However, the case of Iran is probably the cruelest and most real representation of the cynical neo-imperialism of the West towards the Middle East; as Maugeri described it "The solution to the Iranian crisis was presented for years as a demonstration of the cynical arrogance of the oil multinationals, ready to overthrow a government to see their interests protected" (p. 36). It is interesting to note that, for Maugeri, the decision-making power at that case was not really in the government, but rather in the multinational industries; read in this way, the event of the nationalization of Iranian oil company could be a first example of what Nye will only in 2011 call the power diffusion dynamic. In fact, the decision of the United States and the United Kingdom to act with the well-known covert operation Ajax has had strong consequences not only in Iran but in the entire region. As Maugeri put it "the Iranian affair would bring with it indelible negative myths: the use of the CIA to silence local aspirations, the re-establishment of a status quo ante sensitive to Western objectives".

This brief excursus was made to provide the context in which Nasser referred to oil as a common force for all Arab states, even though not all Arab countries had the same amount of oil, or any oil at all. By contextualizing this claim with historical reality and with his idea of panarabism, it is difficult to label his rhetoric on oil as opportunistic. It seems more reasonable to understand this claim as the result of past events regarding the oil issue. Nasser must have been furious when he saw what happened in Tehran with the replacement of Mosaddeq by the United States government, and probably he wanted to sensitize all the Arabs on this issue to avoid a repetition of this case. The aim of this analysis is proving that it is too simplistic and incorrect to label Nasser as opportunistic for stressing the need to defend oil united as Arab nations.

However, it must be recognized that this rhetoric of oil as an Arab power ultimately helped Nasser to conclude important economic agreements, and it is probably these economic revenues that have led many historians to label his pan-Arabist idea as opportunistic. In fact, in 1954, Egypt was the first Arab state to sign an agreement with Enrico Mattei and thus with ENI. Nasser and Mattei were likely strong partners in business, as their interests aligned. Nasser sought to restore dignity to Arab countries, while Mattei was willing to exchange know-how and propose a more equitable formula to challenge the dominance of U.S. and U.K. oil companies; in a certain way, they had an enemy in common.

The road to Suez

Suez is much more than a canal, geographically and historically. Built in 1869, it was more than a shortcut: it was, and still is, a global artery of today's world. Over time, Suez has acquired a meaning that goes beyond the historical event, it is the representation of a feeling, the spirit of an era. The 1956 Suez Crisis has been narrated by various sources, Eden, Lloyd, Eisenhower, Ben Gurion, Nutting... but almost everything has been written from a Western point of view, as has been the case with many other events. Mohammed Heikal, Nasser's right-hand man, knew from the beginning that part of his future work would be to write the history of Suez from a Cairo perspective. In the preface to his book, he recounts this dialog between himself and Nasser: "One day you and I are going to have

to sit down and write an account of all this” Mohammed said, “Not me. You’ll have to do it on your own. Anyone in a job like mine burns the candle at both ends. I almost certainly won’t be there when the time comes to do the writing” Gamal responded¹²².

Like all major events in history, the story of Suez cannot be fully understood without context. One would say that it is inappropriate to say that the Suez crisis began on July 26, 1956, but it began on November 17, 1869 when the canal was opened. The original concession to build the canal was granted in 1855 by Khedive Siad to Lesseps, a French engineer. The work was financed by the *Campagne Universelle du Canal maritime de Suez*, which despite its name was an Egyptian company, but also registered in Paris, *unnecessarily*, according to Heikal¹²³.

In 1875, the British government bought half of the issued capital for £4 million. In 1882 Britain officially occupied Egypt and effectively replaced Egypt as custodian of the canal by opening an office in London and increasing the number of British directors. In 1888 a treaty was signed in Constantinople and ratified by major powers of the time: Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain and Ottoman Empire; the first article read “The Suez Maritime Canal shall always be free and open, in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag. The canal shall never be subjected to the exercise of the right of blockade”¹²⁴. As Heikal described it “In Egypt the company behaved as a state within a state” since it was immune from Egyptian law, Port Said, and the rest of the region were considered company property and not under Cairo authority¹²⁵. To understand the roots of the story, it is interesting to highlight that the Director General of the Company of Suez at that time was Jacques Georges-Picot, the son of the Picot who signed the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement that divided with arbitrary and Western-served borders the Middle East forever.

The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in 1936, and two Egyptian directors were finally added to the board. But, as Heikal pointed out, neither played a significant role in the company’s operations. In addition, the Palestinian question arose, and Egypt was one of the hot zones. The Palestinian issue became the common problem of the Arab League, but Egypt had a dilemma because Britain controlled the supply of arms to Egypt, so any intervention from Cairo would be difficult. But Egypt was forced to take the risk: “Egypt must intervene” (p. 16), declared Nokrashy, the Egyptian prime minister. However, the Palestine war ended in tragedy for Egypt and as Nasser would later put it “we returned from the war convinced that the real enemy was in Cairo” (p. 17). Indeed, the conditions under which Egyptian entered the conflict were “absurd and humiliating” as Heikal described it: the Egyptian troops had to wait the permission of a British officer of the Suez Canal to pass the border, it was a paradox. “Here was the Egyptian army on its way to fight a new enemy, but obliged to pass on sufferance through the lines of its old enemy” (p. 18).

¹²² Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, preface.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 21.

¹²⁴ "Convention Respecting the Free Navigation of the Suez Maritime Canal (Convention of Constantinople, 1888)," October 29, 1888, art. 1, *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 79 (1887–1888): 18.

¹²⁵ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 23.

From History to Ideology

Detaching the history of Nasserism from the one of Suez is not only impossible, but it is inconvenient, too. Indeed, it is within the event of the nationalization of the Suez Canal that Nasserism evolved and developed. This thought is deducible from the book written by Heikal, the loyal right-hand man of Nasser. Heikal did not write “Cutting the Lion’s Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes” to narrate the ideology behind Nasser, but eventually, this latter emerged. This happened mainly because Gamal, during all his political life, had always attempted to justify and rationalize his acts using ideological concepts. Thus, Heikal could not narrate the story of Suez without telling the one about Nasser.

This introduction is aimed at explaining the framework in which this thesis is operating. In analyzing clue historical events of Nasserism, it is complex to identify a coherence within the core pillars of its ideology. This is particularly visible in the case of Suez, where various factors played a role, each calling different, and sometimes contradictory, reactions. This dynamic scenario could be an obstacle when analyzing ideologies since, without fixed guidelines, the analysis might not go so far. The political scientist Michael Freeden offers a path to follow in this situation. Indeed, in his opera “Ideology: A very short introduction”, he presents the possibility of looking at ideologies by using what he calls a “morphological approach”¹²⁶. In Freeden’s words, “ideologies are complex combinations and clusters of political concepts in sustainable patterns”. This means that an ideology is the result of the interactions among the concepts and not the single ones taken alone. With this brief presentation of Freeden’s definition of ideology, it might be evident that given the complexity of analyzing the ideology behind Nasser’s political acts, Freeden’s proposed framework might make this analysis more straightforward. Indeed, the British political scientist presented a theoretical framework that easily adapts to dynamic and evolving contexts, such as the one of Nasserism.

Freeden observed that the same political concept can yield different outcomes when embedded in different ideologies. He likened ideas to modular pieces of furniture, noting that “the same unit (concept) may have a different role (or meaning) in two separate rooms (or ideologies).” This perspective proves particularly useful for analysis, as it avoids the need for consensus on fixed definitions of political concepts, which is the case of Nasserism. Moreover, the Suez dynamic lends itself to such analysis within this theoretical framework, as it can be divided into layers, allowing for the measurement and assessment of the presence and interpretation of core political concepts within ideologies. In a certain way, Suez is the historical representation of this theoretical framework: the dynamism of Nasserism is reflected in history and vice versa.

Thus, this thesis’s section will follow two parallel tracks, aiming at conciliating words, events, and political concepts, with the final objective of seeing the emergence of Nasserism. The first track is the one of history: the unfolding of events that eventually led to the nationalization of Suez. Above, the structure of Suez nationalization was described as “layers”, meaning that each factor and event interacted with the others ending to create a unified block, in which, however, it is still possible to individuate the single components.

¹²⁶ Freeden, Michael. *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 51.

The second track is the ideological one, the thought behind the action, the consideration before the decision. To follow this path, different sources will be taken into account. Firstly, the narration made by Heikal of the Suez Canal event is considered to provide a first ideological ground for deepening the analysis. Through the different layers of Suez's history, core political concepts of Nasserism emerged within different shapes and colors. Thus, to observe the whole of Nasser's ideology, it is necessary to understand and capture the various shadows of the pillars behind it. To achieve this, looking at political speeches is inevitable. Hence, each historical event here will be linked to the development of an ideological concept, which is then analyzed in Nasser's speeches and declarations.

In conclusion, this paragraph aimed at providing the theoretical and historical coordinates of the following analysis and thus introduced the methodology used in evaluating Nasserism through history. The historical layers and ideological dimensions considered include: the Israeli question and, consequently, Panarabism; the presence of the United States and the theme of economic development; the relationship with the U.S.S.R. and the notion of national defense; and, finally, the Cold War and the principle of positive neutrality.

Element One: The Israeli Factor

Like all great stories, the Suez story is composed of layers of real and imagined conviction: a mixture of realities and conspiracies. One of the layers of the Suez story can be defined as the Israel issue. Indeed, Nasser's confrontation with Israel, which culminated in the Suez War, had its origins in the Lavon affair. The Lavon Affair was a plan put forward by Israel from 1954 to convince the British not to leave the Suez Canal.

The issue started with the appointment of Moshe Sharett as Israel's second prime minister, the first Israeli politician to appreciate the Arabs and their culture, even speaking Arabic. In fact, Sharett and Nasser began secret contacts from the very beginning. According to Aburish, Nasser and Sharett lost no time in discussing difficult issues. Sharett wanted Egypt to lift the blockade on shipping to and from Israel through the Suez Canal. Nasser wanted Israel to accept the Palestinian refugees. Professor Avi Shlaim said the negotiations were so cordial that they offered a kind of hope. It is important to note that the only leader to negotiate with Israel before Nasser was King Abdullah of Jordan, and in fact he was killed in 1951¹²⁷. However, the Israeli people were not very happy with the negotiations from the beginning, and this put Sharett in a bad position to continue the negotiations. At the same time, Aburish emphasizes, the Arab countries did not know that negotiations were taking place, so Nasser did not have to face the civil opinion and its idea of breaking the Arab solidarity. According to Aburish, this attitude shows that the Palestinian issue was not a primary issue for Nasser until later; however, to agree with this means to disbelieve what Nasser confessed in his own book "The Philosophy of the Revolution" where he indeed clearly stated that his Arab identity, his political passion and his beliefs all came from the anger proven for the Palestinian issue.

It was in this context that the Lavon affair was born. In fact, Lavon was the defense minister of the Sharett government, which was not really loyal to its prime minister, but rather to Ben Gurion. In fact, without consulting Prime Minister Sharett, Lavon activated an Israeli intelligence cell in Egypt called Unit 131. This operation, also known as Operation Susannah, had the precise aim of preventing the replacement of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian

¹²⁷ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 94.

treaty to avoid the evacuation of British troops along the Suez Canal. The strategy was simple: do everything possible to portray Egypt as an unstable country, which paradoxically resulted in a sort of war against British and American interests, indeed the main targets were western buildings and icons. “Susannah was not an ordinary intelligence operation. Among other things, there was a hurried air about the whole thing” states Aburish, but the hurry was not the only odds there.

From this first layer, it is already evident that the watchword of the Suez issue may be fog: a fog that obscures not only intentions but also the characters themselves, as they assume the guise of another state to persuade the colonizers to remain.

Element Two: The Americans Between Israel and the Aswan Dam

Under the influence of the Cold War, even this situation was eaten up by bipolar logic, as expected. As Heikal noted, at the end of 1955 the Americans made a last attempt to control the events between Egypt and Israel. The designated person to talk to Nasser was Robert Anderson, a very practical man with no experience in the Middle East. Even here, however, the two were not on the best of terms, as Heikal reported that Nasser did not understand a word of their first meeting. But as it should be clear now, Nasser was also a very pragmatic man and he knew that he had to be clear with the West, so he said right away: “Let me make this absolutely clear. I am not going to negotiate with Ben-Gurion by proxy” (p. 95). But Anderson seemed determined to find a solution in the Middle East, and so he made two “original, not to say extraordinary”, proposals. The first suggestion was about “permitting the Arabs to be joined together by a continuous and substantial land area under Arab sovereignty and peopled by Arabs” (p. 96). But as Heikal goes on to explain, the practical solution for Anderson was to build a bridge from Sinai to Jordan where the Arabs would have sovereignty over the bridge, while Israel would have sovereignty over the underpass. To better understand Nasser’s temperament, it is curious to report how Nasser responded to this extravagant proposal: “But supposing, one of our soldiers wanted to piss, and did so from the overpass onto some Israelis in the underpass, wouldn’t that start a war?”. What makes this question even more hilarious is that it followed a serious answer from Anderson.

Although Nasser often maintained this ironic and joking tone, sometimes one would say unsuitable for his interlocutors, he knew well when the negotiation began. In fact, Nasser’s most realistic and thorny discussion with the Americans was the issue of the Aswan Dam. The Aswan Dam issue was a highly sensitive one in Nasser’s politics. Although it was just one of his many ambitious projects for Egypt, the debate surrounding it overshadowed everything else. As previously mentioned, Egypt can be considered a hydraulic state, profoundly shaped by the presence or absence of waterways. The High Dam was not only a bold initiative but also essential to the vision of progress Nasser had for the country. Securing funding for the Aswan Dam meant investing in Egypt’s modernization, strengthening its independence and autonomy; an outcome that was not well received by the West. What happened was that the leaders of the West, especially the British, convinced themselves and others

that financing the Aswan Dam meant financing Nasser, who was called a new Hitler by some, as reported in the speech of Gaitskell, the leader of the opposition in Britain¹²⁸.

The West understood that if there was no way to stop Nasser, they could stop his idea of progress. That is, they knew that the only way to negotiate with him was to limit their funding for the Aswan Dam in order to get some concession on the Israel issue. The West agreed in 1955: The United States, Britain and the World Bank confirmed that they would finance \$400 million of the investment. It would have been a peaceful and satisfactory agreement for Nasser, but he miscalculated.

To understand what went wrong in this event, it is essential to grasp the idea of progress that Nasser had. To do this, it is enough to recall what was said above in his analysis of the philosophy of the revolution. For Nasser, development was not just economic development, or rather, it could not be just economic, it had to be social and human. He clearly stated in his opera and in his speech that it is not enough to have a high rate of employment if the nation is not able to save money. "How easy it would have been to please everyone... but at what cost? At the expense of the people's aspirations and the future of the country!"¹²⁹. From this we understand that for Nasser, economic development goes hand in hand with constitutional law, the future of the country is the result of a harmonized legal corpus, of principles that are well written in the constitutional paper. In fact, Nasser speaks of the sacred interests of the country, economic interests that must be protected by the constitution and not by statesmen or the state itself. For Nasser, it is the whole nation that participates in economic development under a constitutional framework approved by the nation itself: "In order to secure the national economy in the future, we called upon the competent people in the various sectors and urged them to ensure the country's prosperity and the people's welfare"¹³⁰. Another interesting point to consider is Nasser's choice of words: he promises prosperity to the nation but only welfare to the people, two concepts that are not exactly the same. This distinction suggests that Nasser did not intend to grant his citizens individual economic growth or prosperity, but merely social welfare. This may reflect his skepticism toward the Egyptian people themselves; after all, he repeatedly stated that Egyptians tended to turn against one another. Perhaps, in his view, allowing individual and independent economic advancement would have risked undermining national unity. Nevertheless, despite his fears, he ultimately did allow a certain degree of economic freedom, as private enterprise and individual economic initiatives were never completely suppressed under his rule. This reflection on Nasser's concept of development is essential to understanding why he indirectly rejected the West's offer to fund the construction of the Aswan Dam. In fact, what seemed to have convinced the World Bank to retract its initial offer was the agreement Nasser made with the Soviet Union to provide Egypt with Czech arms to protect itself from Israel. This agreement raised suspicions in the West, leading them to ultimately withdraw the offer. As Aburish commented Nasser "while he thought the Czech arms provided the means to protect himself, everybody else thought it meant an inevitable confrontation with Israel. Nasser must have known that, but once again he was responding to the voice of the people."¹³¹ This

¹²⁸ British Empire. 2024. "*Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*." Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://britishempire.co.uk/biography/edenandsuez.htm>.

¹²⁹ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 65.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹³¹ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 114.

conclusion highlights how, for Nasser, a nation's independence and dignity were still more important than progress. In this case, he sacrificed economic advancement in favor of national defense, prioritizing the dignity of the Arabs.

Element Three: Soviet Influence Through Arms and Oil

Tensions on the border between Egypt and Israel increased in 1956, and the Gaza Strip has been a place of death ever since. In fact, on April 4, Israel bombed the city of Gaza in retaliation for a mortar shell fired by Egypt. Here, the UN began to acknowledge Israel's responsibility, but outside the glass palace, the debate was different: how to supply arms and to whom. A few weeks after the Gaza attack, Khrushchev and Bulganin (his prime minister) visited Eden¹³². Eden's goal was to convince Khrushchev to join the Tripartite Declaration of 1950.

Something more should be said about this declaration. In fact, this document, although not so named by Western sources, had a huge impact on the geopolitics of the Middle East. the declaration was titled "Tripartite Declaration Regarding the Armistice Borders" and it focused on the distribution of arms. The first article of this declaration recites: "The three Governments recognize that the Arab states and Israel all need to maintain a certain level of armed forces for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defense and to permit them to play their part in the defense of the area as a whole [...]"¹³³. This incipit already reveals the paternalistic atmosphere of the declaration, but the three Western powers tried to hide this last colonial attitude with the desire to maintain peace in the region, at least this is what the leaders declared. However, in the document they do not speak of the desire for peace, but rather of the "necessity and interest" of maintaining peace¹³⁴.

In 1950, the Soviet Union was not part of this declaration, probably because there were other priorities during the Stalin period, but now, in 1956, the idea of having Khrushchev sign the declaration was quite important, especially for Eden, and it seemed possible. However, Washington was not really pleased with this intention because it would "legalize the Russian presence in the Middle East"¹³⁵. Eden had no time for slow diplomacy and wanted Khrushchev to be part of the deal, realizing that since France continued to trade arms with Israel, the only country Egypt could ask for arms from was Russia. However, Khrushchev was not really in favor of the agreement since he claimed that the Middle Eastern countries were sovereign and had the right and the freedom to choose their own defense, this must be appreciated by Nasser who was indeed informed by the Russians about this negotiation. To better understand the difference of pragmatism that occurred between London and Moscow, it is ironic to report the dialogue that occurred between Eden and Khrushchev during the negotiation, when the leader of the USSR was so tired of hearing Eden that he would go to war to protect the oil of the Middle East, he replied: "Look at the map, the Middle East is much nearer to the Soviet Union than it is to you, and if there was a war over it the

¹³² Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 102.

¹³³ United States, United Kingdom, and France. *Tripartite Declaration on the Middle East, May 25, 1950*. United Nations, UNISPAL. Article 1. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-209951/>.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, art. 3.

¹³⁵ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 102.

sparks would reach us before they reached you” (p. 103), with this thinly veiled threat Khrushchev closed the conversation.

However, this brought another element into the discussion: oil. The context of the oil issue has been introduced and explained in the paragraph above. However, having now delved into the real politics of Nasser, it seems interesting to highlight the fact that from 1956 Nasser became the so-called “new Mosaddeq” for British and American diplomacy. In fact, the CIA representative Eichelberger, in his message to his British counterpart, declared his intention “to make a Mosaddeq with Nasser” (p. 104). This underscores the perception of Nasser as a menace, not only in the context of the anti-colonial discourse but also in light of the West’s recognition of his propaganda capabilities, particularly in regard to Panarabism. The West perceived the emergence of an Arab union as a potentially formidable entity, one that would wield significant influence over oil resources. Since that time, a significant amount of black propaganda against Nasser has been documented, including several assassination attempts. The most prominent example of this propaganda was the fabrication of fake broadcasts in which Nasser purportedly declared his intention to consolidate all Arab oil reserves. These fraudulent broadcasts were disseminated to various delegations, governments, and prominent oil companies.

It appears that the Russian delegation, led by Foreign Minister Shepilov, initiated a dialogue on this matter. Notably, his inaugural diplomatic mission took him to Egypt. During their initial encounter, the topic of the High dam was not addressed (p. 106). However, in a sense, the Aswan Dam was the *file rouge* of almost all the negotiations that took place during this period between Egypt and the rest of the world. For some authors, the Aswan Dam was the main project that Nasser wanted to develop his country, and it was only with the failure of the negotiations for its financing that Nasser proceeded with the nationalization of Suez. However, this reading of history reduces Nasser’s politics to one of opportunism, while there are reasons to believe that he had a more profound ideology, which this thesis seeks to highlight.

In the above paragraph, it was already stated and proved that Nasser was not willing to negotiate Egypt’s independence with the economic development of the country. In fact, he had a precise plan to improve the national economy without compromising the country’s independence, but what is interesting is that this is only part of the story. The economic plan of Nasser could be divided into two simultaneous phases, one could say that there were two parallel-track strategies to reach the same goal.

The first strategy was the well-known nationalization and social reforms. In 1952, Nasser found an overpopulated and indebted country. Nasser’s first choice here was to rely more on the domestic economy to increase real income, and he made this one of the pillars of his pan-Arabist ideology. One of the first economic moves in this context was the decision to nationalize all of Egypt’s private banks, which made clear Nasser’s goal: to keep the economy under state control¹³⁶. This was followed by the nationalization of private businesses and industries, which did not produce the expected results. The second step in this first strategy was to focus on reforming the vital sector of the Egyptian economy: agriculture. In fact, the second economic reform that was implemented was the Agricultural Reform Law of 1952, which has been discussed in detail above. The law aimed to tackle the pasha system and thus

¹³⁶ Kerr, Malcolm H. 1962. *Egypt Under Nasser. Headline Series* No. 156. New York: Foreign Policy Association, 19.

reduce the amount of land that could be owned, initially the limit was set at 200 acres, later in 1961 it was lowered to 100 acres. In this way, Nasser allowed the peasants to own land and pay taxes on it, thus increasing the revenue of the state¹³⁷. This also meant an increase in income for the peasants, which was then reinvested in the local economy. All of this was accompanied by the planification of the national economy in five-year development plans that actually began in 1960.

At the same time, the second parallel track consisted of foreign financial aid, which was in stark contrast to the idea of Nationalism and independence that Nasser used to narrate. In fact, as Sharp reports in his account of Egyptian-U.S. relations, from 1952 to 1967 Egypt received conspicuous financial aid, especially from the United States. The main plan of aid sent to Cairo during this period was the one of development aid, economic support fund and the food for peace program. Washington's willingness to provide all this aid was probably related to the attempt to include Egypt in the western part of the Cold War. However, various authors, including Dawisha, agree that despite this large amount of aid, Nasser did not allow foreign influence in the decision-making process: Egypt was not for sale, at least apparently.

This contextualization is necessary to better understand the Soviet role and its influence on armaments, oil, and the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The key information about this process has been provided in the previous paragraphs and will only be briefly recalled here. Following the Tripartite Declaration, the only way for the United States to influence Egypt was by providing foreign aid. Conversely, the U.S.S.R. had a free hand in supplying arms but was unable to offer significant foreign aid to Egypt, given the dire economic situation in Eastern Europe at the time.

Thus, the safest choice for Moscow was to supply arms to Egypt, and indeed, in 1955, Egypt signed its first agreement with the communist bloc, specifically with Czechoslovakia. Moreover, in 1957, Moscow supplied Egypt with tanks and other weapons worth \$150 million. This agreement was destined to increase, and indeed, in 1963 the value of the arms was \$220 million¹³⁸. What is also crucial to emphasize is that the technology provided by the USSR was much more advanced than that of other Arab countries, and thus even this increase the role of panarabism in the Middle East. However, since the 1955 agreement, the Western bloc began to be suspicious of Nasser's so-called non-alignment foreign policy. The first sign of this growing concern was the withdrawal of the United States' offer to finance the Aswan Dam. According to Campbell, two major events pushed Nasser into Soviet arms: the Israeli attack on Gaza and the Baghdad Pact¹³⁹.

In order to analyze the ideology of Nasser behind his decision, a context of the role of the Baghdad Pact should be given. For the West, the Baghdad Pact was a way to protect the Middle East from Soviet aggression and, in general, to continue a kind of dependency dynamic with these countries. Conversely, Nasser's view of the pact was totally negative, seeing it as a way to weaken Arab unity under Cairo. Nasser made clear what he thought of the

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*

¹³⁸ Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 142.

¹³⁹ Steele, William B. 1963. "Egypt's Relations with the Soviet Union: An Analysis." *Naval War College Review* 16, no. 1 (September): 16–45. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/45237640>.

pact, especially during his meeting with Eden, as reported by Heikal: “He said that with his military background he could understand the need for a proper defense of an area like the Middle East, which was so important for others as well as for those who lived in it”, but he had a different idea of what could threaten the area, as he continued, “the main danger facing the countries of the Middle East was an internal one, not an external one”¹⁴⁰.

This discourse has tried to show how the concept of national defense is crucial for Nasser, as it is for all nationalist leaders. However, it is interesting to try to capture the kind of hierarchy that existed in Nasser’s politics. As it was seen with the case of economic progress, Nasser was not interested in exchanging economic development for national sovereignty, although he still took foreign aid, he would rather refuse the American offers to be free to choose his internal and foreign policy’s strategy. But here is another shadow of this theory. In fact, the Egyptian leader put national defense above economic progress and decided to be dependent on Soviet arms, but not on American dollars. In an interview in 1955 for the London Times with James Morris, Nasser declared: “I do not want to spend money on war. I want to build our High Dam at Aswan and our new pyramid”¹⁴¹, this shows that he would have liked to focus on the economic progress and growth of his country, but was forced by time and circumstances to suppress his desires in order to prioritize his values, such as independence and territorial stability. This situation may, albeit very remotely, echo what happened during the Bush presidency in 2001. Bush had been elected primarily to shift the focus of the presidency from foreign policy to domestic policy, yet he was forced to adjust his priorities due to the circumstances. Similarly, Nasser faced a comparable fate. He was elected to restore dignity to the people and had hoped to do so by elevating Egypt economically and politically. However, he, too, fell victim to the pressures of time and the arms race

Element Four: The non-alignment doctrine and Baghdad Pact

One of the unshakable labels of identity that history has given to Nasser is that of a leader of the Third World of the non-aligned. The story of Nasser is indeed deepened in the dynamics of the Cold War, where everything was divided into two spheres that penetrated not only the appearance but also the intimacy of people’s lives. Nasser was strongly opposed to this, but before understanding his idea behind this label of non-alignment, one should recall what was the relationship between the major powers and the minor ones. Indeed, as Yahya described: “one of the most striking features of international politics since World War II has been the rise of the small to positions of telling influence on world affairs”¹⁴². Paradoxically, small powers benefited from the Cold War scenario, in some cases, as “both the United States and the Soviet Union, out of reciprocal fear and opposed interests, try to court neutrals, to win friends and keep them”¹⁴³. One of the most evident case study of this “paradoxical rise” is the one of Egypt, and as Yahya continues “Egyptian-Soviet relations between 1955 and 1972, the focus of this study, offer a striking example of small nations’ means of using the superpowers’ competition to advance their own interests”.

¹⁴⁰ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 62.

¹⁴¹ Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, 129.

¹⁴² Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 4.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*

Indeed, one way to read Nasser's non-alignment doctrine is to link it to the rhetoric of national interests. This is the same explanation that Yahya gives in his book, and he focuses on the definition of national interest for Nasser. In fact, Nasser was committed to the idea of "we deal with the countries of the world on the basis that no one should interfere in our affairs"¹⁴⁴: the Egyptian president did not want the independence of his country to be jeopardized by external influence. On this regard, Yahya in the course of his book tries to compare Nasser's ideas on non-alignment with the ideology behind the Monroe Doctrine; despite their apparent similarities, upon a closer look, fundamental differences emerge. In fact, the Monroe Doctrine called for mutual non-interference: European states were not to intervene in the Americas, and vice versa, the United States was to isolate itself from what was happening in Europe. Nasser, on the other hand, called for non-interference in national affairs, especially African affairs, "Africa for Africans", but he never sought isolation. One could say that the U.S. doctrine was a case of mutual isolationism, while the Egyptian doctrine was unilateral. Indeed, Nasser was a firm believer in the benefits of international affairs; he seemed to have understood the lesson of the Cold War while it was still going on: no one could really exempt themselves from the rules, but it was possible for even the smallest of them to influence them. Nasser defined foreign policy as the vital lifeblood of the state: "Without our foreign policy, we would not be able to build our internal structure...On the volume of our work in the international field depends on our influence in international affairs...Without external contacts and without our external activities, we could not implement the development plan"¹⁴⁵. With this further analysis, it is better to recall the visions of Nasser that will be analyzed through this thesis. At the beginning, it was emphasized that Nasser would rather give up economic development for national independence, later it was emphasized that national independence was rather subordinated to the furnishing of arms by the U.S.S.R., and at the same time he received plenty of foreign aid to finance the development of Egypt. Thus, at this point, Nasser's ideology seems to be blocked by a contradiction. But by adding this reflection on foreign policy, it is clear that Nasser was not a utopian politician who wanted to die for the sake of glory, he would rather die for the sake of freedom, which is different. Indeed, he recognized the need to have relations with the West and the East, and he tried, as always, to find a balance in which Egypt could prosper and maintain its freedom and dignity, but not all events proved Nasser right in this regard. In general, to really understand the strategy of Nasser in bargaining between East and West one should accept a paradox: "neither economic might nor military strength necessarily translate into influence"¹⁴⁶.

An interesting event on which it is useful to try to analyze Nasser's idea of non-alignment is the Baghdad Pact. In fact, the first and most popular view of the opposition to the Baghdad Pact by Nasser is that he was against it because it meant a Western influence on the defense of the Middle East, this view is also given by Heikal. However, Yahya gives another reading of the story: here the idea is that Nasser opposed the pact mainly because he feared the consequences of Iraq in the group. This idea casts some shadow on the Nasserist ideology, because by reading the story in this way, the rivalries between the Middle East states emerge and the idea of Panarabism loses some strength. The disparity of resources has always been an issue in the Middle East, and although Nasser tried to call

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁵ Arab Observer. 1962. "Dual Economic Policy for the African Continent." Arab Observer, September, 3, 1962.

¹⁴⁶ Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 61.

for a unity of resources, especially oil, this will never be achieved. In a sense, the strengths of the Arabs are at the same time the cause of their inability to unite them in order to be stronger. However, a variety of theories have emerged regarding the factors that motivated Nasser's strong opposition to the pact. Notably, Yahya's own account appears to be internally conflicting. Specifically, while he previously asserted that Nasser's primary concern was the potential for conflict with Iraq, in another chapter he clearly stated that this was not the primary motivation. According to Yahya, Nasser's opposition to the pact was not driven by this particular concern, but rather by a fundamental disagreement with its underlying principles. Specifically, Nasser's reluctance to engage in a defense agreement with the West stemmed from the perceived "impossibility of identifying a common enemy"¹⁴⁷. In practice, this meant that, for Nasser, since the Arab state considered Israel to be its enemy, entering into a defense pact with the USA would be seen as a "foolish self-deception"¹⁴⁸. The Arabs would see the USA as an unreliable partner as soon as they showed signs of preparing to fight their perceived enemy.

The Baghdad Pact became an important battle for Nasser, and his suspicions were confirmed when Israel attacked the Gaza Strip a few days after the pact was announced: for him, this was proof that the pact was a way for the West to destroy Egypt. Full of this feeling, he launched a strong anti-Western campaign, one of the toughest campaigns against the West, and by which Nasser managed to convince Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In retrospect, the Baghdad Pact was a failure for the West, because even if Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan joined it, the pact could not work without the rest of the Middle East. Moreover, in 1955, while the Baghdad pact was being signed, Damascus and Ryad signed a defense agreement with Cairo. One could see in this story the first realization of Nasser's idea of panarabism, but that would not be an analysis of the whole picture. Indeed, the opposition to the Baghdad Pact was largely driven by the perception of a shared enemy, specifically Israel, rather than a sense of Arab unity. Eventually, the United States recognized this dynamic and proposed an agreement with Nasser that excluded the case of defense against Israel. Concurrently, Washington requested that Cairo host an American military mission to oversee the arms management process in Egypt. Nasser's rejection of this offer, as previously outlined, underscores the complexity of the contemporary international relations: "the pressure a superior power may apply to impose its will on an inferior does not necessarily lead to the inferior's compliance" (p. 62).

Better than Non-alignment: positive neutrality

The world in which Nasser operated must have been far more complex than the one understood today, and thus the strategies for survival were far more complicated than what the simple word "non-alignment" could identify. In fact, non-alignment must be distinguished from neutrality, and from here it is easier to understand Nasser's concept of non-alignment. Neutrality in foreign policy means non-belligerence, which is not the case with Nasserism, as history shows. The problem is that there is no clear definition of non-alignment, it is a rather nebulous term. In fact, Yahya and other authors have explained that rather than having a monolithic definition, non-alignment has different connotations depending on the geographical area (p. 52). However, as history has

¹⁴⁷ Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 60.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

always attempted to label phenomena, the non-alignment movement is generally associated with the Bandung Conference of 1955, where Nehru attempted to synthesize the main principles, but from here different interpretations emerged. Indeed, while Nehru's doctrine of non-alignment was based on a moral and ethical account, the same cannot be said of Nasser's. The pure non-alignment of 1955 was based on ten principles revolving around the ideas of human rights, global justice, and international respect; what Nasser had to offer in a sense could be called pragmatism and opportunity. From the beginning, the Egyptian president described his policy as "positive neutrality", which is somewhere between (passive) neutrality and nebulous and moral non-alignment. In a way, he fused nationalist values with the idea of non-alignment in his speeches, thus creating positive neutrality, which had the sole aim of serving the interests of the Arabs. "Our policy is decided according to our interests and according to our conscience. This is the difference between positive and passive neutrality. The latter does not care about what is going on in other parts of the world, but positive neutrality means that our policy is based on our interests" explained Nasser himself in one of his speeches. Thus, the main connotation of this positive neutrality was that foreign policy would serve no interests but those of the country. In this way, the doctrine was closely correlated with anti-Western and anti-colonial rhetoric, but it would be reductive to reduce it to this. As Malcolm Kerr has described: Nasser counted on the fact that the Americans, the Russians, and even the British would eventually end up working for him in various ways¹⁴⁹. As analyzed in this thesis, history shows that in the end Nasser was able to achieve a large part of his goals by using positive neutrality. The examples of this are reported above this paragraph: the military agreements with the U.S.S.R. and foreign aid from the U.S. As Yahya concludes: "Though he refused to stand up and be counted, as Secretary Dulles wished, Nasser brought Egypt more dollars than many believe he could have gained by aligning Egypt"¹⁵⁰. Having given this information, it should be clear that Nasser's positive neutrality, despite the use of the rhetoric of non-alignment movements, was radically different. In fact, as Yahya noted, not all non-alignment leaders were as opportunistic as Nasser. In particular, Nehru called for a non-aligned policy based on moral principles rather than national interests. In sum, Nasser managed to transform the beginnings of anti-colonialist demands into a strong and aggressive foreign policy at great risk. What acted as an airbag between Egypt and the great powers, however, was the pan-Arab sentiment. In fact, both sides realized that winning Egypt meant winning the Middle East and thus continued their hopeless courtship without ever conquering Nasser. This history confirms what Nasser had already claimed in his book "Philosophy of the Revolution": the strength of the Arabs exists and remains in geography, resources and unity – but this is part of another story.

Summing up: the Arrival to Suez

Having made this excursion among the main events and concepts that crossed the Nasserist ideology, the time has come to analyze the phenomena of Nasserism that, in a way, contain the essence of the ideology: the nationalization of the Suez Canal. In the course of this chapter, various factors, events, and relationships have been taken into account in order to present a solid picture of Nasserism through the history of his political thought, which is of

¹⁴⁹ Kerr, Malcolm. 1968. *Egyptian Foreign Policy and the Revolution*. In Vatikiotis, P.J. (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East: And Other Case Studies*, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, p. 118

¹⁵⁰ Yahya, Ali M. *Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955–1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989, 55.

course strongly linked to the history of international relations. The idea, however, is that the figure of Nasser has usually been analyzed as a sort of agent of the history of that time, and thus extrapolating the ideology behind his actions resulted in hard work. The aim of this section is to reconstruct the map that led to Suez, and thus the elements that are part of the core of the ideology of Nasserism. Although these factors and concepts have already been discussed separately, they may need to be tied together to get the full picture.

The first element that was discussed in this analysis was the relationship with Israel and therefore with the Americans. It was noted that the first opposition to the possibility of full Egyptian sovereignty in Suez came from Israel. In fact, as early as the 1940s, the Western powers began to understand that they would eventually have to leave, but Israel could not really accept remaining with an exposed flank. Nasser built his ideology with this dynamic in mind, and indeed in his thinking there is always the presence of an external enemy, which is neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R., but rather Israel. On various occasions, and especially during the negotiations of the Baghdad Pact, Nasser reiterated the fact that the real threat to the Arabs was not something external, but rather internal. This thought could be read in two ways. The most common reading of this is that Nasser knew from the beginning the weakness of Panarabism and was therefore afraid of the inability of the Arabs to coalesce; in this sense, the threat was internal: the Arabs themselves were the threat. However, if this idea is contested with the decisions that Nasser took in those years, another explanation of the statement could be valid: by internal threat, Nasser could also be referring to a geographical internal danger to the area, meaning Israel. In fact, despite being part of the West, Israel is embedded in the heart of the Middle East, in the heart of the Arabs, and thus for Nasser it was the dangerous cancerous cell that constituted the real threat to the organism of the Middle East.

Nasser's concept of national defense is strongly influenced by this latter view, and indeed above it has been pointed out that probably if Nasser could have made a sort of hierarchy of core values, he would have placed the issue of national defense at the top, rather than economic power. This passage is particularly important because the idea of Nasserism seems to be based on a precise balance between freedom, dignity and development. The hierarchy between these values for Nasser has been demonstrated by history itself. This is especially true when analyzing the relationship with the Americans. Here, in fact, it became clear that although the U.S.A. was an important source of money, Nasser did not want to fall into the Baghdad Pact in order not to lose the possibility of defending his borders against Israel. Moreover, as the paradox of Yahya showed: American economic aid was not translated in political influence, as it happened with the Marshal Plan in Europe, or the Alliance for Progress in Latin America. It was said above that this paradox could live with Nasser only because it was nourished by the positive neutrality strategy that he conducted, sometimes carefully, and other times in an impious way.

Following this strategy Nasser ideologically and pragmatically valued arms over the country's economic progress. Already highlighted above was his weighted and conscious choice to indirectly reject the Aswan Dam loan in exchange for arms deals with the Russians. For Nasser, there is no progress without freedom, and dignity. Nasser's concept of freedom is undoubtedly one of the most nuanced, as it varies depending on the social and political sphere in which it is applied. However, if one considers freedom at the national level rather than in terms of individual citizenship, Nasser is profoundly driven by the idea of liberation from the colonial yoke, but not only

that. The nationalization of the Suez Canal serves as a key moment to explore the concept of freedom within Nasser's ideology.

Suez, finally.

On July 26, 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, an event that has been described in various ways. For Western historians and reporters, it was Nasser's last bold move, and for Arabs, it was the end of colonialism. Both descriptions are inadequate. In fact, the nationalization of the Canal was not an unweighted decision, a gamble; it was not even the final point of the imperialist attitude towards the non-West, as history proved. As it has been argued before, the decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was the result of a long and difficult game that Egypt played with the two blocs, but not only. This event should be considered as the emergence of Nasser's ideology, because it is obvious that in approaching this decision, he had outlined the precise concepts that are the bricks of his thought. Before entering into the ideological analysis of the move, it is interesting to analyze the Suez Canal issue from a strategic point of view. In fact, various scholars had tried to understand the game theory model that could explain the outcome and the possible choices of this event, since in studying it, it seems to look at a chess game. Authors such as Shupe, Wright, Hipel, and Fraser have used the Fraser and Hipel conflict analysis technique, which was experimented with in 1979¹⁵¹. As Shupe claims, the analysis of the Suez *hypergame* demonstrates the complexity of modern conflicts and how possible solutions can be predicted.

As explained above, Nasser did not agree to trade Egypt's economic development for independence, and thus, indirectly, refused the loan for the Aswan Dam by agreeing to an arms deal with Moscow; all this was accelerated by the presence of Israel. It is important to add that although tensions were already high, Nasser decided to increase them by recognizing the People's Republic of China on May 16, 1956. Aburish commented this move by saying "the last thing this delicate situation needed was for someone to upset the balance by introducing a new element onto the scene"¹⁵²; indeed, this was the "last straw" for the U.S. that eventually decided to withdraw the offer of the loan. Although, some authors have argued that Nasser's diplomatic recognition of China was a purely provocative act, Aburish's explanation seems more convincing: the Egyptian president wanted to guarantee Egypt a source of arms in case both blocs agreed to an embargo. One could say that Nasser foresaw a coalition between the two superpowers for the first time after the II World War, which would finally come to happen a few months later with the Suez Canal armistice. Indeed, as Nutting reports, Chou En-lai met with Nasser at the Bandung Conference and assured Nasser that if Russia was unable to send him arms directly, China could act as an intermediary¹⁵³.

From this last event it seems clear that behind Nasser's decisions there was a precise road map rather than a scheme. In order to prove the ideological analysis made so far, it is interesting to look at the preferences that Nasser had in this game theory model. Shupe and others by transforming the political decisions into vectors managed to obtain a table of preference vectors with the desire of Nasser in this situation. First, Nasser wanted

¹⁵¹ Shupe, Michael C., William M. Wright, Keith W. Hipel, e Niall M. Fraser. 1980. "Nationalization of the Suez Canal: A Hypergame Analysis." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24 (3): 477-493. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/173642>.

¹⁵² Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 136.

¹⁵³ Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, 138.

money for the Aswan Dam; here the authors seem to agree with what has been stated so far in this thesis and thus that he would not sacrifice his independence to get the funds. Second, it is clear that Nasser would prefer to have an agreement for funds with the West rather than with Russia. Finally, the nationalization of the Suez Canal would have been Nasser's last choice if all other attempts to obtain funds had failed. This is what emerges from the analysis. Moreover, in the course of the analysis, the authors, using the method of Fraser and Hipel, managed to confront the preference of player number 2, which is the Western bloc (mainly U.S. and U.K.). This comparison shows that the equilibrium that would have been preferred by both players, thus the Nash Equilibrium, was the one in which Nasser accepted the original loan. This conclusion may be contradictory because it is obvious that in the reality of history, the nationalization of the canal was and still is an enormous success for Egypt. But the point here is that in order to obtain the nationalization, Nasser had to devote more resources and risk far more than he thought he could gain. Shupe stresses, however, that "this does not mean that Nasser was either wrong or irrational. He held out for outcome 5 (the Nash Equilibrium) in the hope that the British and American attitudes would change and he could achieve outcome 10, a loan on his own terms"¹⁵⁴.

This focus, approached from a game theory perspective, serves as a useful introduction to the analysis of the event, not so much from a historical standpoint, but rather from an ideological one, of which Nasser was the architect. By reconstructing the tactical decisions made during those critical days and analyzing his words, it is possible to trace the ideological framework that guided Nasser's action.

This story begins with a simple question that Nasser posed one Saturday morning to Heikal, his right-hand man: "Why not a hundred percent?"; and there was no answer¹⁵⁵. This question already contains the ideological meaning of Nasser's decision. By asking Heikal why Egypt could not own the Suez Canal in its entirety, Nasser denounced centuries of imperialism and double standards. In 1956, the world was changing and learning from the colonial past, but Nasser was clear that he did not have to change the mindset of the colonialists, but rather the opposite, that of the colonized. By asking, "Why not a hundred percent?" Nasser had already confronted the West and had not yet acted. Although no Egyptian knew the answer to this question, not even Heikal himself, no one took responsibility for finding an answer; no one except Gamal Abdel. By making this calibrated decision Nasser condensed, perhaps unwittingly, all his values and placed them in the world, in public opinion.

However, once the decision was made, the entire body of Free Officers mobilized under Nasser's careful orders. Reading Heikal's account of this phase, one gets the impression that Nasser was like a captain steering a ship in distress, determined to save his crew from the waves, and his sailors followed him almost blindly. Younis, a colonel loyal to Gamal since their days at the military academy, served as the captain's assistant. He was the only one who worked out a real military strategy with Nasser, determining the exact timing of the nationalization¹⁵⁶. In politics, as in love, symbolism is important, and Nasser understood well. The chosen date was no coincidence: the night of

¹⁵⁴ Shupe, Michael C., William M. Wright, Keith W. Hipel, e Niall M. Fraser. 1980. "Nationalization of the Suez Canal: A Hypergame Analysis." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24 (3): 477-493. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/173642>

¹⁵⁵ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 143.

July 26, when Nasser would captivate the people of Alexandria with a speech commemorating the fall of the monarchy. Not only the date but also the location held deep significance. The speech was to take place in Mohamed Ali Square, the very spot where the Muslim Brotherhood had attempted to assassinate him two years earlier. The ideological weight of a seemingly political and strategic gesture lies in the words of the one who delivers it. This is why analyzing Nasser's speech on the eve of nationalization is essential. Moreover, Heikal and other Egyptian sources recount that the speech itself concealed the signal to launch the operation: the agreement between Nasser and his officers was that as soon as he mentioned the name of de Lesseps, they would move in and seize control of the canal's command offices¹⁵⁷. De Lesseps was the name of the French businessman and diplomat who sponsored the opening of the canal, for Nasser's Egypt this was the symbol of imperialism; or as Nutting described him: "de Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal, who ranked in modern Egyptian mythology higher than almost any individual foreigner as an alien bloodsucker who exploited the toiling masses and the penurious resources of Egypt to serve the requirements of nineteenth-century imperialism"¹⁵⁸, this description seems quite detailed and self-critical, especially coming from an ex-British Foreign Secretary like Nutting. nothing is left to chance in Nasser's words. However, Aburish's commentary on this speech does not reflect much on the last statement. In fact, the author says: "There was no prepared text; Nasser depended on notes on the back of an envelope. He started slowly, speaking in a plain, clear style, a variation of *baladi* Arabic¹⁵⁹, avoiding dialect but without going classical. He did this for half an hour without getting to the point"; this was unlike him, but it was part of the plan. When Nasser gave the code word, Younis and his teams acted, and while they occupied the offices, Nasser began to read the new presidential decree that stated the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company; Heikal described the reaction of the crowd: "there was a moment of silent incredulity, as the significance of what they had just heard sank into the quarter of a million people crowded into Menshiyeh Square. Then pandemonium erupted. [...] Nobody in Egypt slept much that night"¹⁶⁰.

The occupation went smoothly at first, the French and British employers did not really revolt against Younis, and the colonel made it clear that friendly relations could be established, but sabotage would be severely punished. But the moment for the Egyptians to show their mettle had not yet come. In fact, as Nasser explained several times, the difficult part of nationalization was not to take over the company, but to show that they could manage it. In fact, Nasser was fully aware that Egypt had to demonstrate to the world its ability to manage canal traffic as efficiently as the British and the French. Otherwise, the West would have seized upon any shortcomings as a pretext to intervene. Perhaps Nasser feared the consequences of the Western officers and pilots leaving, as the Egyptian personnel lacked sufficient training to operate the canal independently. However, history proved him wrong: under the careful supervision of Younis, traffic in the canal remained uninterrupted from day one, matching the efficiency of the previous administration¹⁶¹. Furthermore, Nutting reports that in the first week after the foreign pilots left, Yunis announced to the world: "Send us more ships: we can handle them. The more ships we have, the

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, 141.

¹⁵⁹ Baladi Arabic (عربي بلدي) refers to a colloquial Arabic dialect spoken in many regions of the Arab world, primarily in rural and suburban areas. The word "baladi" comes from Arabic, meaning "local" or "of the country."

¹⁶⁰ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 127.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 129.

more money we earn”¹⁶². Nasser confessed to his Cabinet that the risk of war had receded; this was his first mistake regarding Suez.

The Personalization of the Conflict

Although the state of the canal was the same as the day before, meaning that ships continued to pass and the previous conventions were still respected, Great Britain and France immediately rejected the nationalization. It was in this context that the conflict became personalized, and the issue for Eden became an internal problem between him and Nasser. As Aburish reports: “Eden, having suffered the firing of Glubb and the failure of the Baghdad Pact to attract other Arab countries, had already decided that the world was too small for him and Nasser”¹⁶³.

Indeed, it is interesting to briefly analyze the personalization aspect of the conflict in order to better understand the person of Nasser and the historical context. An initial strain in relations between London and Cairo occurred on March 1, 1956, when Nasser congratulated British Foreign Secretary Lloyd for not making an issue of General Glubb’s dismissal as head of the Jordanian army. With this congratulation, Eden blamed Nasser for Glubb’s demise as a kind of pro-Nasserist move by King Hussein¹⁶⁴. Several attempts were made to mend fences, but the animosity between Eden and Nasser prevailed and the conflict became personal.

In fact, there was no real sympathy between Eden and Nasser. As Heikal reported, they met only once in person, at a dinner party at the British Embassy on February 20, 1955. Eden was there because of a stopover in Cairo on his way to Bangkok. As Heikal said, Nasser was looking forward to this meeting: “He was then still a believer in the value of personal contacts perhaps having fallen into the error, as is so easy for those new to power of overestimating the ability of others to control events in their own countries. He had still to learn how much policies are determined by the constants of history and geography, and how relatively little by the wishes of the man temporarily in command”¹⁶⁵. Heikal’s book recounts the exchange of cold dialogue between the two. The first and only greeting between the two was in Arabic, and Nasser was surprised; “You didn’t know I could speak Arabic?” said Eden, “No, nobody told me”. What might seem like a trivial observation in a meeting of that nature was anything but. By pointing out that no one had warned him, Nasser likely made it clear to everyone in the room that none of the British diplomatic staff, including the ambassador, had considered it necessary to inform the president of the host country about the languages their prime minister spoke. In diplomacy, protocol is everything, and every oversight is intentional.

Heikal recounts this incident without the need for commentary; in reading the dialogue, one also perceives the silence, the glance cast at Stevenson, the British ambassador, who had deliberately excluded Arabic from the discussion. This seemingly minor act triggered a diplomatic incident with a domino effect. That evening, another exchange of banter proved fatal to the Eden-Nasser relationship. The dialogue was so sharp and concise that it needs to be recounted: “Is it the first time you have been here” the British Prime Minister asked, “Yes, it is, it is

¹⁶² Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, 158.

¹⁶³ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 143.

¹⁶⁴ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 128.

¹⁶⁵ Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 61.

interesting to see the place from which Egypt used to be governed” Gamal responds, “Not governed perhaps” said Eden, “advised, rather” (p. 62). These few lines encapsulate the divide between Eden and Nasser, an unbridgeable gulf not just between two men, but between two worlds: colonizer and colonized. It was still too soon for the apologies and acknowledgments of guilt that Europe would offer to these nations decades later. But even in that first meeting, the two discussed the Suez issue, or at least Eden tried to discuss it. In fact, the British Prime Minister subtly attacked his counterpart to criticize Nasser’s bad attitude toward the Baghdad Pact: “But my dear Prime Minister, you have only a few months ago signed an agreement with us whereby the Suez base can be reactivated in the event of an attack on Turkey as well as if any Arab country is attacked. How do you fit this agreement into your concept of the way in which the Middle East should be defended?” (p. 63).

After all, reducing the clash between Eden and Nasser to a mere personal feud would be simplistic. Both were symbols of their respective worlds: Eden embodied the old continent as it had been, clinging to nostalgia and illusions of omnipotence, while Nasser represented the present still unrecognized by the aging leaders who sought to diminish its significance. With hindsight, one could say that Eden had failed to recognize the signs of the times. The old rules no longer applied, and he would soon come to realize it.

However, to frame the conflict, it is better to pose that the Suez War was the result of a convergence of interests of different nations and forces, ultimately represented by: France, Great Britain and Israel “none of the conspirators alone had a big enough reason to start a war with Egypt, but they merged their reasons to justify a war”¹⁶⁶.

Reactions and Multilateral attempts

The situation was hot: on July 31, Eden told Eisenhower that he was considering a military attack on Egypt, but the U.S. president rejected the idea. At the same time, the French continued their secret meetings with Israel. Aburish and Heikal both affirmed that Nasser’s real concern was Britain, “it was Great Britain that mattered and would inevitably become the main decision maker for what would follow”¹⁶⁷. The positions of the two superpowers were not really clear: both opposed any military action, but while the U.S.S.R. made its pro-Nasser position clear, the U.S. was careful to support its allies. This was the period of the return to multilateralism, with the newly established United Nations Organization. Indeed, the Suez crisis is not considered a milestone in the development of the Cold War, as it signaled the beginning of the so-called early détente.

Although Nasser is clearly a pragmatic and realist politician, in some of his political decisions he seems to believe in the power of multilateralism, or at least to hope that it could work. Nasser’s realism in foreign policy is particularly evident in his relations with Israel. In fact, it is clear that Nasser has always been a victim of the Thucydides trap: the more Israel was armed, the more Egypt had to be armed. Especially in the later years of his life, with the Six-Day War, Nasser surrendered all his values to this dynamic, remaining trapped within it.

¹⁶⁶ Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 128.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 144.

However, as will be analyzed in this section, Nasser had a kind of hope in the capacity of the international organization, even though he was aware that it was partly controlled by the West, he believed in the potential of uniting non-Western voices to challenge and overturn Western decisions. Aburish makes this clear when he recalls that Nasser knew he could count on world public opinion to oppose attacks by France, Britain, and Israel. However, it is difficult to understand whether this hopeful attitude toward the global infrastructure was given to Nasser as a result of his anti-Western rhetoric, or whether he was simply aware that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were totally opposed to a military attack. However, the trust that Nasser placed in the international organization could also be seen in his attitude toward the World Bank during the negotiations for the Aswan Dam. Indeed, Nutting recounts the *odi et amo* relationship established between Nasser and Black, the World Bank's president from 1949 to 1963. It is probably thanks to Black's sincere and diplomatic behavior that Nasser believed in the possibility of managing the Aswan Dam issue at the international level. Indeed, during the two first meeting, Black introduced himself: "I am a Wall Street banker by profession and proud of it. But now my job is somewhat different as the banker for the United Nations. Although born an American citizen, I serve not one country but all the countries, including yours, who elected me to my present office. And in that capacity my job is to promote sound and practical development, not to play politics for or against any nation"¹⁶⁸. One might think that Black's clarification was not particularly significant; today, we would consider it obvious and necessary that the president of an international organization should not serve the interests of their home country. However, just as it is not entirely obvious today, it was even less so in 1956. Black's actions demonstrate that he understood he was dealing with a leader who valued dignity over gratitude. Through this speech, he showed that he recognized how much the world had changed since 1950, and that Nasser was not willing to compromise with the stronger power without negotiation. Certainly, the spirit of the times played a major role in shaping Nasser's liberal thinking, but this meeting with Black, and the relationship that later developed between them, must have also been an important influence.

However, Nasser had made his calculations about the possible reaction to the nationalization. He rightly thought that even if Eden was waiting to go to war against him, the British army was so scattered around the world that it would take time to organize it. At the same time, he assumed that the U.S. government would be extremely cautious about taking part in any military action in view of the upcoming U.S. elections. What he miscalculated was the reaction of France; in fact, according to Nutting, he was quite sure that Mollet, preoccupied with the Algerian war, would not participate in any military action. But as noted above, no single actor had the will to go to war with Egypt alone; it was the Union that brought them all together. Nasser thought about the possible alliance between the opponents, but he could not foresee the possibility of having France, Britain and Israel together, he rather believed that Israel would go to war only with the permission of Washington, which never came.

Nutting reports that Khaled Mohieddin, one of Nasser's officials, warned the president that according to the Communist in Paris, the French were planning to attack Egypt in league with Israel. Nasser dismissed the information as a hoax designed to mislead him into a false move¹⁶⁹. What is also important to focus on in analyzing this event is that it was not so easy for Nasser to maintain a strong line of decisions, since all was deepened in

¹⁶⁸ Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, 133.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 148.

paranoia due to the presence of Israel. Moreover, as is well known, the era of the Cold War was a kind of foggy panorama where everything seemed to be what it was not, and if this was the situation for the great powers, it was worse for the small ones like Egypt. This also explains why it is so complex to analyze the ideological thought behind Nasser's choice, especially during the war over the Suez Canal.

To get a full picture of Nasser's expectations of the possible reactions after nationalization, an important source is the interviews he gave to the Western media. In researching these interviews, it is particularly interesting to analyze those from around 1954, as it can be argued that Nasser was already giving signals of what he wanted to do and thus was already planning the possible retaliations. Indeed, in an interview with a French correspondent published in the Al-Ahram daily, Suez is already the hot topic. The journalist promptly asked Nasser about the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez canal and the consequences it would have on international law, but the Egyptian leader cut it short by giving an assertive and not-at-all enigmatic answer. Here the Arabic text of this speech will be reported to analyze Nasser's terminological choices¹⁷⁰:

إن منطقة القناة جزء لا يتجزأ من الأراضي المصرية، فهي خاصة بسيادة مصر، ومن ثم فإن مصر - كما سبق أن أعلنت - ستحترم حرية الملاحة ما دامت لا تمس سيادتها ولا تعرض الدفاع عنها إلى الضرر. ويجب أن نلاحظ من جهة أخرى أن شركة قناة السويس لا تعمل إلا بوصفها مديرة تنظيم الملاحة بالقناة¹⁷¹.

The literal translation of this sentence is the following:

“The area of the canal is an indivisible part of the Egyptian territories, so it is specific to the sovereignty of Egypt, and consequently, Egypt – as it has previously announced – will respect the freedom of navigation as long as it does not affect its sovereignty and does not expose its defense to harm. And it must be noted, on the other hand, that the Suez Canal Company operates only as the manager of the organization of navigation in the canal”

From this answer emerged several aspects of Nasser's ideas about the Suez Canal. Firstly, although the journalist asked about the withdrawal of the British troops, Nasser decided to begin his answer with two important and heavy concepts in foreign policy, “territory” الأراضي and “sovereignty” سيادة two of the three cornerstones of a state for Montevideo. From here, the discussion moved to another level. Moreover, Nasser here defined the Egyptian territory as لا يتجزأ, indivisible, another strong wording choice. The term الأراضي, here translated as “territory” has a particular meaning in Arabic since it is linked both to the agricultural field and to the foreign policy one. In English, the two fields have distinct terminologies: for agriculture and individual use, the correct term is “land” while for the state, it is ‘territory.’ In Arabic, however, this overlap in meaning reflects the layering and fusion of nationalist ideology, where individual land and state territory merge into a single word: الأراضي.

¹⁷⁰ Nasser, Gamal Abdel. «الأهرام» جريدة. In «المجموعة الكاملة: خطاب». Edited by أحمد يوسف خلامس and مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية ومركز مرشد عبد العزيز, 210. القاهرة: 1995. جمال عبدالناصر الثقافية

Speech on Suez

To conclude this chapter, it is worth analyzing key sections of Nasser's lengthy speech in Alexandria, delivered on the occasion of the Suez Canal nationalization. As mentioned earlier, Nasser chose to mark the fifth anniversary of the revolution with a dramatic gesture, one that took his citizens, his *مواطنون*, by surprise. Exploring this hour-and-a-half-long speech feels like retracing the pivotal moments that shaped Nasserism, revealing the foundations upon which he built his ideology.

All of Nasser's speeches began with what became an icon of Nasserism: *أيها المواطنون*. The peculiarity of this incipit stays in the fact that, differently from other leaders, Nasser used *مواطنون*, citizens, to refer to an indefinite number of categories and people. Indeed, this vocative form became a symbol of panarabism, because each Arab man and woman could reflect him or herself in the broadest meaning of *مواطنون*. The term "citizens" was used by various leaders before Nasser, what he added to this term is the breadth of meaning, it seems that Nasser stretched the boundaries of the word "citizens" to include exponentially more and more people: from Egyptians, to Arabs, to the Third World in general. In his speech, he rarely refers to the Egyptian people with the term *الشعب*, which means population, probably to emphasize the fact that he was not speaking to a people, but to a more gathered and unbound mass.

The traditional Revolution Day speech was awaited with eagerness by the *مواطنون*. As Heikal reports "the Egyptian newspapers had promised their readers an important speech", thus the square of Alexandria was crowded with people from all social classes, all there to listen to Nasser. But when the speech began, it was clear that something was wrong: "It was an anticlimax", said Heikal, and "Nasser was very conscious of the fact, which meant he spoke under an artificial restraint"¹⁷². A glance at the speech transcript is enough to reveal uncertainty in his rhetoric: within the first minute, numerous repetitions appear:

ختمل اليوم باستقبال العبد الخامس للثورة، باستقبال السنة الخامسة
الثورة، بعد أن قضينا أربع سنوات تكليف وجهاد وتقاتل؛ للتخلص من آثار
الماضي البغيض، للتخلص من آثار الماضي الطويل، للتخلص من آثار
الاستعمار الذي استبد بنا قوتاً طويلة، وللتخلص من آثار الاستبداد الذي
حكم فينا، وللتخلص من آثار الاستغلال الأجنبي والاستغلال الداخلي

Today we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the revolution, the fifth year of the revolution, after spending four years of struggles, efforts, and battles; to rid ourselves of the traces of a hateful past, to rid ourselves of the traces of a long past, to rid ourselves of the traces of colonialism that oppressed us for a long time, and to rid ourselves of the traces of tyranny that ruled over us, and to rid ourselves of the traces of foreign exploitation and internal exploitation.

Nasser began his speech with a list of numbers, the fifth anniversary of the revolution marked the end of a century of struggles, but the Arab leader preferred to focus his listeners on the precise timeline of the revolution and thus he reminded his citizens they spent "four years of struggles, efforts and battles". The rhetoric of honor and dignity

¹⁷² Heikal, Mohamed. *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*. New York: Arbor House, 1987, 61.

is reinforced by the choice to list synonyms of cruel fighting to enhance the value of the people. For the first part of the speech the four key concepts among which Nasser developed his argument are: الاستعمار (al-isti'mar) "colonialism", الاستبداد (al-istibdad) "tyranny", الاستغلال الأجنبي (al-istighlal al-ajnabi) "foreign exploitation" juxtaposed to الاستغلال الداخلي (al-istighlal al-dakhili) "internal exploitation". It is interesting to note that all these terms in Nasser's rhetoric end up giving different connotations to the same enemy: the other. Nasser draws a deep divide between the citizens and the rest. If it is true that he expanded the term citizen to include as many individuals as possible, it is also true that he chose a precise terminology in vague formulation to define the other, the enemy. It is as if he had tailored a dress able to fit all the different enemies he wanted to identify, indeed, the same words can thus be applied to Britain, to the West, to Israel, because in Nasserism they come from the same root: exploitation.

As he constructs the image of the enemy, Nasser seizes every opportunity to remind his citizens of their origins, their achievements, and their aspirations. The speech unfolds in a near mirror-like structure: on one side, exploitation; on the other, rebellion, held high, with pride. It is striking that Nasser decided to build this part of the speech on different pillars: instead of calling for honor, dignity and courage, he chose the path of strength, determination and faith.

اليوم، أيها المواطنون، ونحن نتجه إلى المستقبل، بعد أربع سنوات من الثورة، نتجه بقوة وعزم وإيمان. نعتمد على الله وعلى أنفسنا، نعتمد على الله وعلى عزميتنا، نعتمد على الله وعلى قوتنا.

Today, citizens, as we head into the future after four years of revolution, we head out with strength, determination and faith. We rely on God and ourselves, we rely on God and our determination. We rely on God and our strength.

Here, the rhetoric of Nasserism seems to be built on slippery and vague foundations. This is probably done to make the people recognize themselves in these words, for while precise terms are used to describe the enemy, this precision is lacking for that of the people. Indeed, the term قوة, "strength", in Arabic can be applied to different contexts: from the military field to the emotional sphere, moreover, it can define the economic power of a country as well as the physical strength of the human body. The second characteristic that Nasser gave to his citizens is عزم, "determination", another quite broad and vague term especially in terms of measurement. However, the most slippery and peculiar term used in this description is إيمان "faith". As it was said above, Nasser was an observant Muslim, thus there is no surprise that for him the faith was part of his temperament. However, what should be evaluated is that by considering faith as an element of the people, Nasser could have reduced the breadth of the term مواطنون. Therefore, it seems appropriate to define this choice as dangerous. However, as it will be analyzed later, religion in Nasserism does not have a precise perimeter, despite this it seems that Nasser until he was alive was able to control the internal force latent in Islam: the chaos originated after his death.

Nasser's rhetoric is ultimately infused with the same essence as Western Nationalisms and therefore employs terms in Arabic that closely resemble their Western counterparts. These similarities are visible in certain parts of

the speech, especially when he addresses the “international world”. It could be said that Nasser preferred to speak the language of the other when addressing it.

حينما تهج إلى المستقبل نشر أن معاركاً مل تنتج، فليس من السهل.. ليس من السهل أبداً.. مش سهل أبداً ان احتا بني نفسنا في وسط الأطماع.. الأطماع الدولية املتافرة، والاستقلال الدولي، واملؤامرات الدولية.. مش سهل أبداً ان احتا بني نفسنا.. بني وطناً، وخفق استقلالنا السياسي، وخفق استقلالنا الاقتصادي. قدامنا - أمها الإخوة - معارك طويلة ستكلف فيها.. قدامنا معارك طويلة لتعيش أحرار، لتعيش كلماء، لتعيش أعزاء.

When we look to the future, we feel that our battles are not over. It is not easy... it is not easy at all... it is not easy at all to build ourselves amidst ambitions... conflicting international ambitions, international exploitation, and international conspiracies... it is not easy at all to build ourselves... to build a nation, to achieve our political independence, and to achieve our economic independence. Ahead of us, brothers, are long battles that we will fight... ahead of us are long battles to live free, to live with dignity, to live with honor.

In this excerpt from the speech, there is a change towards a terminology that is more understandable to the West. A striking example of this is the use of the term **وطناً**, that could be translated as “nation” or “fatherland” in a more nationalistic view. The history of the word **وطناً** in Arabic is ancient and peculiar. In fact, the concept of “borders” and especially of “state”, intended in a western connotation, was not part of the Arabic cultural language until colonialism. The difficulty in defining the borders of the Middle East probably stems from this etiological problem of finding the right wording to define this concept in the Arabic language. The term **وطناً** is not synonymous with **دولة**, which means country, and this juxtaposition probably created the disorder and chaos that the international community still faces today. In fact, the term **وطناً** could be considered a kind of nationalistic import from the West, as it has acquired a meaning that has not been stratified in the popular culture. **وطناً** is the term used to evoke the struggle for independence, the ancient root of the people, the spirit of a nation. In contrast, the term **دولة** refers to the body, the skin and bones of the same nation. In a way, one could say that while the **وطناً** was built by the Arabs, the **دولة** was imposed on them by the colonizer. With this clarification, it should be quite understandable that Nasser’s preferred term has always been **وطناً**, his creation, the people, the ensemble of Arab consciousness. Despite the use of **وطناً** with this connotation of pride, from a historical point of view, the term still recalls the ghost of colonization, even if Nasser tries to hide it. In fact, the concept of nation, and thus **وطناً**, is undoubtedly the result of the influence of Western colonialism on Arab Nationalism.

سنتجه قدماً إلى الأمام، تؤيد احلرية وتؤيد التحرير،

مستمرة... تقاوم الاستعمار وأعوان الاستعمار، أمامنا - أمها الإخوة - معارك طويلة..

We will move forward, supporting freedom and liberation, resisting colonialism and its agents. Ahead of us, brothers, are long battles...

Another salient point pertains to the two distinct terms utilized by Nasser to denote freedom: **الحرية** (al-hurriyya) and **التحرير** (al-tahrir). The first term **الحرية** could be translated from a philosophical point of view as “freedom”,

that is, the external quality given to a person. In fact, in Arabic, the term حُر distinguished the free people from the slaves. The second term, التحرير, is more likely to be translated in English as liberation that is, the conquest of a certain value, in the case of the state, independence. Nasser plays with the different connotations of these words, once again creating an effect of juxtaposition: الحرية is a right guaranteed to human beings, التحرير tells the story of a conquest. Thus, one could say that while الحرية emphasizes freedom in a passive way, meaning that freedom is only a quality given to the subject, التحرير emphasizes the active part of the Egyptian people who were able to conquer what they were. From here, Nasser tiles the file rouge of his speech, which will indeed announce another important conquest for the مواطنون: the Suez Canal.

Central to Nasser's rhetoric in telling the story of the Suez Canal is the constant confrontation with the past. The ghost of colonialism is used by the Arab leader to instill fear and shame, so that he can immediately reassure his citizens that everything is different now. The real battle Nasser is talking about is not a battle between men, but a battle between الماضي the past, المستقبل and the future. In this sense, the role of the numerous temporal references to the present (Alium, Alan...) becomes evident. Nasserism, though it speaks of the future, thrives on the challenges of the past, facing them in the present, اليوم, today. Thus, this introduction may help to better understand the role that Nasser gave to the event of the nationalization of Suez: it was a turn in history for him and for the Arabs.

التاريخ اللي حصل في القرن الماضي، هل التاريخ يعيد نفسه تاني بالخداع والتمليل؟! وهل يكون الاستقلال الاقتصادي.. هل يكون الاستقلال
!أو التملك الاقتصادي، والسيطرة الاقتصادية، سباقًا في القضاء على حريتنا السياسية واستقلالنا السياسي؟

لا يمكن مطلقًا، يا إخوة - أن يوجد التاريخ مرة أخرى، احنا الزيادة بالنظام، احنا زيادة الإنتاج، احنا زيادة بالإدارة، احنا زيادة بالعمل، احنا
زيادة بالقوة، بنيني بلدنا، بنيني بلدنا، احنا بنيني بلدنا ولا يمكن أن التاريخ يعيد نفسه لأن احنا اخدنا الآثار الماضية وأخذنا دروس التاريخ

History that happened in the past century, does it repeat itself again with deception and manipulation? Will
economic independence... will economic ownership and economic control become a race to eliminate our
political freedom and independence?

Absolutely not, brothers. History cannot repeat itself. We are growing through organization, through production,
through management, through work, through strength. We are building our country, we are building our country,
we are building our country, and history cannot repeat itself because we have learned from past events and taken
lessons from history

Before announcing the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Nasser tells his people that he intends to break with the
past. However, unlike at the beginning of the speech, he does not refer to a great and vague spiritual value. Here
he speaks of economic independence, he seems to be pragmatic and theoretical at the same time. On the one hand,
he elevated the role of Nasserism as a knight against the history of oppression, on the other hand, he downgraded
his gesture to a "simple" economic move. This perception is confirmed by other parts of the speech:

علينا آثار الماضي البغيض اللي حصلت غضب عندنا، آثار الماضي البغيض اللي علموها المستعمرين خداعًا و تضليلًا

النهاردة قال السويس - أيها الإخوة - اللي احنا مات منا أبائنا فيها ١٢٠ ألف حفرواها بالسخرة، دفعنا في تأسيسها الملايين، قناة السويس اللي أصبحت دولة داخل الدولة، اللي كان ذلك لله وللزوار والزائرات وكانت تعصى على كل مصرف، هذه القناة قناة السويس، شركة مساهمة مصرية، اقتضيتها بريطانيا متى خدتها منا الـ ٤٤٪ من أسهم الشركة، وبات عندنا نحاربها. دخلت علينا فلوس، ولأجل بريطانيا، وبات قتلت القتال حتى ان يأخذ بأخذ منا الـ ٤٤٪ وكل فوائد البنوك كلها بأخذها فوائد، والمساهمين بأخذ فوائد، ودولة داخل الدولة، وشركة مساهمة
إمصرية

We must remember the hateful past, the past that made us angry, the past that the colonizers taught us through deception and misinformation.

Today, Suez speaks—O brothers—where our forefathers died, 120,000 of them, digging it with forced labor. We paid millions to establish it. The Suez Canal became a state within a state, existing for itself, for visitors, and guests, refusing to yield to any Egyptian control. This canal, the Suez Canal, was a joint-stock Egyptian company, yet Britain seized it. When Britain took 44% of the company's shares from us, we were left fighting against it.

Money flowed into Britain, and we kept fighting until they took from us 44% and all the bank profits, all of which they took as interest, while the shareholders took their dividends, and we were left with a company within a state, an Egyptian joint-stock company!

Here, too, the theme of the past and revenge took the lead. The description of how the Suez Canal was built and the history of its construction is not only a rhetorical figure to make people angry, but it is also a strategic military decision. In fact, after a few minutes, Nasser will utter the famous code word “de Lesseps” and his men will enter the office of the canal. Another reflection on this part should be done on the strong criticism that Nasser launched against the international community by defining Suez as a state within a state. Here the whole international community is called to a moment of reflection. Nasser does not use the word “occupation”, but by using the formula “state within a state” (دولة داخل الدولة) he denounced the degrading system of double standards that existed at the time, so unfair to allow permanent control on the soil of another state. Finally, it seems worth emphasizing that in this context Nasser chose the term **دولة** to identify Egypt rather than **وطنًا**. This further proves what was said above: the colonizer can decide the **دولة**, the body, but the **وطنًا**, the spirit, remains with the people.

The last part of the speech is dedicated to the presentation of the decree that nationalized the Suez Canal. It is easy to imagine the crowd cheering and applauding at the end of each article, but what remains in doubt is whether the reading of the entire decree was necessary or not. Indeed, it is quite obvious that the majority of the people there could not really understand the technical language used by lawyers, politicians and the like. One could see in this gesture the consideration that Nasser had for the masses. He was probably convinced that by treating them as equals during his speech he would escape the accusation of lack of transparency and elitism; and to a certain extent he did.

At the end of his speech there is a big change: For the first time in the entire speech, Nasser uses the verbal conjugation of the future. Since the beginning of the speech, the verbal forms used are the present and the past, there is nothing about the future. This should say a lot about the ideology of Nasserism. One could say that the strength and weakness of Nasserism remain in the same word: now, الآن. Nasser played on the field of the present, haunted by the ghosts of the past, but never by those of the future. This is evident both in his rhetoric and in his

policies. One could argue that Nasser's vision of progress was a short- to medium-term outlook. Economically, this is reflected in the rise of public debt during the Nasserist years¹⁷³, marked by investment in public works that aimed to modernize the state, yet failed to account for the debt that would burden future generations. Politically, Nasser's bold approach is evident when considering what would later become the Six-Day War. Finally, the nationalization of the Suez Canal is perhaps the clearest expression of the *hic et nunc* and, by extension, of the entire Nasserist ideology. Nasser believed he could overcome history by remaining in the present, and he embodied the child of the betrayed hope of liberation. Yet, Nasser will forever seem trapped in his present, unable to transcend the boundary that separates him from history. Perhaps this is the very reason why implementing Nasserism beyond Gamal Abdel Nasser himself proved impossible, and perhaps Nasser himself knew this. Hence, he chose to reserve his future for the final lines of his speech; he did not want to make promises that could not be kept.

Conclusion

Although the analysis of Suez's speech already constitutes a conclusion to this chapter, since it recalls the main factors and concepts developed in Nasserism and the nationalization of the Canal, a few words might clarify the results of such examination in ideological terms.

Indeed, this chapter opened with the presentation of Freeden's framework on ideologies, and thus, the commitment in the analysis was to observe Nasserism through the lenses of the prominent British political scientist. This framework was chosen to overcome the obstacle presented by the inherent contradiction and elusiveness of Nasser's political speeches and acts. Thus, in evaluating and defining the ideological concepts of national defense, economic development, positive neutrality, and panarabism, this thesis looked at the interactions between them rather than at the single notion.

However, in summing up results, this chapter failed in creating the ideological "prism" designed by Freeden and ended up in presenting rather a pyramid of concepts. Indeed, through these layers, a hierarchy of values was identified: political independence comes before economic one, and thus development is subordinated to the former. A peculiar position is occupied by national defense in this hierarchy; indeed, in Nasserism, political independence remains the untouchable principle even before defense, however varying on the contexts, the latter climbs up and down the pyramid.

In conclusion, Nasserism is hardly suitable in such a framework, at least when analyzed in the foreign policy contexts. This result could be given by the high unpredictability of the international context that could force the political actor in changing and "betraying" his ideological concepts. Thus, one could conclude that dynamic ideologies such as Nasserism might be better observed in a more static environment, which is internal policy. On this last conclusion is thus built the next chapter of the thesis.

¹⁷³ ElGhouty, Amal Soliman. 2018. "Public Debt and Economic Growth in Egypt." *Business and Economic Research* 8 (3): 277–295. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ber.v8i3.13443>.

Nasserism: A Domestic Perspective

*We must admit it: our Oriental art is one of the causes of the catastrophe. In other countries, art invigorates the soul and the spirit; it galvanizes the conscience. But for us, if we think about it carefully, it is a constant invitation to idleness and contemplation. How can people prepare for war if they stay up until four in the morning listening to a singer on the radio?*¹⁷⁴

Introduction

After presenting the main concept of Nasserism through the analysis of the core event of his policy, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, it seems appropriate to examine the more internal and intimate characteristics of Nasser's ideology. In order to present these aspects, it is necessary to delve into domestic politics, specifically examining the role of constitutions, the designated form of state, the religious component, and Nasserite project of economic development.

Nasserism has acquired different connotations, especially when it comes to the most domestic aspects of the ideology, and there is still much confusion on how to weigh the different elements of it. As George Lenczowski notes, the problem with Nasserism may be the lack of clarity in defining its goals and procedures. This is probably due to the fact that the Free Officers initially did not aim to govern but rather to revolt. However, Lenczowski points out that "it did not take long for the Revolutionary Command Council to change the concept of its role in the society: from a mere watchdog of virtue, it easily evolved into the position of actual ruler"¹⁷⁵. In fact, the revolutionary group had to quickly build up its governing abilities and skills, and this meant developing a political program to advance the goals of the revolution. As is often the case after a coup, the Revolutionary Command Council had to identify enemies to strengthen itself, and the first enemy on the domestic front was the Muslim Brotherhood, while on the foreign front it was Israel. The relationship between the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood was not always so conflictive, in fact at the beginning were fighting for the same revolution, while after the attempt to assassinate Nasser, the situation changed. In general, the main reason for this deterioration of the relationship is due to the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood was becoming more powerful and could endanger the revolution of the Free Officers¹⁷⁶. Another factor that created confusion in defining the roots of Nasserism remains the fact that there was a kind of internal disagreement: "the initial front-man of the Revolution, General Mohammed Naguib was removed from the top position of the Republic to be replaced by a man who had always been the real head of the Free Officer movement: Nasser himself"¹⁷⁷. After 1955 the political competition between

¹⁷⁴ Nassib, Sélim. *Ti ho amata per la tua voce*. edigita 2024, 2024

¹⁷⁵ Lenczowski, George. 1965. "The Objects and Methods of Nasserism." *Journal of International Affairs* 19 (1): 63–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24363338>.

¹⁷⁶ Gerges, Fawaz A. 2018. *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁷⁷ Lenczowski, George. 1965. "The Objects and Methods of Nasserism." *Journal of International Affairs* 19 (1): 63–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24363338>.

these two forces disappeared, leaving Nasser with “undisputed leadership”, this will have strong repercussion on the formation of his ideology.

Before delving into the macro categories of the domestic aspects of Nasserism, it is interesting to give a long-term perspective on the different phases of Nasser’s ideology. Lenczowski considers four phases spanning twenty years: Egyptocentrism (1952-1954), the pan-Arab phase (1955-1958), the domestic socialist phase (1958-1961), and the pan-Arab socialist phase from 1962. The first two phases, covering Nasser’s first decade, were analyzed in the previous chapter with the lent of the Suez Canal event. This chapter will focus on the last two phases, which cover the most domestic and socialist moments.

The structure of the following chapter is thus constructed as follows. Firstly, the constitutions will be introduced, being the fundamental source of this chapter. Through the constitutional texts, the paragraphs will develop on the form of state, the role of religion, the Nasserite economy, and finally, an excursus on education, media, and arts will conclude this chapter.

Constitution(s)

The first aspect on which it seems appropriate to focus in analyzing Nasser’s ideology during these years is constitutional development. Egypt has a long history of constitutional development, beginning in 1800. However, the first milestone of Egyptian constitutionalism is certainly the case of the 1923 constitution. In this first part of the chapter, an introduction to the latter will be given in order to observe the evolution of Nasserism through four main constitutional documents: the constitutional proclamation of 1953, the temporary constitution of 1954, the constitution of 1956, and the National Charter of 1962.

The 1923 constitution was in force until 1952, with a five-year interruption from 1930. As Costanzo points out: “A special feature of this constitutional text is that it is closely linked to Egypt’s achievement of sovereignty and independence, constituting, moreover, the crowning achievement of a domestic and international political process that had already begun in the previous century”¹⁷⁸. In fact, the first article states that Egypt is a sovereign, free and independent country; the form of government is that of a hereditary monarchy. However, in the preamble of the Constitution, these ideals of independence and liberation are not really present. Rather, other values appeared in the preamble: the welfare of the state, happiness, and development. The similarity with the American Constitution is quite apparent. However, as Costanzo points out, the constitution is based on the Belgian constitution, as is the case in many other European countries. The majority of the main authors of this constitution were already quoted above in the paragraph on Egyptian Nationalism: Al Nadim, Al Tahtawi, Al Marsafi, and Mustafa Kamil. In fact, historians agree that the 1923 constitution was the result of the 1919 revolution¹⁷⁹.

Costanzo’s commentary on the 1923 Constitution is rather superficial in some parts; in particular, it seems inappropriate to state that the main values of the Constitution were independence and the rejection of colonialism since there is no real reference to this in the whole chart. A first element of comparison arose when looking at the

¹⁷⁸ Costanzo, Pasquale. "Una Costituzione liberale dell'Egitto." *Consulta OnLine*, 2023.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*

Constitution of 1956, here, it is clear that the real anti-imperialist spirit is present. Indeed, the preamble of the 1956 version not only explicitly references imperialism and colonialism but also includes strong terms such as “struggle”, “exploiter”, and “revolution”. It seems particularly relevant to quote the third paragraph of this preamble:

“We, the people of Egypt, who have won our right to freedom and life after an uninterrupted struggle against foreign aggressors and domestic exploiters, have drawn inspiration from our past, derived our decision from our present, and traced the way to a future free from fear, want, and subjugation, in which we shall build, by our affirmative action, with all our energy and potentialities, a society in which prosperity will reign, and under whose auspices the abolition of imperialism and its supporters, feudalism, monopolies, and the domination of capital over government, and the establishment of a strong national army, social justice, and a sound democratic life will be accomplished.”¹⁸⁰

Moreover, as Jones emphasized, the 1956 constitution is the first to be written in the name of the people, and thus the incipit is “We”: “is a reaffirmation of the [...]program of the RCC: the abolition of imperialism, feudalism, monopoly and the control of capitalist [...], a democratic society”¹⁸¹.

From the 1956 preamble, it is possible to frame Nasser’s ideology, at least the roots of its goals and to identify what Lenczowski calls “the evils of the old order” for the Revolutionary Command Council¹⁸². Despite the identification of the internal and external enemies, the preamble does not propose specific remedies but rather vague slogans. Lenczowski summarized these proposals in three points: a strong army, social justice, and a democratic society. These three elements are strongly present in the course of the charter as it will be now analyzed.

Constitutional Process under Nasser

Before delving into the analysis of the single aspects of the constitution’s development, it is interesting to reflect on the value of these documents to comprehend not only the evolution of Nasserism but also the one of constitutionalism in Egypt. Indeed, as Lang states, “turning a revolution into a constitution, in Egypt as in other cases, reveals the essentially political nature of constitutionalism”¹⁸³; thus, the real challenge for a revolution is to transform itself into a constituted order. This process is rarely linear, and scholars defined the difficulty of expressing the constituent power of revolutionary forces into order as the “paradox of constitutionalism”. During Nasser’s period, different constitutional documents were released, but not all of them had the value of the Constitutional Charter.

From a constitutional point of view, the transition from the old to the new order was not really smooth. Although the 1952 coup suspended the 1923 constitution, it did not create a full charter. In the aftermath of the revolution, on February 10, 1953, a proclamation was published listing the main principles of the political programme, but this was not a real representation of Nasserism, rather an attempt to demonstrate governing capacity. The

¹⁸⁰ Egypt. *Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt (1956)*. Preamble

¹⁸¹ Middle East Institute. 1956. “The New Egyptian Constitution.” *Middle East Journal* 10, no. 3 (Summer): 300–306. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/432282>.

¹⁸² Lenczowski, George. 1965. “The Objects and Methods of Nasserism.” *Journal of International Affairs* 19 (1): 63–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24363338>.

¹⁸³ Lang, Anthony F., Jr. 2013. “From Revolutions to Constitutions: The Case of Egypt.” *International Affairs* 89 (2): 345–63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23473540>.

proclamation seems not to capture the full picture of the Revolutionary plan or Nasserism. Indeed, in none of the eleven principles is there a reference to the core value of Nasser's policies, such as Panarabism. The declaration focuses rather on general statements about democracy and legitimacy of power. A strong emphasis is put on personal freedoms both in principle 3 and 4: "personal freedom and freedom of opinion are guaranteed, within the limits of the law, public order, and morality" and "Freedom of belief is absolute. The state guarantees the freedom to practice religious rites and doctrines in accordance with established customs, provided it does not conflict with public order or violate morality."¹⁸⁴ This liberal element is maintained in the following constitutional documents.

In 1954, the Free Officers drafted a temporary constitution that eventually lasted until 1956, the year when the first "Nasserite" constitution was finally published. Lang asserts that "the essentially revolutionary nature of the Nasser regime resulted in efforts to embrace a participatory political process", however, the regime strongly controlled this process to retain its power. Indeed, in the communiqué of March 25 of 1954, the RCC stated: "The Council of the Revolution will surrender its powers to a constituent assembly of 24 July 1954 at which time it will proclaim the end of the Egyptian Revolution"¹⁸⁵. The wording of this last statement highlights the transformational phase under which the regime was going at that time. By declaring the end of the revolution through the drafting of a constitution, the Free Officers demonstrated a certain maturity in recognizing the significance of constituent power and its distinction from constituted power.

However, the analyses of the 1953 Proclamation and the 1954 temporary constitution do not really serve as a basis for further reflection because, as noted above, it contains very vague references to the Free Officers' program. In fact, it is the constitution of 1956 that better represents the first period of Nasserism, and by comparing it with the National Charter of 1962, which was then transformed into a constitution by referendum in 1971, it is possible to capture the main development in Nasser's ideology.

In fact, when approaching the first real Nasserite constitutional document, the first element to notice is the importance given to Panarabism. For example, in the 1923 text, the Constitution incipit was "Egypt is a sovereign, free and independent state [...]". This language is retained in the 1956 version. However, there is an addition in art. 1 of the Nasser's Constitution: "[...] The Egyptian people is part of the Arab Nation"¹⁸⁶. This principle was then included in the constitution of Syria and later in that of Jordan¹⁸⁷. This aspect symbolizes the importance of Panarabism in Nasser's thought and how Nasser developed it. As stated above, there is no such reference in the 1953 proclamation, which shows that the nature of the political programme for Egypt was initially strictly confined to its borders.

¹⁸⁴ *Alamet al-Ada' - Tarikh al-I'dadat* [Performance Mark - Settings History], Constitutional Declaration No. 12 bis (b), 1953.

¹⁸⁵ Stephens, Robert. *Nasser: A Political Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971

¹⁸⁶ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Oriente Moderno* 31 (1951): 57-74

The Fundamental Principles of the State: Its Form

In starting the constitutional analysis of Nasserism, one could not avoid beginning with its skeleton: the form of the state. By delving into the mechanics of Nasser's regime, it is possible to understand the Arab leader's concept of power. Moreover, looking at the functions and duties of the institutions is an opportunity to grasp the balance of power that the Free Officers designed for Egypt.

As Lang reports, the constitutional committee of 1954 replaced the role of the king with the president, thus, it introduced a strong presidency to fill the void left by a weak monarchy. However, in this substitution process, the committee did not rebalance the power between the executive and the legislative, and the result indeed is a feeble parliament. In his work, Brown states in this regard, "if one considers a balance of institutional power to be a central aspect of constitutionalism, this constitution meant that 'Egypt had perfected the art of writing anticonstitutionalist constitution'"¹⁸⁸: quite a strong critic to be just at the beginning of Nasser's constitutional journey. However, the analysis of the provisional constitution of 1954 is further complicated by the lack of transmission of this document. In fact, an interesting reflection was written by the scholar Issa, persecuted by the Nasser regime, in his book "Constitution in the Rubbish Bin". The title of the book is quite descriptive of the actual situation of the 1954 document; the only copy of it was indeed found in a dusty attic of a former think tank¹⁸⁹. Scholars, however, have often linked the period of the drafting of the temporary constitution with the famous Nasser quote: "The important thing is not whether we are a monarchy or a republic, but whether we are democratic or not". This statement highlights that, even in theorizing, the Rais always focused on practical outcomes.

There is reason to believe, indeed, that the outcome of a strong presidency has not emerged from theoretical considerations alone. On the contrary, several events in 1954 pushed Nasser in the direction of concentrating power to maintain order. One of the most decisive factors has been the assassination attempt on Nasser by the Brothers in October in Alexandria. The immediate response to such a threat has been a harsh repression. Only after having outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, Gamal focused on the balance of power; as Stephens concludes: "by taking on both positions together, he greatly strengthened both his role and the institutional role of the presidency"¹⁹⁰.

Panarabism in 1956

Despite what was stated in the 1954 communiqué, the revolution did not end with the drafting of the 1954 temporary constitution, but "efforts continued to translate revolutionary power into constitutional form" until the 1956 constitution was presented to the people. The importance of democratic participation for Nasser was satisfied by the use of a referendum, held on 23 June 1956. As noted above, this latter is the first Nasserite constitutional document since it contains the principles of what could be defined as Nasser's ideology; Panarabism is one of

¹⁸⁸ Brown, Nathan J. *Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001

¹⁸⁹ Hammond, Andrew. "Egypt's Deep-Sixed 1954 Constitution: A Reminder of What Might Have Been." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, September-October 2002. <https://www.wrmea.org/2002-september-october/egypt-s-deep-sixed-1954-constitution-a-reminder-of-what-might-have-been.html>.

¹⁹⁰ Stephens, Robert. *Nasser: A Political Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971

these. The Constitution is divided into six chapters: The Egyptian State, The Fundamental Values of Egyptian Society, Public Rights and Obligations, The Legislative Authority, The Executive, General Provision, and Transitional and Final Provision.

The first chapter is undoubtedly the most intense in terms of concentration of Nasserite values: in the first three articles, sovereignty, state religion, and Panarabism are discussed and positioned on the highest point of the constitutional document. However, this section results more as an executive summary of the preamble, above discussed. The only element that is left out from the preamble and which is present in the first chapter is Islam, however, this subject will be discussed in the subsequent paragraph. An important reflection should be done on the last clause of the first Article:

مصر دولة عربية مستقلة وذات سيادة. وهي جمهورية ديمقراطية. الشعب المصري جزء من الأمة العربية.

“Egypt is an independent and sovereign Arab state. It is a democratic republic. The Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation.”

In the analysis of Suez Canal’s speech, an important emphasis was put on the crucial difference between دولة (*dawala*) and وطن (*watan*). Here, another terminological comparison arises: the one between دولة (*dawala*) and الأمة (*al-umma*). This latter term has been already discussed in different contexts throughout the thesis, indeed, the umma usually refers to the Islamic sphere, but the broad translation of the term could be “community”. In this article, the term umma is accompanied by عربية “Arabic” and thus refers to the “Arab community”. However, official translation from Arabic to English had preferred using the wording “Arab nation”.

This peculiarity should prompt further reflection. First, one should interrogate the reason why Nasser chose this formulation: there were indeed other ways to refer to Arab society; one could have used the term “Arab Nation”, with وطن (*watan*), the spirit. This first option would have emphasized the goals of panarabism rather than the unity of the Arab society at that moment. In fact, by declaring that Egypt is part of the Arab وطن (*watan*), Nasser would have highlighted the ultimate goal of panarabism, which is to build a united nation, or perhaps a kind of federation. The second option for Nasser was to use the term Islamic community, thus using the term umma (الأمة) with its usual adjective, Islamic الإسلامية (*Islāmiyyah*). This terminology would have had a broader ideological impact because it would have labeled Nasserism as a kind of Islamic ideology and would have been similar to the Muslim Brotherhood’s plan to rebuild a caliphate. It is quite clear that Nasser wanted to distance himself from such an ideology and therefore chose not to use the phrase Islamic umma الأمة الإسلامية (*al-ummah al-Islāmiyyah*).

In the end, Nasser opted for a hybrid of these two options, coining the phrase “Arab community”, الأمة العربية (*al-umma al-arabiyyah*), which left room for interpretation. This way, he avoided taking a clear stance or explicitly declaring his intentions to both the world and his own country. Instead, he fostered hope for a further unification of Arab nations while leaving its precise form undefined.

A second question that should be asked when analyzing this article is why the term “الأمة” was translated as “Nation” in the official English translation, thus reducing the ambiguity left by the Rais. In fact, if it is true that

every speech is a political act, then translating political material is even more powerful. By giving such a connotation to the term “community”, it is evident that the intention is to reduce the boundaries of Nasser’s aspirations while at the same time westernizing them. Indeed, as introduced above, concepts such as “nation” and “state” entered Arab culture as imports of colonialism. The choice of using “community” in the first article of the constitution could be seen as a kind of resistance against the Western conceptualization by Nasser. However, as emphasized in this paper, the Rais has always opted for the practical rather than the theoretical choice, so it would be quite unusual for him to see opposition to the West in such a formulation.

To conclude this reflection, it is necessary to point out that the 1956 constitution, despite being the first milestone of Nasserism, also represents its uncertainties. Nasser may have had a clear political program for Egypt in 1956, but he did not have one for the entire Arab region. The boldness of placing Panarabism in the first article of the constitution is ultimately diminished by the caution of its wording.

An Impure Presidentialism

The form of state that Nasser decided upon is the democratic republic, as stated under the “principles of the state” in the constitution. What remains quite unclear in the entire constitution is the form of government. The constitutional chapter from which this latter element can be analyzed is the third one, entitled “Executive Powers”. The incipit of this section is Article 119:

“The President of the Republic assumes the executive power and he practices it in the manner clarified in this constitution.”

From this first Article, it is clear that Egypt is becoming a presidentialism: the executive power is not divided among different branches, but it is concentrated in the hand of the president. This form of presidentialism is often adopted by regimes transitioning from a monarchy to a republican state. Indeed, it results in a linear transfer of the executive power, previously detained by the monarchy, now resting with a president who derives legitimacy from the people.

In the Egyptian regime of 1956, legitimacy arrived at the president through a peculiar process, described in Article 121:

“The House of Representatives nominates the President of the Republic with a majority of the number of its members, and it offers this nomination to the citizens so that they can be polled in this matter. The nomination for the President of the Republic is considered attained with an absolute majority of those who have given their votes in the poll. If that nominee did not attain the majority, the Parliament nominates someone else and his nomination is pursued in the same way.”

The election of the Head of state happened thus in two different moments. In the first phase, the parliament is in charge of voting, by simple majority, for the most suitable candidate. Here, the people is indirectly part of the process: it is the delegate model; thus, the deputies, elected by the people, express the first preference for the President of the Republic. Once a nomination is found, the second phase begins. The parliament *offers* the nomination to the citizens through a referendum: the people is now the main agents of legitimacy, and it is directly involved in the election. The president’s legitimacy is thus derived from the direct and indirect participation of the

citizens. In the first phase it is evident the lack of trust in the direct legitimacy by the people, by introducing this first phase of *screening* the state takes the responsibility of selecting the best choices for the people, and thus the citizens only have to manifest their consensus or not: they have no choice despite rejecting the nominated president or not. Thus, rather than being a positive choice for the people is a negative one. Therefore, the people have a role in the election, but it pays at the cost of the loss of competitiveness of the election. Moreover, as the article specifies, the *poll* is without quorum, making it even more difficult for the people to refute the nomination given by the parliament.

By introducing such a peculiar mechanism, it is clear that Nasser was trying to reconcile the two models of the Cold War: the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, on the one hand, the Rais wants to guarantee the legitimacy given by the people; on the other, he does not trust the volatility of the people and therefore reduces its margin of action by reducing its choice to a mere decision between “yes” and “no”.

However, the similarities with Western constitutionalism are evident throughout the Constitution, especially when comparing the 1956 document with the United States Constitution. For example, at the opening of each parliamentary session, the President of the Republic delivers a speech to the assembly¹⁹¹. It is a clear recall to the Union message given by the United States Presidents at the Congress. Another clear similarity with Washington is the provision of impeachment, described in Art.130:

“The President of the Republic is charged with treachery of honor and disloyalty to the republic building on the recommendation from at least one-third of the members of the House of Representatives, and the decision of the accusation is not issued unless with the two-thirds majority of members of Parliament.”

The procedure of impeachment is exactly the same as the one explained in the U.S. Constitution. However, the causes for which the impeachment could be activated differs in the two constitutions. Indeed, in the American case, the wording chosen is: “The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors”¹⁹². The Egyptian text, therefore, remains vaguer in listing the causes that may lead to impeachment, mentioning only “treachery of honor and disloyalty”, unlike the U.S. text, where specific crimes are explicitly named.

Another striking point of commonalities with the U.S. model is given by Article 142, which states that the President is in charge of declaring war, but he needs the approval of the House of Representatives. Similarly, the American constitution in art. 1 section 8 prescribes that: “The Congress shall have Power [...] To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water”. In Washington, as in Cairo, the Head of State is the commander of the armed forces, but they both need the consensus of the assembly to push the country into war.

¹⁹¹ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art.

¹⁹² U.S. Constitution, art. II, sec. 4

Finally, another point of contact between the U.S. Constitution and the 1956 Egyptian one is the procedure of amendment. Nasser got closer to Western constitutionalism by designating a rigid constitution, however, it is important to state that the 1923 Constitution presented a rigid procedure of amendment too. Undoubtedly, the 1956 constitution presents a far more complex process to amend the document in comparison with the monarchical constitution. The procedure of amendment is contained in Article 189:

“The President of the Republic and anyone from the House of Representatives can request one or more amendments to the articles of the constitution, and the article that is requested to be amended and the reason for the cause of its amendment must be contained in the request for the amendment, in order for there to be an amendment. If the request was submitted to the House of Representatives, it needs to be signed by at least one-third of the members of Parliament. In all situations the Parliament first debates on the amendment and then issues its decision on the affairs with the majority of its members. And if the request was refused it is not permissible to submit a request for the amendment of the same articles until one year has passed after the refusal. If the Parliament approves the principle 115 of the amendment, it debates, after six months from the date of this approval, the articles subjected to amendment, and if one third of the number of members of the Parliament approves of this amendment, it will announce this to the people to poll them on these affairs. If the amendment is approved, it is considered implemented from the date that the referendum results were announced.”

The American inspiration here is evident. Indeed, in both systems, the legislature plays a crucial role in the process. However, in both the U.S. and Egypt, popular ratification is seen as the final element in ensuring the protection of the constitution. At the same time, important differences between the two countries arose, reflecting the existing ideological distance. For example, the U.S. model allows for the possibility of amendment to be initiated by regional authorities (two-thirds of the states), making it more democratic than the Egyptian system, where only the House of Representatives and the President can propose amendments. Moreover, the majority requirements are different between the two systems: in the American case, there is the need for a two-thirds majority in both chambers, while in the Egyptian one, the requirement is just one-third in the parliament. These differences reflect more than mere practical dissimilarities: the choice of restricting the audience of subjects that can initiate such a procedure manifests an interest in maintaining the management of the state inaccessible to the rest of the people. The decision to have a relatively low requirement, one-third of the majority in the entire parliament, to initiate the amendment procedure reflects the state's view of its possibilities. In a sense, the United States, by raising the requirements, seeks to ensure that the proposal that passes is truly one of the best that could be formulated; on the contrary, with a one-third majority, the expectation seems to be to aim for the least bad option.

The turning point: 1962

The impure presidentialism, usually defined as parliamentary presidentialism, of 1956 represents Nasser's uncertainty in choosing his models. This ambiguity is completely lost in the constitutional works of the 1960s. Indeed, after 1956, the regime went under the domestic socialist phase, as Lenczowski defined it: here, Nasser took a clear position, getting closer to the socialist and soviet sphere.

The first tangible sign of the beginning of the socialist phase in Nasserism was the 1962 drafting of the Charter for National Action of the United Arab Republic (UAR). The UAR consisted of the unification of Egypt and Syria, which happened in 1958. The Charter of 1962, however, was not a new constitution; rather, it was an inspirational document for further drafting, a declaration of interests. Horton reported the public reaction to the release of the Charter in Cairo, and he wrote: “It has become increasingly clear that the new Charter for National Action of the [...] UAR is meant to be an historic document comparable to great Western documents that marked major turning points of political and social development”¹⁹³. Horton is convinced in stating that the Charter is “the first serious defense of Arab socialism, [...] it is not an academically respectable defense – this is yet to be written – but it does contain what a stable government, after then experimental years, believes about the past and intends for the future”¹⁹⁴. From this description, too, emerges a figure of Nasser who is not interested in theoretical framework but in coherent practice.

The National Charter of 1962 delineates the main principles on which Arab socialism will evolve, finally becoming a different creature from pure socialism. In ten chapters, the document exposed the regime’s view on different themes: the necessity of revolutions, the Egyptian struggle, democracy, the “inevitability of Socialist Solution”, its problems, Arab Unity, and foreign policy.

From the second chapter, it is clear that the document aims to be an occasion for taking a strong position against the West. Nasser indeed called for a change in the strategy of the revolution’s expansion: in his words, Egypt must concentrate on the Communist bloc since it “has emerged as an increasingly effective material and moral counterweight to the capitalist bloc”¹⁹⁵. Until 1960, the Rais had been careful not to spend a word of compliment for either side of the Cold War. Now, by considering the communist bloc as a valid alternative to the ideological domination of the West, Nasser changed his attitude of restraint or positive neutrality.

The interesting chapter regarding the form of the State is undoubtedly the fifth one, entitled “True Democracy”. Here, no definition of democracy is given, but its role is explained: “democracy shows that a revolution is popular; socialism shows that a revolution is progressive”. Thus, the receipt for a successful post-revolutionary order is a combination of democratization and socialism. Indeed, for Nasser, “political democracy cannot be separated from social democracy. [...] democracy cannot exist under the domination of any one class”. In stating these principles, the Rais is indirectly communicating that, for his regime, the Western democracies are not considerable “True Democracies” since they are still victims of capitalism, feudalism, and monopolism.

The “Socialist Solution” is fully explored in the sixth chapter, whose incipit is: “Socialism is the way to social freedom [...]. The national wealth must be not only redistributed but also, and equally importantly, expanded.” In this last clause, the imperceptible but persistent distance between the Nasserist and Soviet socialism arose. Indeed, by emphasizing the concept of the *expansion* of wealth, Nasser is forging the cornerstone of Arab socialism:

¹⁹³ Horton, Alan W. *The Charter for National Action of the UAR: A Résumé of the Complete Document*. Cairo, 1962. *Northeast Africa Series* Vol. IX, no. 5

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁵ United Arab Republic. *The Charter for National Action*. Cairo, 1962.

distribution and development, planification and private property, socialist principles planted in capitalist soil. The analysis of Nasser's socialism, its economic effects, and Arab socialism will be all subjects of the following section on Economy, in this same chapter.

Finally, the last crucial Nasserism principle discussed in the Charter is the Arab Unity. The Rais in 1962 is convinced that "the concept of Arab unity no longer needs bolstering by meeting of heads of state. [Indeed,] a popular base in each Arab country is progressive and demonstrates a unity of objective". The National Charter clarifies that the UAR has not achieved its final forms but will continue to "propagate her call"; this rhetoric aims at getting closer to new plausible candidates for the union, such as Iraq and Yemen.

In this same paragraph, interestingly, Nasser emphasized the limits of the Arab League, stating that since it is a league of governments, "it cannot go beyond the possible". The strategy of Nasser thus seems to undermine the existing institution representing Arab unity to give credibility to his own Pan-Arabic project. In the long run, this strategy will prove to be not only insufficient but also counterproductive. Indeed, the pinnacle of the side effects of Nasserist Panarabism and of this specific strategy to discredit the presence of the Arab League is represented by Egypt's suspension from the League in 1979. This suspension was triggered by the Camp David Accords signed by Sadat; however, it also symbolized the apex of a resentment-fueled process that characterized the other members of the League, and which led to the expulsion of the country that had been acting for decades without consulting it, thus Egypt.

It is interesting to note that Nasser avoided the path of development through institutionalization in the Arab world. He could have used the existing Arab League to promote further coordination and speed up the process. But he did not, preferring to rely on other forces, the individual state members and their peoples. In analyzing this aspect, one could not ignore the international context in which the Rais was promoting his project: the European integration was happening, and it was observed by the whole international community. Thus, one option for Nasser would have been to look at the European model of integration for his Arab peoples, this would have involved institutionalization. The Arab leader, however, did not consider such a path, and it is interesting to interrogate the reasons why. Ideologically, it is quite clear that Nasser rejected the Western model in his rhetoric of anti-imperialism, and thus could not suggest importing the European system of integration. Throughout this thesis, however, it has been emphasized that, in the majority of cases, practice surpassed theory within Nasser's framework. Thus, it seems more suitable for this analysis to search for a practical reason for which the Rais did not want to follow the European path. A possible reason for this could be found in Nasser's belief that the Arab peoples needed more time to achieve the European integration level. He likely thought that by adopting the same strategy as the Europeans, Arab countries would not achieve the same results but rather less integration compared to Brussels. As mentioned earlier, Nasser never specified what form this Arab unity should take: a federation, confederation, or regional organization. This can be seen as further confirmation of Nasser's pragmatic approach: he was reluctant to set ideological goals, as this would require him to uphold them throughout history. Instead, he preferred the flexibility of being free from institutional or ideological constraints, even if it meant slowing down the process.

The 1964 Constitution

As previously stated, the 1962 National Charter does not substitute the precedent Constitution. Its function was to declare the regime's new intents, and indeed, as Lenczowski describes, it marked the watershed between the pan-Arabist phase and the socialist one. The 1964 constitutional work results from this passage, corresponding to a strong socialist turn. This last document is probably the most soviet-like political act made by Nasser.

Indeed, if the 1956 constitution had a lot in common with the American system, the 1964 one is on another level. From the preamble, it is clear that the language has changed: in describing the struggles of imperialism, the Constitution uses socialist rhetoric and terminology. In precedent constitutional documents, despite using the socialist terms to refer to nationalization, planification, and other economic maneuvers, rhetoric, at least in the preamble, has always been independent from this ideological mark. The same could not be said of the 1964 preamble:

“[...]in consolidation of the effectiveness and capability of the alliance of the forces of the working people, which has been placed by the great conversion stage at the head of national action to lead it through the Socialist Union and by means of its democratic organizations.”¹⁹⁶

The inspiration from the 1962 National Charter is here clear and well-stated. The reference to the union of workers, “democratic organizations,” and national force are all elements taken from Soviet rhetoric. The apex of this process is reached in Article 1, the definition of the state.

الجمهورية العربية المتحدة دولة ديمقراطية اشتراكية تقوم على تحالف قوى الشعب العاملة. والشعب المصري جزء من الأمة العربية

“The United Arab Republic is a democratic, socialist State based on the alliance of the working powers of the people. The Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation.”

Despite this being the constitution of the United Arab Republic, it relegated panarabism to the end of the definition of the state: the most important position is acquired by democracy and socialism. Moreover, the similarity with the Soviet constitution of 1936 is evident: “The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a socialist state of workers and peasants”¹⁹⁷. However, a strong distinguishing feature between the two regimes is that in the Egyptian constitution, Islam is still maintained as the state religion in Article 5; the role of religion in Nasserism will be discussed in the next section.

The basic elements of Egyptian society are listed in the second part of both the 1956 and 1964 constitutions. These articles remained more or less the same in these two documents, except for the fact that if the 1956 constitution only recalled socialist rhetoric and terminology, the 1964 constitution is much more straightforward in stating that: “The economic foundation of the State is the socialist system which prohibits any form of exploitation in a way which ensures the building of socialist society with its twin foundations: sufficiency and justice” (Article 9). Here, Nasser emphasized values such as equity and sustainability, but he did not push the soviet rhetoric this far. Indeed,

¹⁹⁶ United Arab Republic. *Constitution of the United Arab Republic*, 1964.

¹⁹⁷ Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. *Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, 1936

Article 9 of the UAR Constitution, in its incipit, is strikingly similar to Article 4 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution. This last article is phrased the same way as Nasser's, except for the fact that the Soviet article continued by announcing the end of capitalism and private ownership. The same could not be said of Nasserism, since in Article 16 (UAR Constitution), the state guarantees people's right to private ownership:

“Private ownership is safeguarded and the law organizes its social function, and ownership is not expropriated except for the general good and against a fair compensation in accordance with the law.”

The economic implications of such contradictions in the Nasserism framework are the object of a subsequent paragraph. What is crucial to state here is that, despite having rhetoric and aims in common, the Soviet Union and Egypt had never shared the tools to achieve the same results. Egypt had never adopted the Soviet institutional skeleton, for example. The Egyptian National Assembly, despite being strongly controlled by Nasser, remained an elective organ, contrary to the equivalent organ in the Soviet Union. Both from a constitutional and a practical point of view, Nasserism never acquired the absolute dominance of institutions through its party (Arab Socialist Union). Indeed, the constitution prescribed a *parliamentary presidentialism* that eventually led to the personification of politics. However, in comparing the two constitutions, it is interesting to note that the Egyptian one in Article 49, regarding the legislature, contains a peculiar clause: “One half of the members of the Assembly at least must be of workers and farmers”. This could be considered the highest similarity in infrastructure between Cairo and Moscow, the elements above mentioned constituted just rhetoric. Indeed, the Soviet Constitution of 1936, in Article 123, declares the same principle for National Assembly formation.

In analyzing the constitutional text, an issue related to the translation arises. Indeed, in the official English translation of the document, published by the Egyptian Information Department and supplied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, various terminological choices could spur further reflections. Precisely, Article 102 has been reported as follows:

“The National Assembly nominates the President of the Republic. The nomination is referred to the people for a plebiscite. The nomination to the post of President of the Republic is made in the National Assembly upon the proposal of at least one third of its members. The candidate who wins two thirds of the votes of the Assembly members is referred to the people for a plebiscite. If none of the candidates obtains the said majority the nomination process is repeated two days after the first vote. The candidate winning the votes of an absolute majority of the Assembly members is referred to the citizens for a plebiscite. The candidate is considered President of the Republic when he obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast in the plebiscite. If the candidate does not obtain this majority, the Assembly nominates another candidate and the same procedure is followed.”

The procedure explained is almost similar to the one of the 1956 regime. What changed here is terminology, but not the one in Arabic. Indeed, in both constitutions, the term الاستفتاء (*al-istashfa*) is used, but in the two texts, the Information Department of Cairo translated it differently. In the precedent constitution, الاستفتاء (*al-istashfa*) is translated as “poll” or “referendum”; in the one analyzed in this paragraph, the chosen term is “plebiscite”. Despite indicating a similar process, “plebiscite” and “referendum” have nothing in common. Already in the 60s, plebiscite

had a negative connotation, especially due to the abuse of this instrument before and during World War II. The term “plebiscite” immediately takes back an authoritarian atmosphere, contrary to “referendum”, which is considered the most democratic institution of contemporary times. Technically, there are not so many differences in procedure between the two forms of consultation: the aim and the environment define whether it is a plebiscite or a referendum. Indeed, while the former is used for legitimacy issues in an authoritarian regime, the latter is common in a democratic system. The Rais acknowledged this difference, thus, it is interesting to wonder about the reasons that led him to approve such a translation. In the original text, الاستفتاء could be translated both as referendum or plebiscite; in Arabic, there is not a specific term for the latter. One first possible explanation of this decision could be given by analyzing the relationship between the regime and the bureaucratic machine of the state; indeed, understanding the *niggle room* bureaucrats had under Nasserism could shed a new light upon this (*voluntary*) differentiation. Another view on this issue is that Nasser tried to give a new connotation to the term “plebiscite”, hoping to be its bearer to the Third World. Indeed, while “referendum” has been a predominant Western feature in politics, as well as “popular referendum” in the U.S.S.R., Nasser believed that a “real”, however, with weak-decision-making-power, plebiscite could become an alternative for the non-aligned countries. In essence, Nasser tried to balance objective and widespread referendums in the West and their fraudulent equivalents in the East.

Conclusion

To fully capture the Nasserism constitutional process, it is essential to look not only at the texts that were crafted under his control but also at the ones that came after him, such as the 1971 constitution. Through amendments, this text survived until 2011, thus constituting a pillar of modern Egyptian society. Thus, by briefly analyzing it, it will be possible to find a conclusion for the constitutional development under Nasserism.

The 1964 Constitution is the last Nasserite document. In 1971, Egypt adopted a new Charter under Sadat: the first opening to the markets and reforms will begin. In approaching this analysis, Kayla Sivak-Reid noticed that the introduction section, the preamble, of the constitutional text is missing. The preamble has always been an essential component of the precedent constitutions, and thus its absence from the 1971 one surprises. However, after reading the document, it is clear that there is no introduction simply because there is nothing to introduce. “This constitution marks the first smooth transition of the Egyptian republic since its founding. [...] it simply built on the foundations set down by former President Nasser”¹⁹⁸. Indeed, there are no major changes or developments with respect to the 1964 Constitution. Notwithstanding, some additions were made by Sadat, especially in the field of religion and judiciary; an example is Article 2, with the introduction of sharia among the legislative sources. This aspect will be discussed in the paragraph below.

However, the new Constitution will maintain the Arab socialist character. Here, too, Article 1 declares Egypt as a “democratic socialist state, founded on alliance of the working forces of the people. The economic fundament remains the socialist system, at least on the Charter. In reality, Sadat will need to reinterpret Nasserism’s heritage in economic policy. Indeed, when Sadat took power, the Egyptian economy was struggling. The new President comprehended immediately that the biggest issue was the lack of competition in the Egyptian market, a result of

¹⁹⁸ Kayla Sivak-Reid, *Tracing a State and Its Language from Province to Republic: Translations of Modern Egypt’s Constitutions* (Classics Honors Projects, Classics Department, Macalester College, 2016).

Nasserite socialism, thus Sadat “required the state to loosen its grip on many facets of the economy and recognize the potential contribution of the private sector and foreign investors to stimulating growth and development”. With this brief introduction, it is easier to comprehend what Sivak-Reid noticed: “It is unclear in this constitution whether references to the development plan refer to the five-year plan continued from the Nasser era or if those sections were amended later to include Sadat’s 1973 Open Door Economic Policy.”¹⁹⁹

Egypt continued functioning on the form of state and government given by Nasser, thus democratic republic and parliamentary presidentialism. The electoral procedure for the President of the Republic remained the one of 1956, reported in 1971 by Article 76. However, an interesting development is registered regarding the tool of presidential decree. Indeed, decrees with force of law entered the Egyptian legislature with the 1956 constitution Article 136, here the second paragraph is reported: “In extraordinary cases, the President of the Republic, by delegation of the Assembly of the Nation, may issue decrees having the force of law; the delegation must be for a limited period and must indicate the subject matter of such decrees and the basis on which they will be based”. The same wording is used in the 1971 constitution, in Article 108, but an interesting clause is here added: “The delegation is valid for a limited period; it must specify the subject matter of such decrees and the principles on which they are based. The decrees must be submitted to the People’s Assembly at its first session following the expiration of the delegation. If they are not submitted, or if the Assembly does not approve them upon submission, they lose all force of law”. The 1956 constitution thus had fewer limitations regarding the law decrees respect to the 1971 one. However, to fully comprehend the evolution on this matter, it is necessary to recall that some limitations were present in the 1956 constitution too, but they were placed under Article 135 that dealt with the exceptional case of decree laws issued by the President of the Republic during the dissolution of Parliament. Undoubtedly, the 1971 constitutional framework puts more limitations, at least on this presidential instrument. Notwithstanding, the figure of the President of the Republic remained almost unlimited in various fields and thus still reflected the transitional phase from the monarchy to the republic of 1952.

As mentioned above, the 1971 Constitution remained in force until 2011, meaning that this presidential system with few limitations, the result of a rushed transition, remained largely unchanged until the mid-2000s. This process should prompt reflection on the impact of Nasserism on the Egyptian state and society. Indeed, as stated in Chapter Two, Nasserist ideology was likely not destined to transcend the limits of history, as it was closely tied to Nasser’s political figure. However, the fact that the core of the constitution, along with the structure of the state and government, remained nearly untouched may suggest that Nasserism hindered the evolution of the Egyptian state in certain aspects, particularly in terms of constitutional development. The *immanentism* of constitutional order might be considered an exception in evaluating Nasserism ideology through time since other core aspects of the state and society evolved rapidly from the ideas of Gamal, a striking example of this is the case of religion, which is now analyzed in the following paragraph.

¹⁹⁹ Macpherson, Bruce James Stewart. 2012. *The Growth and Development of the Modern Egyptian Financial Sector*. Durham thesis, Durham University. Durham E-Thesis Online. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5718/>.

The Fundamental Principles of the State: Religion

Under the first title of the 1956 Constitution, there is a pillar that is not usually associated with Nasserism, namely religion. In fact, Article 3 states that the state religion is Islam, and the national language is Arabic²⁰⁰. Comparing this with the 1923 version, it is interesting to note that the same article in this version remains under the sixth title in Article 149. The decision to place religion under the first title, “The Egyptian State”, must carry a particular significance, and indeed it does. As noted above, Nasser was a strong believer in freedom of belief and religion, and he has often been portrayed, particularly by Western narratives, as a secular leader opposed to Islamic tradition. This characterization tends to oversimplify Nasser’s actual stance. From this first aspect, it is clear that the assumption of linking Nasserism with anti-Islamic thought is misleading. In fact, by placing Islam in Article 3, Nasser was not necessarily seeking to dignify religion per se, but rather to highlight Islam as an intimate part of Arab cultural identity. This does not mean, however, that Nasser believed all Arabs were Muslims. On the contrary, he strongly defended the right of every Arab to practice, or not practice, his religion freely. Indeed, such a reference to religion is not even present in the provisional constitution of 1954, which in its first articles covers almost the same topics as the 1923 version. The addition of the 1954 Constitution in this regard was probably the decision to include freedom the equality of religions and faiths in Article 3: “All Egyptians are equal before the law. They enjoy the same public rights and duties, without discrimination based on origin, language, religion, creed, political opinion or social status”.

This paragraph aims to acknowledge the evolution of the concept of religion and its relationship with the state for Nasser. Analyzing the different formulations and positions for religion and its role over the years, from 1953 with the proclamation, continuing with the provisional constitution of 1954 and the final constitution of 1956, it is possible to see the evolution of this concept in Nasserism. It seems that, for Nasser, in 1956, Islam was recognized as part of the shared heritage of the Egyptian state and the Arab world. However, one should also consider that Nasser was aware of the societal concerns arising from the perception of excessive secularization. Thus, Article 3 of the 1956 Constitution may have been a strategic compromise, balancing his secularist inclinations, the deep-rooted Arab cultural traditions, and the influence of Islamist thought, particularly from groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. This compromise was likely intended to maintain national unity and avoid societal unrest, reflecting the complex dynamics of Egypt during that period.

Muslim Brotherhood: the origins, similarities with Nasserism

Given this opening, it seems necessary to introduce an important subject and agent in Nasser’s policies: The Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, to fully understand the relationship between Nasserism and Islam, and thus between secularization and religiosity of the state, in the Egypt of the 1950s, it is necessary to consider the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, in this paragraph, a brief excursus on the birth and development of the Islamic movement will be presented.

At the origins of the Muslim Brotherhood is the thought of Hasan Al Banna. The Islamic leader founded the الإخوان المسلمون (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) in 1928, while Nationalism was growing in Egyptian soil. Since their

²⁰⁰ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 3.

inception, Nationalism and Islamism have been intertwined, nurtured by the waters of the Nile. In the first chapter of this thesis, a space was devoted to the development of Nationalism in Egypt, and here it is useful to recall that already in 1907, Islam and Nationalism started to interact: the main nationalist party, Al-Watan, was indeed eventually accused of religious fanaticism. It is on this ground that Al Banna's ideas circulated and grew, in contemporary, with the Free Officers. The origins of the Muslim Brotherhood are connected to the ones of the Islamist and Nationalist schools, and indeed, Aly and Manfred stated: "Banna was intellectually a combination of Muhammad Abduh reformism, Rashid Rida conservatism, and Al-Afghani's political activism"²⁰¹, all the three thinkers have been analyzed in the first chapter.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Free Officers, the Muslim Brotherhood had a strong and solid political program. As soon as Banna moved to Cairo, the first program was out: building more mosques, creating educational institutions, increasing small industrial and commercial enterprises, and developing social clubs and organizations²⁰². The Brotherhood cared about all the aspects necessary to foster a nation: identity, standardization, and sound economic policies. The roots of Banna's thought lie in the conservative reformist school of Islam, specifically in the ideas developed by Rashid Rida: it was necessary to adapt Islam to the needs of modernization, but the inspiration should be taken from traditional Islamic rules, and thus the ideal government was the caliphate. Banna developed his thought from this paradigm as a kind of response to the failure of the liberal state in 1923. Thus, despite their different backgrounds, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers emerged from the same delusion and anger at institutions, corruption, and colonialism. What acted as a watershed principle between the two organizations was the concept of "nationality": for Banna the Egyptian, and Arab, identity could not be detached from Islam. However, as Nasser saw the internal disorder of the state as a direct consequence of imperialism, Banna saw the colonizers, and thus the West, as the authors of the decadence of the umma. The two leaders looked at the same illness but diagnosed it differently. Thus, they ended up prescribing two completely different therapies for the same disease. This divergence is evident when looking at the six principles that the Brotherhood proclaimed to achieve its mission. The goals of the Brotherhood were the same as those of the Free Officers: to find a way for Egypt to grow and prosper, to liberate the Nile Valley from invaders and occupiers, to find a place for the new Egypt in the international scenario. Interestingly, Banna added to his program the need for universal peace and humanitarian civilization²⁰³, something the Free Officers never mentioned. For Banna, all these goals could only be achieved by respecting Islamic rules and traditions, while for Nasser, the only way was to respect national dignity.

Panarabism or Pan-Islamism?

The strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood, as summarized by Ali and Manfred, presents peculiar similarities with the Nasserite one: "[...] avoid divisive political organizations such as parties; [...] seek power to realize goals,

²⁰¹ Abd al-Monein Said Aly e Manfred W. Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 336-361.

²⁰² *Ibidem*

²⁰³ Hasan al-Banna, *What Is Our Message?*, trans. (1968), accessed March 25, 2025, <https://islambasics.com/book/what-is-our-message/>.

including if necessary armed force;²⁰⁴. At the same time, the two plans differ in important respects, such as Banna's idea of reviving the caliphate and establishing a religious government. An interesting point from which to compare the two organizations is the strong belief, for both, that Egypt was more than its borders. While Nasser spoke of Arab land, Banna preferred the term "Islamic homeland", but they both addressed this undefined community in terms of numbers. This recalls the debate between Pan-Nationalism and Pan-Islamism, which has been covered in the first chapter. Both Panarabism and pan-Islamism in the Middle East have their origins in Ottomanism, an attempt to unite groups and communities with different languages, identities, and religions. The difficulties faced by both Panarabism and pan-Islamism are similar, but pan-Islamism has always been categorized as "anachronistic" in relation to the principle of Western nationality. This may explain why Nasser never spoke to the Islamic umma but rather to the Arab nation: he knew that in the 1950s, the idea of reuniting peoples under the name of God would not be supported internationally. What is important to note here is that Nasser did not underestimate the power of religion as a glue for Arab society; he seems to have taken into account the signs of the times, at least at the beginning of his conception.

This latter statement is confirmed by Nasser himself in his "Philosophy of the Revolution", when the Arab leader illustrates the theory of the three circles. The latter theory has been exposed in the second chapter of this thesis, under the paragraph "The Three Circles Theory", thus, here the practical implication of such framework will be presented. From the beginning of his framework theorizing, Nasser showed a willingness to use the potential power of Islam in politics. Indeed, he called for the transformation of the pilgrimage to Mecca into an annual world conference of Muslim countries: "the pilgrimage can have incalculable political force, the world press should take an interest in it, not exclusively to describe rituals and traditions to readers, but considering it a periodic political congress [...], congress of devoutly gathered masses...but strong, unambitious and active, submissive to God but feared by their adversaries, aspiring to the other life but nonetheless aware that they have a mission to fulfill in this"²⁰⁵. Such statements could be seen as an attempt to compromise between the spiritual and the secular nature of the state. However, to the ears of Islamists, the idea of desacralizing the الحج (*al-hajj*), the pilgrimage, would likely be far from appealing. Moreover, not only did this concept of Nasser have profound repercussions among the Islamists' schools, but it strained the relationship with other Arab countries, too, especially with Saudi Arabia. Indeed, if Cairo could aspire to be the political capital of the Arab nations, Riyadh has always been the geographical capital of the Islamic Umma, the guardian of the holy shrines of Islam. In 1964, the Saudi sponsored the "World Muslim League" to isolate Nasser's circle; Gamal described this move as a "reactionary imperialist" one.

As was stated in the above chapter, the priority for Nasser was the Arab Circle, "the most important and the most closely connected with us". The Islamic sphere maintained an important position in Nasser's agenda, although this aspect is generally silenced when analyzing Nasser's ideology. In 1955, Nasser created the Islamic Congress, whose first secretary-general was Sadat. This first initiative had more a symbolic meaning rather than practical

²⁰⁴ Abd al-Monein Said Aly e Manfred W. Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 336-361.

²⁰⁵ Gamal Abd el Nasser, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*, a cura di Enrico Galoppini (Passaggio al Bosco, 2023), 92.

implications, but it was followed by the creation of the “Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs” in 1960. The main results of this Council were the publications of numerous books on Islam distributed throughout the Middle East, thus serving the mission of Egypt as supreme leader of the region. However, Islam never really followed the Nasserite path, and indeed the first Islamic Summit Conference (1969) “was convened in Rabat and not in Cairo, and its headquarters were in Jedda, under the auspices of the hated reactionary Saudis”²⁰⁶. According to Warburg and other scholars, the failure of spreading Nasserism in the Islamic sphere is the result of the political decline of Nasser: the idea is that after 1967, the rhetoric of the Arab leader was weakened by different defeats, namely the dissolution of the United Arab Republic and the Six-day War, and thus it did not penetrate fully the Islamic Umma.

Another perspective on this topic could involve considering the broader picture of Nasser’s legacy. It is evident that the Islamic circle could never have been truly loyal to him, as he spoke the language of politics, not that of God. Nasser attempted to use Islam as one of his tools, yet, ironically, it was the only force that ultimately stood against Nasserism.

From the honeymoon to divorce

The relationship between the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood has passed through different stages. The first period, from July 1952 to March 1954, is what Mitchell titled “the short honeymoon”, a sort of conciliation between the two organizations. As was said above, this truce was guaranteed by the Free Officers who believed that the Brothers were already weakened by Banna’s assassination. An example of conciliatory moves was the release from prison of many members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Another proof of the condescending attitude towards the Islamic organization was the decision of January 1953 outlawing all political activities except for the Muslim Brotherhood, considered a religious association. However, as Warburg noticed, despite this exclusive relation with the Free Officers, the Brothers never intended to submit to political pressures. Indeed, even in this honeymoon phase, clashes existed. A first setback in the relation presented in 1954, when Neguib rejected the Brotherhood’s demand of founding the Egyptian constitution on Islamic principles²⁰⁷. For scholars, the first serious challenge to the Free Officers came on 12 January 1954 when the Brotherhood clearly denounced the “Free Officers regime” during a commemoration of their martyrs at the Cairo University: the same day the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed. The definitive breakdown of the relationship ultimately came with the assassination attempt on Nasser in Alexandria while he was addressing the crowd: as Sadat described it, “the Muslim Brotherhood openly declared war on us with the obvious aim of overthrowing us and taking over the rule of Egypt”²⁰⁸.

The period between 1954 and 1970 was “a period of tension in the relationship between the movement and Nasser”²⁰⁹. This time frame is characterized by an increment in executions, including the one of Qutb in 1966, the successor of Banna. All of this happened under the jurisdiction of special courts and thus with show trials in the

²⁰⁶ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. “Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

²⁰⁷ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. “Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

²⁰⁸ el-Sadat, Anwar. *In Search of Identity*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

²⁰⁹ Abd al-Monein Said Aly e Manfred W. Wenner, “Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt,” *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 336–361.

great majority of cases²¹⁰. The number of Brothers imprisoned reached eight hundred. This harsh repression is typically included in the framework of Nasser's secular moves rather than in his authoritative actions. However, this interpretation of history does not allow for an understanding of Nasser's strategy in managing Islam within an Arab society. In fact, it would be more accurate to view this repression of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political move aimed at preserving power rather than as an attempt to secularize the state and eliminate a religious organization. The latter explanation, which is the direct opposite of the former, better frames Nasser's concept of Islam and the role he envisioned for it, both in theory and in practice.

By highlighting the similarities between the two organizations and programs, this paragraph was intended to affirm that "Nasser ideologically rejected the theocratic notion of the State without rejecting Islam altogether"²¹¹. As it has been stated above, the Arab leader was fully aware of the potential power of Islam in Egyptian society, but he never had the *hubris* to believe he could defeat it. Conversely, Nasser attempted to fuse Nationalism, Arabism, and Islamic principles. To do this, he needed to bring religion under the control of the state, so he used socialist ideology as a medium. He began this narrative of Islam as "a religion that is one hundred percent socialist"²¹², and thus he could use the tool of socialism on Islam, such as nationalization of religious institution. Through various reforms, the Nasserite regime managed to remove the religious institution from the core power of the state, such as the judiciary; indeed, the Sharia courts were abolished in 1957. Another important reform was the nationalization of Al-Azhar, the religious institution of Cairo, which was transformed into a government-controlled university in 1961. Al-Azhar became the main channel of communication between Egypt and the Arab and Muslim world, controlled by Nasser himself.

Islam in the Constitutional Process

However, as Warburg states, "a clear indication, if indeed one was needed, of the total submissiveness of the Islamic hierarchy under Nasser, was their acquiescence with the National Charter of 1962"²¹³. Indeed, while in the 1956 constitution Islam was defined as religion of the state, "its general treatment in the [1962 National] Charter was rather ambivalent": in chapter X, "Foreign Policy", the document declared that: "the UAR adheres not only to the concept of Arab unity but also to [...] the spiritual bonds of the Islamic world, and the Charter of the United Nations"²¹⁴. This latter affirmation was considered the "humiliation of Islam" since religion and the international system "were treated as equals, once again hardly a compliment"²¹⁵; for Shamir this is the turning point in the

²¹⁰ Waterbury, James. *Egypt: Burdens of the Past, Options for the Future*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978²¹¹
Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

²¹¹ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

²¹² P. J. Vatikiotis, 'Islam and the Foreign Policy of Egypt', in J. Harris Proctor (ed.), *Islam and International Relations*, (London: 1965), pp. 138–145

²¹³ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

²¹⁴ Horton, Alan W. *The Charter for National Action of the UAR: A Résumé of the Complete Document*. Northeast Africa Series, vol. 9, no. 5. Cairo, July 1962

²¹⁵ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>.

relationship between Nasser and Islam²¹⁶. Finally, in 1964, Sharia was not mentioned in the Constitution anymore, thus emphasizing the social and political transformation of Egypt²¹⁷. However, the impact of Nasserism on society is still immediately visible in the peculiar relationship between the state and Islam. Indeed, as said above, in 1971, a new constitution was approved by referendum. Despite being approved by Sadat, the constitutional text conserved much of Nasserism heritage. What is interesting to notice is that, at nearly one year from the passing of the Rais in the constitution of Egypt, religion and the state began a new phase:

One could look at the 1971 constitution as the result of a long process that transformed Egypt day by day. For example, Article 2 of 1971 states:

الإسلام دين الدولة، واللغة العربية لغتها الرسمية، ومبادئ الشريعة الإسلامية المصدر الرئيسي للتشريع.

“Islam is the religion of the state, Arabic is its official language, and the principles of Islamic Sharia are the primary source of legislation.”

Conversely, in the 1956 Constitution, the wording of Article 3, containing the principles of the state, was limited to:

الإسلام دين الدولة. اللغة الرسمية هي العربية

“Islam is the religion of the State. The official language is Arabic.”

By reporting the integral articles, it is possible to notice that in 1971, an important section was added: the one on Sharia. This amendment could be interpreted in two different ways. On one hand, the adding of Sharia as a primary source of legislation could be seen as a defeat of secularism since it stays in profound contradiction with the former Nasserite reforms. On the other hand, the wording of the article tends to hide a peculiarity: it does not address the Sharia specifically, but rather the مبادئ (*mabda*), the principles of the Islamic Law. What seems to be just a wording detail is transformed instead into an important cornerstone of Egypt, defining the precarious equilibria between state and religion. Indeed, this clause in Article 2 of the 1971 constitution will open the path for the development of Egypt as a “repugnancy clause” Islamic country, rather than a “supremacy clause” one. A brief clarification on these two terms will be given in this paragraph.

Modern Islamic Constitutionalism has two main schools of thought on the role of Sharia courts and the position of Islamic Law in the source system. The first school is the supremacist school, where the Sharia is the main source of law, even superior to the law itself. The second school is that of the repugnancy clause, where the courts can strike down a law that contradicts the Sharia. The difference between these two systems is huge and has a great impact on society and constitutionalism. Supremacy clause systems, such as Saudi Arabia, base their laws entirely on the Sharia; on the other hand, Egypt and other repugnancy clause countries use the Sharia as a criterion only in

²¹⁶ Shamir, Shimon, ed. *The Decline of Nasserism, 1965-1970*. Tel Aviv: 1978.

²¹⁷ Altman, Isaac. "The Politics of Islamic Legislation in Egypt in the 1970s." *Shiloah Center Occasional Papers*, 1980

cases where a law is completely contrary to the Sharia²¹⁸. Given this clarification, one might better understand why, in reality, the 1971 Constitution was “a victory for the so-called moderates”²¹⁹.

This paragraph aimed to trace the line between truth and oversimplification when speaking about Nasser’s secularization process. First, by analyzing the relationship between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, it was possible to highlight the similarities and differences between these two entities and thus see the contradiction of Nasser’s approach to religion. What emerges from this brief analysis is that the Rais did not have a clear line on the role of religion in the state, but he tried to contain the power of Islam in the secular institutions. Indeed, it is true that many of the reforms introduced by Nasser began the secularization of Egyptian society, but the question remains whether they were done for this purpose or whether they were merely tools to achieve a solid state.

In the second part of this section, a brief comparison of Panarabism and Pan-Islamism was presented, deepening Nasser’s use of Islam in foreign policy. The main point was that the Arab leader was desperately trying to lead the Islamic countries and not only the Arab ones. In fact, even though in most cases these two identities coincide, Nasser was aware of the huge difference between being an Arab leader and a Muslim leader. In his writings and his political decisions, it is clear that he was trying to make Egypt the leader of the Islamic world as well. What is difficult to understand is whether Nasser really believed in this mission or whether he simply could not play this role. Reflecting on this, Ali states that “in Egypt, unlike Iran, there is no overwhelmingly dominant individual to play the role of an Ayatollah Khomeini. In part, this may be due to the fact that Egypt is a Sunni society, and Iran is Shi’a society; in part, however, it is also due to the long experience of Brotherhood without a charismatic leader”²²⁰. Following this reasoning, one could ask whether the problem was Nasser’s lack of charisma in the Islamic field or rather the presence of the Brotherhood in Egypt, which acted as a strong deterrent. What is clear, however, is that Nasser’s main concern was always the stability of the regime, and thus, he sacrificed the rest for the strength of his country.

In conclusion, the idea of associating Arab Nationalism with secularization is probably the result of a kind of oversimplification due to the need to label similar phenomena with the same name. Indeed, various authors, including Kissinger²²¹, have tried to place Atatürk and Nasser under the same umbrella of nation-builders. Both leaders revolutionized the idea of state religion in their countries, but the differences between them are so striking that it seems to be superfluous to list them. In general, it may suffice to say that while Atatürk aimed at weakening the role of religion in his state, Nasser sought to dominate it.

²¹⁸ Scotti, Valentina Rita. "Islamic Constitutionalism." *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Comparative Constitutional Law* (MPECCoL), last updated March 2023.

²¹⁹ Warburg, Gabriel R. 2006. “Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952–80.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (2): 131–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208208700502>

²²⁰ Abd al-Monein Said Aly e Manfred W. Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 336–361.

²²¹ Kissinger, Henry. *World Order*. London: Penguin Books, 2014, 112.

Economy and Constitution

Antony Lang emphasizes that the 1956 constitution sought to create greater economic freedom and that this was reinforced by the nationalization of the Suez Canal²²². Indeed, several authors have pointed out that the Suez affair had several important effects on Nasser's economic thinking. In fact, after the nationalization, a series of laws were passed in 1957 that required all foreign banks to become Egyptian. Much of the share derived from these nationalizations was transferred to the Egyptian government, and indeed, between 1957 and 1960, a number of public economic organizations were formed to fill the vacuum left by private capital²²³.

Commenting on the economy and the constitution in Nasser's ideology, Mansfield notes that the 1956 constitution introduced the idea of a planned economy. This assertion is indeed confirmed by Article 7 of the Constitution, under the second title of the Constitution, "Foundational Elements of Egyptian Society": "The national economy is organized according to established programs in which the principles of social justice are respected, and which aim to increase production and raise living standards"²²⁴. There was no reference to such a principle in the earlier version of the Constitutional Charter. The only reference to economy in the 1953 Constitutional Proclamation was that taxes would be determined on a proportional basis. However, the economy was always at the forefront of Nasser's program, as evidenced by his statement above about the importance of the economic welfare of his citizens and the development of his country. This is also underlined by the fact that the provisional constitution of 1954 already contained some articles on nationalization. In fact, Article 39 stated: "The state may nationalize public utility or monopoly enterprises, with just compensation, if in the best interest of society"²²⁵. One could say that this was just an anticipation of what would have happened in 1956.

What was said above about Nasser's idea of developing the country is now confirmed by this constitutional analysis. By placing the fundamentals of economic development in the first fifteen articles, Nasser once again renews his goal of developing the country in a fair and, apparently, not really western way. Although Nasserism shares some principles with Soviet socialism, such as the idea of nationalization and the planned economy, it is quite inaccurate to label Nasserism as a Soviet-like economic policy. Indeed, as Mansfield points out: "The Free Officers had no comprehensive programme of social and economic reform when they came to power in 1952; agrarian reform at that stage was essentially a political measure"²²⁶. This statement is meant to highlight the fact that Nasser was not really guided by any particular economic theory, especially at the beginning. What he really cared about was a more equal distribution of wealth, and he looked for different strategies to achieve this. The High Dam is indeed one of these strategies, "they [Free Officers] centered their hopes on the building of a giant

²²² Lang, Anthony F., Jr. 2013. "From Revolutions to Constitutions: The Case of Egypt." *International Affairs* 89 (2): 345-363. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23473540>.

²²³ Mansfield, Peter. 1973. "Nasser and Nasserism." *International Journal* 28 (4): 670-688. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40201172>.

²²⁴ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 7.

²²⁵ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1954, art. 39.

²²⁶ Mansfield, Peter. 1973. "Nasser and Nasserism." *International Journal* 28 (4): 670-688. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40201172>.

dam on the Nile near Aswan which would not only increase Egypt's cultivated area by 20 to 25 per cent but provide immense quantities of cheap hydroelectric power for industrialization"²²⁷.

However, the economic development plan that Nasser had for his country was presented in different occasions, both to Egyptian and foreign authorities. Indeed, by looking at one interview from December 1954 with the correspondent of Foreign Affairs journal, it is possible to have an early overview of the future Nasser's decisions in this field. Here, the extract of the interview will be reported both in Arabic and English so to have a more comprehensive analysis of the terms chosen by Nasser²²⁸:

إن برنامج بناء اقتصاديات مصر من جديد يتألف من ثلاث شعب، والهدف الأوحد من هذا البرنامج هو رفع مستوى المعيشة بين جماهير الشعب. ومن مظاهر هذا البرنامج ما يلي:

- 1- قانون الإصلاح الزراعي الذي غير كتلة الزراع من الانقطاع
- 2- إجلاء القوات البريطانية، وهو أمر جوهري لتحقيق سيادة الدولة
- 3- إنشاء بنك صناعي لمساعدة الصناعة وجلس إنتاج لوضع خطط التصنيع

غير أن المشروع الرئيسي في برنامج البلاد هو إنشاء السد العالي، والهدف منه هو زيادة الإنتاج الزراعي في مصر بما يعادل 50 بلكة وسيبب العمل فيه أوائل سنة 1955، ومستغرق إنشاؤه عشرة أعوام

“The program to rebuild Egypt's economy consists of three branches, and the sole objective of this program is to raise the standard of living among the masses. Among the manifestations of this program are the following:

- 1- The Agrarian Reform Law, which changed the structure of agriculture from dependency.
- 2- The evacuation of British forces, which is essential for achieving state sovereignty.
- 3- The establishment of an industrial bank to assist industry and production to set industrialization plans.

However, the main project in the country's program is the construction of the High Dam, the goal of which is to increase agricultural production in Egypt by an equivalent of 50 blocks, and work on it began in early 1955, with its construction taking ten years.”

These words come from the first period of Nasser, in 1954, when it was still difficult to understand the limits and objectives of the revolution's programme. Despite the lack of a clear political programme, it is clear that there were some clear values and concepts that drove Nasser from the beginning. Indeed, even when he speaks of the economy, he reiterates the core values of anti-imperialism and independence, not just from an economic point of view.

²²⁷ *Ibidem*

²²⁸ Nasser, Gamal Abdel. "حديث نشر في جلة «فورين أفيير» الأمريكية حول مكاسب الثورة المصرية نقلته جريدة الأهرام". In *المجموعة الكاملة*: مرشد عبد العزيز، 211. القاهرة: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية ومركز أحمد يوسف خلامس، *خطب وأحاديث وبيانات جمال عبدالناصر*، 1995. جمال عبدالناصر الثقافية

The first point of Nasser's programme, presented here to a journalist but in a broader sense to the Western world, contains a strong formulation. In fact, the Egyptian President does not use any kind of euphemism here, but he goes straight to the point, knowing that his words could create some kind of political tension. Indeed, his speech begins with *قانون الإصلاح الزراعي*, meaning "Agrarian Reform law", a term broadly known for its Soviet-socialist connotation. By 1954, when Nasser spoke, some of these agrarian reforms had already been passed, so there was no real need to restate the concept to an American magazine. Nasser's decision to recall this decision can therefore, be seen as a rhetorical strategy to put more pressure on the West.

The second point on Nasser's programme is another hot topic for the West: territorial sovereignty. The decision to include the British question and the Suez Canal issue in this speech can be interpreted as an analysis of Nasser's ideology. Indeed, this choice communicates that for Nasser, there is a kind of holistic balance between economic development, national defense, and social justice, as was explained in the second chapter. By calling for the *إجلاء القوات البريطانية*, the withdrawal of the British forces Nasser aimed at sending another message to the West: there is no economic development without national independence. Thus, this second pillar should not be considered as a reference only to London, but it should be interpreted as a kind of warning to other Western powers as well: Egypt was not for sale, not even to Washington.

Finally, the third point contains an important strategic message from Nasser. Indeed, if the first point merely recalled Soviet terminology, the third seemed to be a copy-paste of a Soviet decree. Undoubtedly, the strongest phrase here is *خطط التصنيع* (*Khuatat al-tasnin*), industrialization plans. It is even more interesting to note that in the provisional constitution of 1954, art. 36 Nasser recalled this concept of economic plans, but in the constitution, he opted for a more "sober", one could say, term, which is *خطط مرسومة* (*Khuatat al-marsuma*), a quite generic word that could be translated in "structured plans". Thus, this analysis of the text suggests that Nasser probably wanted to emphasize and put pressure on the West by highlighting the possible similarities with Soviet ideas, but that he did not really intend to mock the Soviet Union, at least not initially.

In the last part of his conversation with the American journalist, Nasser does not miss the opportunity to reiterate his first strategy for launching his development plan: the construction of the Aswan Dam. Again, the message is strong and clear: Egypt wants not only foreign aid, but also independence and progress. However, as noted above, Nasser knew that the best way to build the dam was with the help of the West. However, this brief extract from the conversation does not seem to be a way of getting the West to invest in Egypt. In fact, the numerous and clear references to the Soviet world must have been interpreted by the foreign offices as a red flag rather than an interest in the Westernization of Egypt. Still, by defining the Aswan Dam as the *المشروع الرئيسي* (*Al-mashru al-raisi*) the principal project, Nasser's intention was probably to draw Washington's attention to the importance of this project, and so the speech could be read as a kind of carrot-and-stick rhetoric of a small power in the Cold War. On the one hand, it reminds the enemy of the West in order to scare the West of the real possibility of Egypt falling into Soviet hands. On the other hand, it drew attention to an ambitious project that could help the West win Nasser's confidence.

As emphasized above, the Aswan Dam was seen as the key to all of Egypt's problems. For Nasser, the strategy was to distribute wealth through new agrarian reforms and then to multiply that wealth through industrialization and social services. This strategy is well reflected in the 1956 constitution. Reading this constitution, it seems that Nasser was trying to proceduralize the plan he had already put in place in 1952, a striking example is indeed Article 12: "The law establishes the upper limit of agricultural property so as not to allow the rise of latifundia"²²⁹. It is clear that Nasser wanted to put into writing what he had already done with the first agrarian reform in 1952, and indeed he later reduced private land ownership from 200 feddans (about 84 hectares) per person to 100 feddans in 1961. It is impossible to talk about Nasserism without analyzing the impact of his economic policies on Egypt and its people. There have been different views on this, and the main problems in trying to do a fair analysis on this subject remain manipulation, or the lack of data, but also the difficulty in understanding the ideological thought that was behind these economic decisions.

Focus on Agrarian Reforms

Before continuing to analyze the characteristics and the effects of the Nasserite economy, it seems appropriate to give a specific focus to the role of the agricultural reforms that he has promoted from the first days of his government. In fact, Nasser's land reforms were a predominant part of early Nasserism. Moreover, analyzing the effects of the land reforms in Egypt is also useful for understanding the general pattern of these measures in the Third World. The analysis conducted by Brooke and Derrick aims to highlight the roll-back effects that these land reforms had and how they influenced the Egyptian economy in the long run²³⁰. The two authors argue that the redistributive projects failed to account for institutional deficiencies and ended in exacerbating poverty.

The main popular consensus on land reforms rested on the conviction that "one cannot think of an act [...] that was more empowering to the poor than the agrarian reform"²³¹. Indeed, the general expectation is that redistributing land to the poor should lead to a better condition for them; since land is an asset that provides stability in terms of production and can be rented or sold. However, different studies, among which Brooke, have proved that the land reforms had actually condensed poverty in rural areas.

The land reforms did not produce the expected results, at least in the long term. This was mainly due to one factor: the dismantling of the previous system, the *'izba*²³². The *'izba* was both a unit of measurement and an institution that emerged in the first half of the 1800s and identified the precise spatial distribution of the patent to produce goods. The *'izba* was then transformed into a feudal system, with an unequal relationship between lord and peasant. Thus, when the *'izba* was dismantled by Nasser, two inverse effects occurred. The first was the social and political effect: a wave of liberation of the masses was perceived, and peasants assumed that they were now free to produce what they needed on their own farms. The second effect is the economic-productive downside: the peasants did not have the necessary machinery and skills to run their family-sized farms.

²²⁹ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 12.

²³⁰ Brooke, Steven, and Gabriel Koehler-Derrick. 2020. "When Redistribution Exacerbates Poverty: Evidence from Gamal Abdel Nasser's Land Reforms." Working paper prepared for the 2020 AALIMS Conference, April 6, 2020.

²³¹ *Ibidem*

²³² *Ibidem*

It could be said that Nasser did not strictly adhere to Marxist theory in this regard. In fact, the Rais was not a staunch supporter of Marxist principles across all areas of politics. The issue arose because the land reforms treated land as a form of capital but failed to redistribute fixed capital, such as machinery and technical expertise. From a Marxist perspective, land is not capital but rather a natural resource that requires capital to be effectively utilized by workers²³³. Simply granting land to peasants without complementary resources, such as machinery, training, and access to credit, risked lowering productivity and creating inefficiencies. Thus, Nasser's reforms, by treating land as a form of capital while neglecting the redistribution of fixed capital, left peasants struggling to make full use of their newly acquired lands. In addition, the land reform decrees prohibited the possibility of selling the land after thirty years of ownership. This was done to avoid the risk of the formation of a new feudal system since the peasants would probably have sold their land to obtain liquid money in moments of difficulty. Paradoxically, this aggravated the situation even more, because it forced the peasants to cope with the situation without having the possibility to change, it even froze the social texture, since it created the "peasant class" that could not develop during the first thirty years²³⁴.

In conclusion, this brief analysis of the Nasserite land reforms has highlighted three main side effects. The first is the economic one, thus the inefficiency of redistribution from a productive point of view. The second is the ideological one, since Nasser, by mixing ideologies and theories between the West and the East, ended up miscalculating the allocation of resources and capital. Finally, there is the social effect, that is, the freezing of the peasant class for at least thirty years and the social burden of lost development.

Nasser between Capitalism and Socialism

The main debate about Nasser's economic policies and effects remains in understanding whether or not it is correct to define them as socialist. Cleveland emphasized that the economic policies of Nasser, at least in the first period, cannot be called purely socialist, but they could be seen as state capitalist²³⁵. As it was said above, although the name of the policy recalled socialist economy, the effects and the intentions may be different from it. This issue is discussed in depth in Megahed and Ghannam's paper, "The Rocket in the Haystack", which aims to assess the Nasser regime's efforts to transform the Egyptian economy through various strategies. In the section "Socialism without socialists", the authors assert that "while the regime's rhetoric made extensive use of words like 'socialism' and 'planning', it did not actually, as is commonly believed, implement a central planning nor a socialist approach"²³⁶. In fact, the authors noted that, first, central planning is only possible in a socialist economy, where the state controls production, which was not entirely the case in Egypt. Indeed, Abdel Malek asserts that the categorization of Nasser's regime as non-socialist is reinforced by the notion of Arab socialism, an ideology based on nationalist and Islamic ideas that actually cracked down on Marxism²³⁷. Malek emphasizes that in Nasser's

²³³ Marx, Karl. *Il Capitale. Critica dell'economia politica. Libro III: Il processo complessivo della produzione capitalistica*. A cura di Friedrich Engels. Traduzione di Dario Puccini. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1974.

²³⁴ Douguédroit, Annik. Review of *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A Study, Syria and Iraq*, by Doreen Warriner. *Méditerranée* 7, no. 1 (1966): 80-82.

²³⁵ Cleveland, William L., e Martin Bunton. 2016. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 6th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press

²³⁶ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. "The Rocket in the Haystack." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59-104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

²³⁷ 'Abdel-Malek, Anouar. 1964. "Nasserism and Socialism." *Socialist Register* 1: 38-55

Egypt, private property was maintained and the private sector contributed to the national income. It is important to note that this was possible not because of a legal vacuum, but precisely because of the presence of the right to private property in the constitution. In fact, the right to property was guaranteed by both the provisional constitution of 1954²³⁸ and the constitution of 1956²³⁹. The presence of such a right in the constitution is an obvious element of the impossibility of labeling Nasser's economic policies purely socialist. What is more, Megahed and Ghannam agree that "it is more appropriate to treat Nasser's planning experience as developmental planning, which resembles the approach of many Western countries to build what is known as the welfare state"²⁴⁰. Thus, the idea is that Nasserism adopted a form of state capitalism that borrowed only the socialist rhetoric, nationalist orientation, and planning from socialism but aimed to achieve capitalist goals. However, many scholars had emphasized the fact that the collusion between socialist means and capitalist ends led Nasser to achieve no real development, neither socialist nor capitalist. This assertion, however, fails to highlight the fact that although Nasser's policies did not produce a fully dynamic capitalist system, they did revolutionize the entire social structure in Egypt. What emerged from this could be summed up in what Poulantzas stated about Nasser: "he [...] rose above the ongoing class conflict and utilized the state to ensure the implementation of the capitalist development process, regardless of its degree of success"²⁴¹.

Thus, Nasser's plan was to distribute wealth while promoting the development of the country. Industrialization was the key to this process. But the resources for industrialization had to be gathered in four main different sectors: industry, agriculture, diplomacy, and monetary policy. In the previous chapter, the field of diplomacy was analyzed, focusing on the role of the external actor in building the Aswan Dam and thus stimulating the process. However, another important reflection on this topic is offered by Megahed, who also highlights the role of diplomacy in the acquisition of machinery and technology. In the case of Egypt, both superpowers participated in the development process but with different means: the United States provided mainly foreign aid, while the Soviet Union was the main provider of technology and human capital to train engineers and professionals in Egypt²⁴². Looking at the data, however, it is difficult to assess whether Nasser's plan failed to achieve its main goals or not. In fact, by the end of the first five-year plan, and thus in 1965, consumption increased dramatically; the problem was that there was a reliance on debt and thus this could be unsustainable in the long run without a strong economy²⁴³. However, this uncertainty cannot really obscure the fact that under Nasser's leadership, Egypt underwent an economic transformation, especially among the working class. In fact, Nasser's policies toward the working class sounded

²³⁸ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1954, art. 14.

²³⁹ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 11.

²⁴⁰ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. "The Rocket in the Haystack." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

²⁴¹ Poulantzas, Nicos. 1976. "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau." *New Left Review* 1/95 (January–February): 63–83.

²⁴² Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. "The Rocket in the Haystack." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

²⁴³ Sabri, Abd al-Halim. 1966. *The Years of Socialist Transformation and Evaluating the First Five-Year Plan*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.

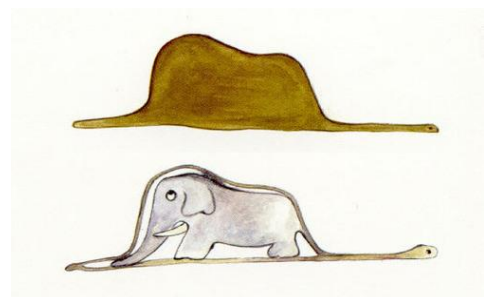
quite socialist, despite his capitalist aims at the state level. For example, the minimum wage was raised several times and the standard of living of the working class increased²⁴⁴.

So far, this section has presented the goals and aspects of Nasser's economic policies. What is now interesting to add are the exogenous and endogenous limitations that these policies had, so as to understand how much the choices of Nasser had an impact on the final outcome. There are two types of limitations in this case: material and external ones. The first material limitation was already highlighted at the beginning of this thesis and is the cultivable area; the difficulty of managing water for agricultural purposes led social scientists to define Egypt as a hydraulic state. The second material limitation, however, remains in industry, which is its underdeveloped nature. In terms of external limitations, Megahed and Ghannam identified the bipolarity of the Cold War, and indeed, until now, it has been emphasized how the international context has played a role in the Aswan Dam project.

From these limitations and the characteristics discussed above, several lessons can be drawn from the Nasserite economic plan. First, Nasser's regime managed to increase social and economic rights without depressing wages, and this was probably possible because of the mix of capitalist and socialist measures. Second, despite his investments in nationalization, Nasser never managed to achieve partial self-sufficiency and thus continued to depend on foreign aid and imports, especially in the food sector. Thirdly, by not really focusing on a single economic strategy, Nasserism probably aimed to achieve short-term development without considering the amount of public debt that was rising, but in doing so it revolutionized the entire society and thus contributed to the next transformation that would have happened under Sadat.

To conclude this section on the economic concepts of Nasserism, it seems useful to add a reflection on the main theories and ideologies that guided the Rais. As emphasized above, the most correct way to analyze Nasser's economic choices is to view them from a middle point between capitalism and socialism, without siding with any precise part. What is even more striking is that it was Nasser himself who declared his total lack of theory from the very beginning: "From the very beginning we had the courage to affirm that we had no theory, only firmly established principles"²⁴⁵.

This statement illustrates the difficulty of analyzing Nasserism: the absence of a clear path or framework to compare concepts. Nasserism is better described as a stratification of ideas rather than an amalgamation. The problem in identifying a unifying principle among the different concepts and theories within Nasserism lies in avoiding the mistake of analyzing the whole from the particular. Indeed, should the analysis proceed in this way, the conclusion would be that Nasser's economy is certainly guided by socialism, as most reforms and decisions are inspired by this theory. However, it has been shown that this is not the case. On the contrary, when closely examined, the socialist elements reveal a different ideology, a mixture of capitalist and socialist economics. In a sense, analyzing Nasser's economic thought is like



²⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁵ Abdel-Malek, Anwar. *Nasser: A Biography*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007, 150.

encountering the drawing the Little Prince presents to adults: what seems to be a hat is actually a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant²⁴⁶. The point is that there is nothing under the hat because there is no hat. Similarly, in Nasserism, nothing is hidden behind socialism because there is no socialist ideology; there is a new framework born from a boa swallowing an elephant: Arab socialism.

Economy, Nationalism, and Gender Equality

As emphasized in the course of this paragraph, the evaluation of Nasser's economic policies varies according to the aspect and the effect that it is analyzed. It has been seen that almost all authors agree on the fact that even if it is not possible to say that the economic plan of Nasser succeeded in creating development in the long run, it must be acknowledged that through his decisions and mistakes, Egyptian society was completely transformed. In a way, this was possible because of the side effects of his economic policies. A striking example of this is the case of women. Indeed, it is widely recognized that Nasser's industrialization program massively increased the presence of women in the workforce, and this contributed to the idea of labeling Nasser as a progressive leader in the Middle East. However, one should be careful in labeling Nasserism attitude toward feminism, because as Megahed noted, the benefits of adding women to the working class were uneven: "while it enhanced women's presence and participation in certain areas, it also to a large degree maintained and cemented patriarchal norms that effectively prevented women from achieving complete emancipation"²⁴⁷.

It is evident that Nasser's idea of the welfare state offered an explicit commitment to gender equality, and this is clear from the constitutional work. Indeed, Art. 19 of the 1956 constitution stated: "The state gives women a way to reconcile their work in society with their duties to the family"²⁴⁸. However, women were not among the priorities of Nasser's program from the beginning, and there is no reference to them in the previous constitutional documents. Thus, it is quite clear that the willingness to give women a new role in society depended on specific economic goals, and thus it would not be inappropriate to describe it as a side effect of Nasserism rather than a part of it. This discourse could also be extended to the role of women and feminism in socialism; however, it might not be appropriate to address this topic in the context of this thesis. Megahed defines Nasserism's approach to women's rights as a kind of state feminism, recognizing the role of the state in promoting women's emancipation. Nasser's Egypt is considered as one of the three most prominent cases of state feminism in the world, along with the Soviet and Chinese cases²⁴⁹. As it is emphasized by Hatem, "it is important not to trivialize the concept of state feminism by using it to describe formal (legal and ideological) state commitment to women's right"²⁵⁰, indeed the term "state feminism" defines state programs that aim at changing the productive (and thus reproductive) roles of women in the society. Through times feminist authors had tried to highlight that state feminism represents a

²⁴⁶ Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *The Little Prince*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Harcourt, 2000. The image at p. 119 is taken from the same book.

²⁴⁷ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. "The Rocket in the Haystack." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

²⁴⁸ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1956, art. 19.

²⁴⁹ Rowbotham, Sheila. *Women, Resistance and Revolution*. London: Pluto Press, 1972.

²⁵⁰ Hatem, Mervat. 1992. "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (2): 231–51.

“conservative top-down” approach to women’s right and usually it worsen the issues of underrepresentation and subordination, while it ameliorate the economic female situation.

Indeed, in the case of Egypt, state feminism strengthened the regime’s legacy and led to the labeling of Nasser’s political persona as progressive. Thus, although it began as a side effect, state feminism managed to achieve good results for Nasser. This does not mean, however, that a real change in patriarchal culture took place. In fact, in most cases, the legislation cemented patriarchal attitudes. A striking example of this is the “Gender specific protective legislation” which was framed as protecting femininity by prohibiting women from working in jobs considered too masculine. Megahed noted that even in the industrial sector, women were confined to “feminine industries” such as retail, shoe and garment manufacturing, social services, etc.²⁵¹. Thus, “simply put, Nasser’s regime created and oversaw a ‘public patriarchy’ that encouraged women to work, join the labor force and enjoy a degree of economic independence while marginally preserving patriarchal culture that views women as subordinate to men and dependent on the state for education, employment, and other important social services”²⁵².

State feminism operated in Egypt, especially between 1950 and 1960, and this is particularly visible in the analysis of the constitutions. As it was reported above, the 1956 constitutional document comprehended the state commitment to providing equality of opportunity, and this was also maintained in the constitution of 1964 where “they declared all Egyptian equal under the law and forbade discrimination on the basis of gender, racial origin, language, religion or belief”²⁵³. A legislative example of how the commitment to gender equality was operated is represented by law number 14 of 1964 which “guaranteed jobs in the state sector for all holders of intermediate school diplomas and college degrees irrespective of gender”. Moreover, the law obliged employers to provide daycare for children in factories with more than one hundred female workers. This law represents the apex of state feminism in Egypt: it aimed at increasing the labor force, but it cemented even more the role of women as caregiver of the family. Indeed, by promoting these laws the state has not deconstructed the role of women as mothers and wives but has built on it the new role of worker. What Hatem emphasized more was that these laws made women’s private lives a public concern of the state.

Thus, paradoxically, what in the West was called the “progressive Egyptian framework” has nourished more conservative social behaviors to women. A striking example of the paradoxical effects of state feminism is the maintenance, under Nasser’s rule, of the “personal status laws” of the 20s and the 30s. The personal status legislation was composed mainly by Law 25/1920 and Law 25/1930, that respectively defined women as economic dependents on men and forbade their right to divorce²⁵⁴. However, Nasser’s personal ideas on women’s liberation were apparently quite progressive, as different interviews and speeches showed. For example, in an interview with the Supreme Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Nasser stated: “Why wouldn’t women work? In my opinion,

²⁵¹ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. “The Rocket in the Haystack.” *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

²⁵² Hatem, Mervat. 1992. “Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (2): 231–51.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*

²⁵⁴ Egypt. *Law No. 25 of 1920 on Personal Status*. Cairo: Government Press, 1920. And Egypt. *Law No. 25 of 1930 Amending Personal Status Laws*. Cairo: Government Press, 1930.

when a woman works, she is protected; [...] Preventing women from work is against their interests, we are really freeing women by allowing them to work with men shoulder by shoulder”²⁵⁵. In the same speech Nasser attacked with sarcasm and irony the Islamic leader on the issue of veil: “I told you, Monsieur, you have a daughter in medical school, and she doesn’t wear the veil. How do you expect me to get ten million Egyptian women to wear it?”²⁵⁶. From this extracts it emerges the intrinsic contradiction of Nasser’s state feminism: liberating women within the confines of the state, essentially raising the walls of the patriarchal system and reinforcing them with laws that offered only the illusion of a real women’s self-determination. As it is better described by Megahed “the public patriarchy implemented by the state [...] gives the state the right to determine the limits of women’s participation in the public arena”²⁵⁷.

Indeed, state feminism was also reflected in politics, where women’s representation in parliament and other institutions remained inexistent. The social outcome of this process was that “Nasser regime produced women who were economically independent of their families, but dependent on the state for [...] political representation”²⁵⁸, this is the core of what Hatem called “public patriarchy”. Another effect of state feminism, and of the one-party system introduced by Nasser, was the complete lack of independent organizations for women representation both inside and outside political bodies. This contributed to leave women captives of the state’s desires and needs, as Salem describes “the key paradox of feminism under this regime was that it simultaneously gave women access to spaces in society they had long fought for – including work and education – while also closing down political space and extending control over independent organizations”²⁵⁹. This statement is also corroborated by the outlawing of all independent feminist organizations in 1954, which is reported by one of the best-known feminists of that time, Doria Shafik.

Shafik started her political activities before the revolution, in 1954 started a hunger strike for women’s right to vote and formed the organization “Bint al-Nil, بنت النيل” meaning literally “daughter of the Nile”. Shafik was put under arrest in 1960 and committed suicide in 1975²⁶⁰. Shafik’s story is the story of the women who believed in the 1952 revolution from the beginning but were ultimately disappointed by it. In fact, Shafik wrote an article in 1953, “The Happiness of a Nation”, celebrating the first anniversary of the revolution: “The only one step left is for women to gain equal political rights. Once achieved women will have been truly liberated” she claimed. Despite having trust in the regime, Shafik complained about the lack of cooperation between men and women in the state: “there can be no success for a nationalist movement without the cooperation of women [...], it is unfair that half

²⁵⁵ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. “The Rocket in the Haystack.” *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>

²⁵⁶ Nasser, Hoda. *Nasser: Les archives secrètes d'Al-Journal Al-Khass et la question palestinienne*. Paris: Flammarion, 2011, 116.

²⁵⁷ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. “The Rocket in the Haystack.” *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>

²⁵⁸ Hatem, Mervat. 1992. “Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (2): 231–51.

²⁵⁹ Salem, Sara. “Four Women of Egypt: Memory, Geopolitics, and the Egyptian Women's Movement during the Nasser and Sadat Eras.” *Hypatia* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 593–608. Published by Cambridge University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45153640>.

²⁶⁰ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. “The Rocket in the Haystack.” *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

our nation are always giving but then are deprived of their rights”²⁶¹. Shafik fought to claim that the revolution did not pay enough attention to the real interests of women, among which there was the right to vote. However, it should be highlighted that Shafik’s main concern with the regime was the anti-democratic turn that Egypt was taking, and thus, probably, her political activism was impeded by the authority.

At the same time, in Egypt, there were feminists who were sufficiently satisfied by the state feminism of Nasser; an example is the case of Inji Aflatun. However, it is interesting to notice that Aflatun, like other political activists, defined herself first as communist and secondly as feminist; thus she manifested interest in the economic conditions of women rather than their liberation. An explanation of the difference in views between “pure” feminists and feminists in favor of “state feminism” is given by Salem. In her paper, in fact, Salem reconstructs the formation of feminism in Egypt and, to some extent, in the Third World, showing how feminist demands became linked to other rhetorics and values. Indeed, the author acknowledges that in the first half of the 20th century, the first generation of feminists in Egypt began to focus on issues of Nationalism and independence, unlike what happened in the West. This meant that women articulated gender equality as part of independence of the country, and thus, feminism was interlinked with anti-imperialist values since the beginning. A major example of this dynamic is the connection between the feminist issue and the Palestinian one in Egypt, which has led to the formation of the Arab feminism, contraposed to the Western one²⁶². Moreover, in Egypt, what bound people together during the revolution was their opposition to social inequality. The fight against social injustice united Nationalism, feminism, and Marxism. In a certain sense, this dynamic reflects the effects of Nasserism on the society: the Arab leader managed to unite different sections of the population by identifying a common enemy. This process of enemy-finding is a cornerstone in the development of nationalist ideologies, as was emphasized in the first chapter of this thesis. Moreover, especially in Third World scenarios, the creation of nationalist values has been closely linked to the development of anti-imperialist values. The case of Nasserism thus proved Anderson’s theory, explained above in the section on Nationalism in Third World countries. The discourse of feminism in Egypt was presented to show how Nasserism and Nationalism had, in a way, phagocytized the other -isms that were already part of society. Conversely, it should also be noted that other issues and demands grew within Nasserism, and thus, Nasserism partly shaped other social movements, including feminism. Finally, another aim of this paragraph on feminism and Nasserism was to dismantle “the myth that Nasser gave unconditional support to women’s liberation and show that his advocacy was still bound by moralist understandings of women’s liberation and its limitations”²⁶³.

²⁶¹ Shafik, Doria. "The Happiness of a Nation," *"Qasim Amin," "Women and the Case of Arabs," "The Liberation of Women," "The Last Hope."* 1953. AUC Rare Books and Special Collection, Social and Women’s History Collection, The Doria Shafik Collection – Carton No. 18/89.

²⁶² Salem, Sara. "Four Women of Egypt: Memory, Geopolitics, and the Egyptian Women's Movement during the Nasser and Sadat Eras." *Hypatia* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 593-608. Published by Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/45153640>.

²⁶³ Megahed, Kareem, e Omar Ghannam. 2022. "The Rocket in the Haystack." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47 (1): 59–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48645754>.

The Role of Education

Another file rouge in the constitutions under Nasser is undoubtedly the theme of education. Already in the provisional constitution of 1954, art. 10 declares: “The right to education is guaranteed by the state. Primary education is compulsory and free in public schools”²⁶⁴. However, with the 1956 constitution, education became a pillar of the Egyptian revolution and society. Here, in Art. 50, not only is education a right and guaranteed by the state, but the first clause actually states: “The State oversees public education”. The term *oversees* indicates the initiation of a novel role for education and, consequently, for its subjects: children and youth. Another indication of this transformation is the change in the name of the governmental educational department. Prior to 1953, the ministry was formally designated as the “Ministry of Knowledge”. However, in the aftermath of the revolution, it underwent a renaming process, acquiring the new title of “Ministry of Childrearing and Education”, the original Arabic name is وزارة التربية والتعليم (*Wizarat al -Tarbiyya wa al-Ta’lim*)²⁶⁵; here, the term “التربية” represents the transformation. It is noteworthy that the government has opted to utilize the term التربية, education, instead of معرفة, knowledge. This substitution signifies deliberate communication from the government, underscoring a shift in focus from mere outcomes (knowledge) to the process of education itself. This strategic shift in language is likely a deliberate effort to emphasize the government’s commitment to the nation’s future and promote the concept of ongoing development. However, it should be highlighted that the term التربية does not have a specific translation in English. Indeed, as Ruth Folmar noticed in his work, in Arabic, the term denotes more “discipline, cultivating certain morals, bringing up”²⁶⁶.

In the above paragraph, the importance of education in the constitutional framework was highlighted. This characteristic of Nasser’s regime should bring some reflections on nationalist ideology. Indeed, in the first chapter, space was devoted to the analysis of the theories of Gellner and Hobsbawm, both emphasizing the role of education in shaping Nationalism. One brief recall of these concepts might be useful here: Nationalism aims at creating a nation by finding a principle of homogenization and thus standardization. This process can take different paths; in the majority of cases, education is the preferred channel to spread Nationalism. Nasser was not an exception to this scenario, and he called for societal homogeneity: Egyptians “will crystalize; its component parts will hold together; it will form a homogeneous entity”²⁶⁷. Thus, in Nasserism “the classroom was the laboratory of ideology”²⁶⁸ to create the ideal Arab citizen designated by the constitutional values; in one of his last speeches of 1969, he stated: “Building factories is easy, building canals is easy, building dams is easy, but building men, that is the harshest difficulty”²⁶⁹. With the aim of building a nation, Nasser ended up admitting that he was actually

²⁶⁴ Egypt. *The Constitution of Egypt*, 1954, art. 10

²⁶⁵ Mahmoud Awad Taha, *Mithaq al-Thanra* (Cairo: Maktabat Jazirat al-Ward, 1962), 183.

²⁶⁶ Ruth Folmar, *The Revolutionary Classroom: Education and State Building in Nasserist Egypt, 1952-1967* (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2020)

²⁶⁷ Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 203.

²⁶⁸ Ruth Folmar, *The Revolutionary Classroom: Education and State Building in Nasserist Egypt, 1952-1967* (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2020)

²⁶⁹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, Speech on Ministry of Land Reclamation (1969), quoted in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 75.

trying to build the new Arab man, and in this, children were the raw material. It is interesting to note that this last statement was made in 1969, when there is reason to believe that Nasser already understood that he would never see the Arab unity he was working for. Nevertheless, he continued to cling to this blind ideal of building Arab society in a way that would survive the West.

If it is true that education played an important role in the Constitution, the opposite is also true: the Constitution was one of the most important pillars of the renewed educational program. In fact, according to Abdalla, the 1961 Constitution became a textbook to be memorized in school. As Abduh notes, the same treatment was not reserved for the Qur'an. However, religion continued to play a central role in the curriculum. Indeed, Nasserism aimed to strengthen the cultural and traditional heritage of the Arab people, and thus, Islam had to be integrated. As emphasized in the previous part of this thesis, despite the label of "secularization", religion continued to play an important role in Nasserism, and its presence in schools is proof of this. Nasser continued to refer to Islam in all his speeches, not only because it was part of the social fabric, but also because it evoked important values needed for the revolutionary program, as Ahmad states "values like faith, patience, justice, and destiny, transforming religion from an outward battle to inward experience and personal emotions". After the revolution, new Islamic studies textbooks were released to encourage students to embody social values such as sincerity, patriotism, and forbearance²⁷⁰.

Another function of nationalist education is to standardize language in order to facilitate the dissemination of concepts and propaganda. This was especially addressed by Gellner's theory of industrialization: the role of the vernacular in the standardization process was enormous. The same concept is applied in Nasserism, but with a more ambitious, one could say, goal: to unify the Arab nations. As is well known, Arabic is not a monolithic language, but it changes in forms and pronunciations in different Arab countries. Nasser must have been a strong linguistic nationalist, convinced that identity runs through language. The problem in the Arab region that Nasser faced was that although there were strong similarities among the peoples, they did not speak exactly the same language. The first chapter discussed Herder's and Fichte's theories of linguistic Nationalism, which are now applied to Nasserism. In fact, Nasser, like Fichte, believed in the possibility of uniting a people through language; the problem is that Nasser was not talking about the four hundred central states that were united under Germany. The Arab region is scattered with different dialects that could potentially be assimilated into a single language, but they are not. Nasser knew the power of language, and indeed, he was one of the first Arab leaders to speak in classical Arabic to give an idea of the unity of the region. Classical Arabic became an icon of Nasser's political persona, and in a sense, he embodied the literal meaning of the term used to denote classical Arabic, which is العربية الفصحى (*al-'arabiyya al-fusha*): "the most eloquent Arabic". One could say that in education, two parallel revolutions were happening: a political and a linguistic one, the latter nurturing the former.

Like the media, the education sector has been among the main transmitters of Pan-Arabist values in the Middle East. In the above paragraph, the role of language was emphasized, since in Nasserism there was a belief that

²⁷⁰ Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

“every Arab-speaking country is our country [...] whether willingly or perforce”²⁷¹. The main agents of the Pan-Arab revolution through education were the teachers. One could say that the main subjects of education for the internal revolution were the students, while in the externalization of this process, the main actor was the teacher himself, a kind of megaphone of the revolution throughout the Arab peninsula and beyond. In fact, what happened during Nasserism was what Folmar defines as “the export of Egyptian teachers to the Gulf”²⁷²; through media, this gesture was presented as a form of Arab solidarity of sharing knowledge and experience; politically, it was a huge form of propaganda for Nasser. The line between propaganda and the export of knowledge was so thin that the Emirati government suspected that Egyptian teachers were conducting covert operations on behalf of Cairo.²⁷³ This process played an enormous role in enhancing Nasserist influence throughout the Middle East and contributed to creating the standardization effect desired by Gamal.

Panarabism through Education

The fight for Arab unity was waged on foreign soil as well, but this did not mean that the issue was silenced at home. In this regard, it is interesting to analyze some extracts from a speech by the President on the occasion of the Unity Day held at Cairo University. The discourse analyzed here was delivered on the 22nd of February 1967, thus at the dawn of what was then called the decline of Nasser’s political leadership. Indeed, already six years had passed since the dissolution of the United Arab Republic with Syria, and one could say that this was the first hint of the collapse of Panarabism. Moreover, 1967 marked the first complete political defeat of Nasserism with the Six-Day War, which took place between June 5 and 10 of that year. Thus, the analysis of this discourse is particularly relevant not only to see what kind of contents and concepts Nasser wanted to convey to his youth, his students; but also, because it is the occasion to observe another Nasser, the disillusioned and wounded Gamal.

The speech starts as all the others, with the vocative “dear citizens” مواطنون (*mubatinun*); but only a few lines later, a new vocative epithet is used: إخوة (*ikhwa*), brothers²⁷⁴. Right from this incipit, it is possible to perceive the deep divide between the young and the old Nasser. Indeed, the change of wording in addressing his audience should not be passed over in silence. As mentioned above, the term “citizens” had a kind of broad meaning for Nasser, and the choice to now address the audience as “brothers” speaks to the difficulty of using the same wording while society was changing. At the same time, analyzing this speech, the first impression is that of a leader who does not want to accept the change, the sign of the times. In fact, immediately after reaffirming the dissolution of the union with Syria, he indulges in an emotional moment: “Despite everything that has happened, we here in Cairo are celebrating Unit Day, and they are there in Damascus celebrating Unity Day, and the masses of the Arab nation are sharing this celebration with us...talking about it as we are talking, *studying* it as we are *studying* it [...]”²⁷⁵. With these words, Nasser tries to convey the fervor of Panarabism as it was more than ten years earlier. He could not accept the end of this dream, and therefore, neither could anyone else. This idea is reinforced by other passages in

²⁷¹ Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Middle East in Transition: Studies in Contemporary History* (New York: Routledge, 1958), 137.

²⁷² Ruth Folmar, *The Revolutionary Classroom: Education and State Building in Nasserist Egypt, 1952-1967* (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2020).

²⁷³ Easa Saleh Al-Gurg, *The Wells of Memory* (London: John Murray, 1998), 96.

²⁷⁴ Nasser, Gamal Abdel. كلمة الرئيس جمال عبدالناصر في افتتاح مؤتمر الإنتاج أمام رؤساء مجالس الإدارات. تقديم: المكتبة الإلكترونية، 1967. مركز معلومات حصرية. 1997.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*

the texts, such as: “[...] the separation affected the appearance of unity, but it did not affect the unity that exists in the hearts and consciences of the Arab peoples”. The choice of wording in this sentence wants to recall a sentimental lexical, as the terms “appearance” مظهر (*mahaẓar*), “heart” قلب (*qalb*) and الانفصال (*al finsal*) demonstrated.

However, to better understand the message that Nasser wanted to send to the Egyptian youth, it is useful to look at the main keywords of this speech. Among the most repeated words here is “conspiracies”, مؤامرات (*muamarat*), usually referring to the West. In this way, the president wanted to make it clear to his students that no one could be trusted except the Rais. Another crucial term of this speech is “economic development” so that the new generation could appreciate what Gamal prepared for them: a country aiming at skyrocketing growth, which is not still accomplished. So, there is a lot of economic vocabulary here, but the president does not indulge in technicisms. He uses numbers and data to inspire credibility, but he does not delve into more detailed explanations, as he has done in the past.

Finally, in this speech, Nasser seems to be presenting the new Egypt to its new population, attempting to make them fall in love with their nation. To achieve this, he naturally resorted to the rhetoric of opposition, speaking of vaguely defined enemies. The result of this strategy is an obviously distorted picture that satisfies neither the author nor his audience: the Egypt Nasser bequeathed to the new generation is a nation full of contradictions, teetering on the verge of collapse.

Youth and Nasserism

The above speech addressed a special category of Nasser’s audience: the youth. In the section dedicated to the analysis of education, it was highlighted that under Nasser’s rule, students were regarded as lumps of clay pressed into the molds of Nasserism to produce the new Egyptian citizen. The best raw material for the regime was children, as new and old fictional stories could entirely shape them to make them fall in love with their land. However, the attention was not only given to the children in school but to the whole range of people who were still learning and studying. These people were called “youth”, and this became a social category. As Ferrand noted, there is a precise term in Arabic to designate the group of people who are “graduated or about to graduate from Egyptian secondary schools and universities”: شباب (*shabāb*). The majority of the people included in the شباب *shabab* used to become part of the أفندية (*effendiyya*): “intermediate stratum [...] of educated young men, primarily enrolled in public administration, who were assimilated into a proto-middle class due to their social and political expectations, despite [...] their inability to achieve them”²⁷⁶. During the regime, these two entities, the شباب *shabab* and the أفندية *effendiyya*, ended up being considered the same thing. This happened especially thanks to the increase in the number of universities and scholarships to allow more and more people to enter the university and eventually the public administration. Under Nasser’s regime, a fusion occurred between a socio-generational category and a socio-economic one: youth and the middle class became one and the same. The said effect of this semantic process is the complete abandonment of the concept of “generation”. This is a particularly powerful political

²⁷⁶ Ferrand, Antoinette. 2024. "Youth in Nasser’s Time: A Class Identity." *ZMO Working Papers*.
<https://doi.org/10.58144/20240410-000ff>.

transformation. First, by replacing the generation with the middle class, the leader has the possibility of expanding his support in time and space: by avoiding the limit of a generation, Nasserism was automatically projected in the minds of different segments of the population born before and after some crucial events of the regime, but the regime considered them as a single middle class. Secondly, as Ferrand noted, the fact that youth and middle class became synonymous was very convincing in a socialist society “that refuses to recognize class struggle”²⁷⁷.

In this regard, it seems appropriate to specify that the term “generation” can acquire two different meanings depending on the context. The classical one is the demographic conceptualization of the term, thus the average interval between parents and children. The social-psychological definition refers “to the views shared in common by a group of contemporary individuals”; a striking example globally is the ‘68 generation. Analyzing the Nasserite regime from this perspective, one immediately noticed that despite his attempts to create a great, enduring, and immense generation of new Egyptian citizens, the Rais was unable to stop time. In fact, since the 1960s, a new coherent cohort of people has been able to emerge, thanks mainly to intellectual figures. This new youth was considered to be “ungrateful heirs of the valuable legacy their predecessors had been waiting to pass down”²⁷⁸, but the reality was that the 60s generation was not fully a product of Nasserism. Indeed, the شباب *shabab* of 1960 was simply too young to participate in the 1952 revolution, but at the same time was too old to be encapsulated in the educational system from the beginning. This generational and ideological gap was a threat to the regime since as Kirmse noticed, Egypt in this regard was particularly similar to the Soviet Union pattern: “young people were key agents in [the] interplay of [Soviet] political projects [...] were mobilized by state and party structures in great numbers”.²⁷⁹

The concept of youth is deeply intertwined with the educational system, as it is the extension of one’s educational career that allows for the expansion of youth as a social class. As mentioned earlier, under Nasserism, the number of students and schools increased, but this did not necessarily lead to a higher percentage of educated individuals. Beginning in the 1950s, Egypt experienced significant population growth; as a result, despite the expansion of the education system, it was never able to keep pace with the country’s rapidly growing population. The situation was different in the university field, where the youth could also be transformed into the “intellectual class”. This process took place under the control of the regime so that academia and research were strictly linked to serving national interests. At the same time, the regime tried to promote the scientific and applied sciences rather than the humanities; in this propaganda, the data on employment were crucial: by showing that the scientific degrees had a higher employment rate, the regime managed to relegate the literary and philosophical fields to a small portion of the youth. Indeed, by analyzing the career paths chosen by this segment, one could identify the emergence of a new stratum of the middle class: the managerial class, usually disinterested in the political and social issues and

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁷⁹ Kirmse, Stefan B. “Internationalist Nation-Builders: Youth under Brezhnev in the Soviet South.” *Europe–Asia Studies* 74, no. 7 (August 9, 2022): 1256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2110219>.

aiming at occupying administrative positions. This excursus helps in showing that “youth is less about age than about socio-economic status, and therefore about rising classes”²⁸⁰.

In conclusion, thanks to the educational system, Nasserism managed to conceptualize youth as a social class, detaching it from the sign of the times. This process, however, could not be fully completed, as evidenced by the case of the 1960 cohort. Moreover, the conceptualization of youth in a socio-economic category eventually led to the crystallization of ideas that could not be dismantled over time. Despite this well-structured system of metamorphosis, the youth class gradually eroded, likely due to internal fractures, ultimately imploding from within. This caused a profound wound in the Nasserist regime and ideology, which no longer stood on the support of youth. Finally, it is worth noting how the fusion of youth and the middle class remained a social and institutional construct within Egyptian and Arab societies and how this was reflected in the Arab Spring. However, this would require a separate thesis to be explored fully.

The Socialist Youth Organization

Another crucial instrument in fostering the growth of Nasserite youth was the party’s section dedicated to boys aged fifteen to twenty-five. Before delving into the analysis of this structure, it might be useful to have an overview of the organization of the Arab Socialist Union. Indeed, the Nasserite party contained peculiar characteristics that were then reflected in society.

Ilya Harik defined the Egyptian party system as a “collaboration movement”. This meant that the party had the role of identifying the new regime’s collaborators; it did not have decision-taking power, as in the U.S.S.R and China. Moreover, the party was characterized by an asymmetrical relationship between the center and the peripheries: “subnational power is not allowed to become cumulative unless it adds to the power capital of the national leader”²⁸¹. The party avoided the clash with other entities since eliminating competitors was its aim. Indeed, ideologically, Nasser believed that the failure of the liberal constitutionalism of the old regime was the direct result of the influence “of alien political systems” such as Western forms of democracy. Thus, to build a New Democracy suitable for Arab people, Nasser needed to concentrate the power in one mass party. The Rais explained to the people that mass movement was the wiser choice for Egypt since “all Egyptians shared similar desires [...]. Common aspirations of the masses should be given the opportunity for political expression in one national movement, regardless of the differences in socio-economic background of the population”²⁸². This led to the result that, unlike the parties of the U.S.S.R and P.R.C., Nasser’s single party comprised *all* citizens. The working forces were reunited in the Arab Socialist Union (ASU); they did not have separate unions or corporations: only individual membership was recognized.

In the beginning, ASU did not have a separate section for young people, but they participated in political life directly from the party. The Youth Organization was created in 1965 with a twofold aim: indoctrination and

²⁸⁰ Ferrand, Antoinette. 2024. "Youth in Nasser's Time: A Class Identity." *ZMO Working Papers*.
<https://doi.org/10.58144/20240410-000ff>.

²⁸¹ Harik, Iliya. “The Single Party as a Subordinate Movement: The Case of Egypt.” *World Politics* 26, no. 1 (October 1973): 80–105. Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2009918>.

²⁸² *Ibidem*

preparation for cooperative life in Egypt. In the general introduction to the pamphlet “UAR Socialist Youth Organization” produced in 1966 by the government itself to sponsor the association, it is written: “the main task which we must put before our eyes in the next stage is to pave the road for a new generation [...]. We cannot say that our generation has done its duty unless we can be sure [...] that progress would continue”²⁸³. The concept of generation, above explained, is here represented: indeed, it is not possible to determine in this sentence which generation is the agent and which is the object. The sentence could be interpreted both as an invitation for the older generation to take care of the younger one and as an encouragement for the current young generation to look after those even younger. In this sense, Nasser was able to expand the concept of generation.

In the pamphlet, the four elements for ensuring the correct “growth” of the youth are listed: political theory, programme of action, political cadre, and statutes. These tools were easy to access by attending the Youth Socialist Institutes, two-week camps for young boys. The same governmental authority declared that in this initiative, “students, supervisors and instructors participate in the debate, in a spirit of intellectual liberty, calmness and orderliness. The discussion continues until all participants agree on the concepts of the various issues, and until they all share the same view, a matter which is considered one of the objectives of the course.”²⁸⁴ By reading the lecture programme, one could easily analyze Nasserism priorities of the time. Moreover, the titles of the lessons inevitably recall the key words from the preamble of the 1962 National Charter. In the end, the two-week course could simply be called a “study of the constitution” since the topics to discuss were the inevitability of the Revolution, the Socialist solution, the New Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Political Action. These are exactly the sections in which the National Charter is divided. However, two interesting lectures were not completely related to constitutional documents: “Islamic rules for raising the individual and building up society” and “The Palestine Problem”, two issues that were indeed undermining Nasser’s regime stability.

The cultural activities proposed, in fact, reflected much more the entire Egyptian society rather than just the segment of youth participating in these camps: radio, newspapers, and television were part of these cultural activities to be carried out together. There was also the possibility to read a socialist book for one hour, no more, per day. The absence of real activities (and not *passivities*) is evident. Yet, Nasser did not dismantle the artistic, theatrical, and musical culture in Egypt; on the contrary, as will be analyzed in the following paragraph, it continued to thrive, taking on a particular form following the path of Nationalism.

²⁸³ Arab Socialist Union. *Socialist Youth Organisation*. Cairo, U.A.R., July 21, 1966.

²⁸⁴ *Ibidem*

The literary field and media

Freedom of expression in the constitutions and the use of the reserve of law

Before delving into the analysis of the world of media, art, and culture in Nasserite Egypt, it is necessary to frame the context in which these forms of expression grew. Thus, a preliminary introduction to freedom of expression, of press and opinion is essential. As it was stated at the beginning of this chapter, Nasser's constitutions dedicated a substantial section of their framework to "public rights and duties". This part has been usually relegated to the third chapter of the constitutional document. It is not actually possible to do a comparison between the constitution of 1956 and the one of 1964 regarding the field of rights of expression, simply because, apparently, no differences arise between the two versions. In 1956, the freedom of opinion was disciplined by Article 44 and the one of press and publication by Article 45; in 1964 respectively by Article 35 and 36. Despite being extremely similar, the two versions have a different intonation, which is particularly visible by looking at the original text. For example, Article 44 of 1956 in Arabic was written as follows:

حرية الرأي والبحث العلمي مكفولة. ولكل إنسان حق التعبير عن رأيه ونشره بالقول أو الكتابة أو التصوير أو غير ذلك في حدود القانون.

"Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed. Every person has the right to express and disseminate their opinion through speech, writing, imagery, or other means, within the limits of the law."

Article 35 of 1964 was:

حرية الرأي والبحث العلمي مكفولة؛ ولكن استعمال حق التعبير عن الرأي، أو نشر الكلمة أو الصورة أو غير ذلك، يكون في حدود القانون.

"Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed; however, the exercise of the right to express an opinion, or to disseminate words, images, or other means, shall be within the limits of the law."

The element of comparison here is the presence (or absence) of the adverb ولكن (*walakinna*), "however", which is part of the second version of the article. Ironically, in the 1956 version, in the very same position where ولكن (*walakinna*) appears, there was another term that, in Arabic, can look quite similar in writing, ولكل (*wakullu*), but carries a very different meaning: "every". While ولكن (*walakinna*) often introduces exceptions or limitations, ولكل (*wakullu*) is usually associated with the broadening of rights to a wider range of subjects. Thus, the meaning of the two articles is the same, but the emphasis is completely different. In a way, one could say that the 1956 version of the freedom of expression article highlighted the universal meaning of that right by choosing to put "ولكل إنسان", meaning "every person". This shadow is wholly lost in the 1964 version, where the إنسان (*insaan*), the person, the entitled of the right, disappeared. In the latter wording the emphasis is put rather on the role of the law, indeed, the reserve of law is introduced by ولكن (*walakinna*), while in the 1956 Constitution, the reserve was relegated to the last three terms of the article: ذلك في حدود القانون, within the limits of the law.

What might appear to be a technical specification is not. When speaking of rights and freedom, even a single comma has the power to transform the life of citizens. If it is true that the reserve of law was present in the two versions of the article, it is necessary to understand the reason behind the smallest of changes. It was not by chance, in 1964 that the regime's grip on its citizens' freedom of expression became more severe. Thus, while it is true that law does not change society overnight, its words can anticipate its evolution.

Indeed, as Ghiglia noticed, from 1960, the press, in particular, experienced a reduction in freedom. A crucial point for Egyptian journalism has been the promulgation of Law No. 156 in May 1960. This latter has outlaw private newsrooms transferring the ownership of the most important newspapers to the party²⁸⁵. Ghiglia described this law as a marriage of convenience between the state and journalists. Since the state owned the press, journalists were considered similar to civil servants; thus, they benefited from the public welfare and social security system. The situation of reporters indeed was not favorable economically at that time: the Egyptian journalists' syndicate was dismantled by the revolution in 1954, and thus professionals in the press sector did not have wage bargaining power. Law No. 156 has thus guaranteed a better economic situation for journalists and has handed over control of the press to the state through the party.

To conclude this introduction, the analysis of the two articles of 1956 and 1964 on freedom of press and publishing will be now presented.

Article 45, 1956 Constitution:

حرية الصحافة والطباعة والنشر مكفولة وفقاً لصالح الشعب وفي حدود القانون

The freedom of the press, printing, and publication is guaranteed in the interest of the people and within the limits of the law

Article 35, 1964 Constitution:

حرية الصحافة والطباعة والنشر مكفولة في حدود القانون

The freedom of the press, printing, and publication is guaranteed within the limits of the law

The same dynamic that occurred in freedom of opinion articles is now presented here: the subject, the person, the شعب (*shab*), the people, is no longer there in 1964.

This process of de-personalization of rights and freedoms might not be overlooked. Indeed, it could be considered a symptom of the decline of Nasser: the more he feared losing popular support, the less he seemed to regard his own people

Infrastructure: The Army of Letters

As mentioned above, education and media were fundamental to Nasserism maintenance. However, the Rais acknowledged the power of another field, strictly linked with press and education: Art and Literature. The government eventually managed to extend its influence on cultural and creative productions, but it operated behind the scenes.

Richard Jacquemond, in his analysis of the literary field under the Nasser regime, noted that it was only after 1956 that Nasser began to build the system of institutions to control and mobilize intellectuals. In fact, the Higher Council for Arts and Letters and the Ministry of Culture were established in 1956 and 1958, respectively.

²⁸⁵ Marianna Ghiglia, "Journalists and Social Welfare Provisions in Egypt (1952–today): A Contribution to the Understanding of the Welfare-State Transformation Process," *Égypte Soudan Mondes Arabes* 25 (2024), published online January 13, 2025, accessed April 5, 2025, <http://journals.openedition.org/esma/3407>.

Jacquemond calls this infrastructure “The Army of Letters”, which is a very visual metaphor to emphasize the strong practical use that Nasser made of the literary and media fields²⁸⁶. The process that led to the establishment of the monopoly of art and literature in Egypt under Nasser was quite seamless. In fact, most writers and intellectuals carried on their work in continuity with the period of the monarchy. In a sense, the Free Officer system continued the tradition of protecting and controlling artists and intellectuals.

The turning point, as Jacquemond points out, came in 1962, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the regime. In fact, in that year, by Presidential Decree, Nasser declared that higher education would be free for all, a costly regulation but one that paid off by ushering in a period of symbiosis between the intelligentsia and the state²⁸⁷. It should be noted that this decision, to put more state in the literary and intellectual field, came exactly one year after the failure of the union with Syria; one could say that Nasser returned to the rhetoric when the reality did not meet his expectations. Moreover, with the defeat of Panarabism, and thus the failure of the United Arab Republic, Nasser ushered in his “socialist turn”, a period of nationalization and reforms aimed at greater equality at the expense of political freedom. This phase saw an increase in the political mobilization of intellectuals, the regime needed real commitment.

The ambiguity of the literary system remains in the fact that the Nasser regime would not tolerate political opposition, but at the same time allowed a certain pluralism of expression. The journalist Salah defined this duality as “a game of window dressing”²⁸⁸, a kind of pluralism under surveillance: artists and intellectuals were left free to manage their internal activities, and the state did not intervene in professional matters such as theoretical choices and ethical or aesthetic models. This is probably why there was no real Nasserist art direction. As Roussillon stated, “There was never an official art or philosophy in Nasser’s Egypt, and one of the characteristics of the period was the flourishing of eclectic forms of thought taken from the most diverse areas of world culture”. Nasser gave a stage to several literary and artistic currents that were all under the great control of the regime, a kind of iron cage, to put it in Weberian language, where artists were free to express themselves while remaining within the boundaries drawn by the political.

The point that Jacquemond wants to make is that in Nasser’s period, intellectuals exploited the freedom they had within the cultural internal field to favor debates that could not exist in the political area. Because of this dynamic, literature became a channel for political and social criticism in a hidden way²⁸⁹. Nasser’s strategy in this field was clear from the beginning: the Higher Council for the Protection of Arts and Letters became a means for the intellectual elite to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime. In exchange for this support, the regime provided them with the means to promote their linguistic and philosophical norms without control.

²⁸⁶ Jacquemond, Richard. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.

²⁸⁷ Delanoue, Gilbert. *Les intellectuels et l'État en Égypte: 1892-1952*. Le Caire: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1982, 28.

²⁸⁸ Jacquemond, Richard. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008, 17.

²⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 36.

Jacquemond's argument posits that during Nasser's tenure in Egypt, the authorities employed a double standard in their treatment of artistic products, a practice that subsequently found expression in the artistic language of the period. Indeed, writers and intellectuals were known to employ a dual language, exhibiting a bifurcated form in accordance with their dual positioning: literary and political. This phenomenon is vividly illustrated through a comparison of two books authored by Ibrahim on the Aswan Dam. One of these books was a *reportage*, while the other took the form of a novel. A notable paradox emerges when examining the content of these works: while the novel serves as a critique of the regime and truth, the reportage is a work of fiction. This dichotomy is further illuminated by the insights of the renowned scholar of Arab literature, Ceza Kassem Draz, who asserts, "Art is truth, while reportage is deceit"²⁹⁰. In this context, literature has given rise to dissimulation, symbol, and allegory. Indeed, novelists have refused to limit themselves to realistic descriptions of the social world, instead retreating into the surreal²⁹¹.

The army of Letters needed to be led by a general, and this was Yusuf al Siba'i: half army officer, half writer.²⁹² Yusuf became the Secretary-General of the Higher Council for Arts and Letters and managed to organize quasi-state institutions focused on specific branches of art and literature. The *general of letters* has been crucial in spreading the Pan-Arabist identity through the Middle East thanks to non-governmental organizations such as the Congress of Arab Writers and the Congress of Afro-Asian Writers, thus emphasizing the Nasser's prestige both in the Arab and in the Third world. Thus, the infrastructure of the Army of Letters was needed both at the national and international levels.

In consideration of the aforementioned context, it can be posited that the modality exhibited by Nasser could be categorized as analogous to that of the authoritative regime. While there may be some truth in this assertion, it does not encompass the entirety of the complexity inherent in the situation. In particular, the Free Officers exercised a strong control over political expression and not artistic and intellectual expression, despite being linked. As stated above, the regime had a limited engagement in exerting influence within the domains of literature and the arts. What indeed should be noticed is that the concept of freedom during the Nasser period was evaluated through a distinct lens and was governed by what Jacquemond defined as "The Law of Decreasing Freedom"²⁹³.

The latter concept could be explained as following: the application of freedom of expression varied according to the medium. Books, for example, were the freest of these applications since they were consumed by a limited audience. In contrast, the daily and weekly press were far more controlled. Finally, audiovisual media, such as theater and radio, had minimal freedom since they were under the control of the Ministry of Information. It is noteworthy that Jacquemond's analysis encompasses a broader timeframe, extending beyond the Nasser period to encompass the 1990s, highlighting the continuity of this pattern of diminishing freedom.

²⁹⁰ Kassem-Draz, Céza. "Opaque and Transparent Discourse: A Contrastive Analysis of the 'Star of August' and 'The Man of the High Dam' by Son' Allah Ibrahim." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 2 (1982): 32–50

²⁹¹ Jacquemond, Richard. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008, 56.

²⁹² *Ibidem*, 18.

²⁹³ *Ibidem*, 42.

The Sound of Nasser: Music Inspired by the Rais

An interesting and unique example of the diversification of modalities and uses of the arts in the service of the Nasser regime is the case of the music industry in Egypt. Through the songs of two immortal Egyptian artists, it is now possible to understand the image that the masses had of Nasser, or better, the idealized idea of their leader. Thus, it seems useful to conclude this chapter by looking briefly at two singers who portrayed the figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser to his people.

The two musical artists who best restituted the photograph of Nasser and contributed to his immortality in the hearts of Arabs are Abdel Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum. Hafez earned the title of “singer of the masses”; indeed, Yusuf Idris, one of the most famous Egyptian writers of the 20th century, acknowledged the role played by the singer during and after the 1952 revolution. A curious aspect of Hafez’s political and media power is that his songs became anthems during the Arab Spring, which shows how his lyrics reached the heart of society, transcending generations²⁹⁴. Paradoxically, Nasser’s ideology never managed to overcome the test of time, but his image, alive in the people, did.

Umm Kulthum, “the star of the Orient”, became not only the voice but the representation herself of Nasserism. Virginia Danielson, in her biography, highlighted how Arabs were enchanted by Umm Kulthum for the fact that “she sang naturally, not like Europeans”²⁹⁵. Danielson underlined the fact that the people did not only admire their star, but they respected her as a symbol of national pride. Nasser immediately understood the importance of a figure like Umm Kulthum in Arab society, and indirectly, he and his ideology became the main subject of the songs of the Star of the East. It was as if it were a vicious circle: Umm sang the spirit of the Egyptian people, and Nasser was part of it. A fictional story, but useful in understanding the impact of Umm Kulthum’s songs on the people, is told by Nassib in his novel “I Loved You for Your Voice”. The phrase that best describes the subtle balance between propaganda and the spirit of the people in her songs is written by Nassib in this opera: “The poetry was composed in such a way that until the end, one wondered whether it spoke of the voice of the beloved or that of the nation”.

The main differences between the two artists, Hafez and Umm Kulthum, stayed in the explicitness of their contents. Hafez, the singer of the people, used straightforward language in expressing his admiration towards Nasser, as can be evinced by his famous song “Nasser, oh freedom”. Here, some extracts from the text are reported, in Arabic and English:

ناصر يا حريه ناصر يا وطنيه

يا حريه يا وطنيه يا روح الامه العربيه

“Nasser, Oh Freedom, Nasser, Oh Nationalism

Oh Freedom, Oh Nationalism, Oh Soul of the Arab Nation”

²⁹⁴ El-Kouny, Nada. "Abdel Halim Hafez's Music Lives On, 41 Years After His Death." *Al Jazeera*, March 30, 2018. Accessed 5/04/2025 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/3/30/abdel-halim-hafezs-music-lives-on-41-years-after-his-death>.

²⁹⁵ Danielson, Virginia. *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

In these verses, the synonym of Nasser for his people follows, and they could not be more precise. Freedom, Nationalism, Arab Nation: the nuclei of Nasserism are now presented.

الشعب يريدك يا حياته يا موصل موكبه لغاياته
وحياه المصحف واياته اسمك في قلوبنا اغنيه

“The people want you, Oh their life, Oh leader of their march toward their goals
By the life of the Qur’an and its verses, your name in our hearts is a song.”

In analyzing this last verse, the presence of the Qur’an creates a sort of oxymoron: the sacred and the profane are now part of the same concept. By singing these words, Hafez is confirming what was above analyzed: الشعب (*al-shab*), the people, felt the unity embodied by their leader, who was able to encompass both Islam and secularism, a single identity with all its different expressions.

وحياه الثوره وغلاوته
وحياه الخضره وحلاوته
ناصر

“By the life of the revolution and its struggles,
by the life of the greenery and its sweetness
Nasser”

This choice of wording expresses a strong density of meaning and symbolism. Indeed, the music resonates with the crucial antithesis between “revolution/struggles” and “greenery/sweetness”. The first couple of terms recall sentiments of pain, suffering, and distress. On the contrary, the second one evokes peace, stability, and prosperity. The more profound meaning to this verse is probably added by the *impure* metonym: the struggles are part of the revolution, and thus, for the Egyptian people, is an element of recognition. An important role is played by the term “greenery”, الخضره (*al-khadra*), which brings symbolism into the song. Indeed, metaphorically, the greenery indicates prosperity, development, and a flourishing future for the Egyptian people. Moreover, الخضره (*al-khadra*), literally translated, would be “green”, a color that represents profound concepts in Arab countries. Green is strictly linked with Islam and its promises of eternal life and peace, but green is also the color of revolution, of hope, and change. Thus, for Hafez and Egyptians, الخضره (*al-khadra*), became a shadow of Nasser.

Another song that portrayed the spirit of Nasser for his people might be “The story of The Dam (it was a dream, an idea)” (كان حلماً فخطراً) قصة السد, by Umm Kulthum. As said above, the star of the Orient used a more indirect language, rich in metaphor and usually comparing sentimental love with the nationalistic one. However, in the analyzed song, Umm Kulthum took off the veil from his words and abandoned herself in an ode to Nasser. “The story of The Dam” is entirely built on the opposition between reality and illusion, which in Egypt has been defeated by Gamal: “It was a dream, an idea, a probability. Then it turned to become a reality not an illusion”. The different identities that survived in the figure of Nasser were evident to his people, too, as this song showed. Indeed, in the course of a few verses, Nasser is admired for being a man of science, but at the same time for being the servant of God: “Saying ‘I will build it’. And, leaning on God”.

From these two analyses, what emerges is that the people absorbed the spirit of their leader, admiring his human characteristics, his modalities, and his way of being an Arab man rather than his political concepts and ideology. The people saw themselves mirrored in his works and his flaws, often overlooking, at least apparently, the concepts behind them. Nasser gave them not only emotions but songs to sing, placing before them a canvas on which they could paint their hopes of the new Free Egypt for the world to see. However, this reflection must be understood within the context of the silenced dissent that simmered beneath Egyptian society, a dissent that would eventually erupt. Still, he managed to build a nation for them, a place where they could imagine themselves free, respected, and with a voice (at the international level). In this light, it's no wonder that the Rais was remembered not just for his triumphs but for his missteps, much like the son of any Egyptian family, with all the complexities that come with it.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at rebalancing the overall analysis of Nasserism, focusing on the intimate environment of internal politics. The initial assumption was that such context would help minimize the distortions caused by the unpredictability of the international sphere. The analytical process, thus, intended to examine Nasserism in a protected area, avoiding disturbances by external factors. In a way, this approach allowed a further deeper analysis of the ideological concepts explored in the second chapter.

Indeed, in comparing the two chapters, the one on Suez and this latter, a complementary character arises. Themes such as political independence, economic development, defense, and Panarabism are here observed through different lenses. Particularly, one of the advantages of using the internal politics scenario is to have access to sources such as constitutions and legislative documents rather than declarations, political speeches, and treaties compiled by different authors. These materials may be considered more unilateral and focused in their aims and modalities compared to international sources. Thus, internal documents may constitute a fixed point when delving into complex and dynamic ideologies such as Nasserism. Indeed, through this chapter, the consultation of constitutions in chronological order provided a safe ground to better comprehend the evolution of Nasserism, thus avoiding the need to resolve antinomies and contradictions by flattering the thought of Nasser.

However, one should eventually recognize the obstacles of focusing solely on internal politics. For instance, the absence of external factors does not translate into a complete static environment. Indeed, other variables should be taken into account when focusing on this restricted site, such as sociological composition and the economic situation of Egypt. In this chapter, these two components were briefly discussed; however, capturing the essence of Nasserism undoubtedly requires a more in-depth analysis, which this research project could not accommodate due to practical constraints. Moreover, while it is true that in internal politics, the figure of Nasser was free from the constraints given by foreign interactions, it was still embedded in the complex political framework of Egyptian society. The clash with the Muslim Brotherhood is not a historical detail but rather an obstacle, or an incentive, to ideological development. This latter example is particularly useful in untangling the declension of secularism in Nasserism.

Undoubtedly, the internal politics scenario highlighted the dedication of the Rais towards economic development and his strategy to achieve it. The basis of this study was made by the constitutions, but from there, a variety of effects and documents were considered. Discussing the role of agrarian reforms has introduced endless debate on whether or not the Nasserite economic plan was socialist. At the end of this section, a paragraph was devoted to the correlation between economy, Nationalism, and feminism. This excursus underlined the evolving concept of development in Nasserism: economic development was not solely confined to production and GDP but had to include social transformations, too.

This third chapter could be divided into two macro areas. The first one, the one that delves into the form of state, religion, economy, thus this part was focused on the direct image that Nasserism wanted to give of itself. On the contrary, the second section explores the reflection of the ideology on the people. This was possible by analyzing the fields of education, media, and arts. These latter were the main instruments of Nasser for painting the picture of his thoughts and acts, thus, it seemed interesting to propose a specific analysis of their role.

In conclusion, this chapter aimed to offer an excursus through Nasserism, as seen both through the eyes of its founder and through those of ordinary citizens. This final shift in focus was inspired by the growing recognition that what has traditionally been labelled as an “ideology” may, in fact, more accurately be described as a phenomenon, thus something that requires a precise analysis of its representations to be fully understood. This final statement will be further explored in the conclusion of the thesis, where Skinner’s perspective will be introduced and Freedman’s theory recalled.

Conclusion to the Thesis and Further Research

The final section of the thesis will be articulated in three main points. Firstly, an overall analysis of the topics discussed throughout the three chapters will be given. In this part, reflections will be made on the role of each element presented in the research, so to evaluate *ex-post* the value of the different perspectives and instruments used in the analysis. Secondly, this section aims at answering the main research question: Is Nasserism an ideology? Or is it *just* Nationalism? In providing an answer the evolution of the research question during the analysis will be highlighted. Moreover, in the attempt to find a solution to the issues of Nasserism, Freedén's framework will be recalled; this time, in comparison to another interesting theoretical structure which is the one of Skinner. Lastly, in the very conclusion of the thesis, space will be devoted to some considerations on the legacy of Nasserism in nowadays Egypt, and thus further possible researches are introduced.

As anticipated in the introduction to this thesis, the three chapters explored Nasserism through three distinct analytical lenses. The first chapter served as a literature review on Nationalism, aiming to highlight the different expressions of Nationalism across various geographical contexts and theoretical approaches, thereby offering a broad and comparative framework for understanding the phenomenon. The chapter reviewed classical and modern theorists to provide a comparative framework for Nationalism. Specifically, the chapter emphasized how each scholar associates Nationalism with a core factor: Hobsbawm with education, Gellner with industrialization, and Anderson with colonization. Their inclusion was based on the relevance of these three elements to understanding Nationalism in the context of the Middle East and Egypt in particular. This analytical path was made possible by the nested structure of the chapter, which progressed from general theoretical premises to more specific regional applications. This structure allowed for shedding light on the anti-Western perspectives of Nationalism, and the diversity that exists when applying the same label to different contexts. The last part of the chapter was completely devoted to the case of Middle East and Egypt. This section of the chapter not only served to contextualize and provide a point of contrast with Eurocentric doctrines of Nationalism but also functioned as a conceptual bridge between the literature review and the rest of the thesis. Indeed, the figure of Nasser cannot be fully understood without a careful examination of how and why the ideology of Nationalism was introduced and adapted in the Egyptian context. Looking back, the initial focus on Western theories of Nationalism has proven particularly fruitful. As later discussed, especially in the second chapter, although Nasserism is deeply rooted in local realities and can be considered an indigenous political project shaped by the specific historical, cultural, and social dynamics of the Nile Valley, it also integrated elements commonly associated with Western nationalist models. One notable example is the emphasis on education as a tool to promote national cohesion and identity, a process that mirrors what Hobsbawm identified as a central mechanism in the construction of Nationalism in Europe. Therefore, by contrasting Western and non-Western narratives within the same chapter, the analysis was able to show that Nasserism, while presenting itself as a response to colonialism and as a uniquely Egyptian project, also echoed broader trends in the global development of nationalist ideologies. This interplay of local and imported elements is a key to understanding the hybrid nature of Nasserist thought, and it reaffirms the usefulness of the comparative approach adopted in the opening chapter.

The second chapter follows a completely different structure from the first. Here, the aim was to introduce the character of Nasser not only from a historical perspective but also from an ideological one. For this reason, the chapter begins with an excursus on the figure of the *Rais*, followed by a focus on his work, *Philosophy of Revolution*. Building on this foundation, the chapter then delves into a case study, namely, the nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956, as a first step in evaluating Nasserism. However, the chapter does not focus solely on the event itself; rather, it attempts to retrace the main causes and pre-existing conditions that led to nationalization. By using this case-study approach, it has been possible to integrate both historical and ideological dimensions. The Suez Canal nationalization served as a case study to analyze Nasserism's ideological and political dimensions. Nonetheless, a key limitation lies in the difficulty of understanding what Nasserism meant for the Egyptian people themselves. The foreign policy perspective, while broadening the panorama through various and diverse international dynamics, inevitably excludes the internal point of view. In this sense, beginning the ideological analysis with such a pivotal event in Nasser's trajectory yields a twofold outcome. On the one hand, it effectively contextualizes his political and ideological thought, enabling a more nuanced analysis, particularly by observing Nasser's interactions with various international actors (Americans, Russians, British, French...). On the other hand, by limiting the focus to foreign policy, it highlights the need for further research into his domestic policies, a subject explored in the third chapter. In conclusion, one of the strengths of this chapter lies in the integration of political speech analysis throughout the section. In particular, Nasser's renowned speech on the Suez Canal has been employed as the closing element of the chapter, as it encapsulates all the themes previously discussed. In this sense, it serves as an implicit and coherent conclusion. At the same time, the speech opens up space for further reflection: this final section represents the only moment in which Nasser is portrayed addressing his own people rather than interacting with foreign actors. As such, it stands out as a rare but crucial element within the thesis, significantly enriching the overall analysis. In an overall evaluation of the chapter, it is also important to highlight the role played by the sources used. The primary reference point in this analysis was Heikal's book *Cutting the Lion's Tail*. The introduction to said work itself guarantees the authenticity of the source, as Heikal recounts a conversation with Nasser in which the latter remarked: "One day you and I are going to have to sit down and write an account of all this." This dialogue, though seemingly implausible, holds a romantic significance, but it goes beyond that. It symbolizes the necessity for the Third World to have a voice, both in action and in narrative. The chapter followed Heikal's exposition of the events specifically to stay true to the scope of the work, which aimed to tell the story from the Egyptian perspective. However, this approach brings its own limitations: by intentionally silencing the Western point of view, the chapter amplifies the Egyptian voice. In a way, this chapter responds to the need to interrogate the tension between the Global North and the Global South cited in the introduction of this thesis. By researching Nasser's ideology, it is indeed impossible not to capture this dynamic, which resonates as a constant theme in the opera.

Finally, the last perspective from which to evaluate the ideology behind Nasserism is presented in the third chapter, entirely focused on the domestic scenario. As explained in the introduction, the decision to first explore Nasser's figure and ideology through the lens of foreign policy, and only in the third chapter to analyze the same topics from an internal perspective, stems from the realization that it would be more effective to begin with a more widely recognized context, namely, the Suez Crisis. In an ex-post review of this research, however, the limitations of this

approach must be highlighted. While it may be true that examining Nasser's thought in a more familiar context made it easier to identify the ideological elements behind his actions, this approach inevitably led to the incomplete exploration of Nasserism in the second chapter. Many of the assumptions presented there had to be revisited and counterbalanced in the third chapter, since they were offset with regard to the domestic policy context. Specifically, this approach proved to be less effective in analyzing the concept of economic development within Nasserism. Although the theme of economic development was addressed in both the second and third chapters, reversing the order, by first introducing the concept within the domestic policy framework and then in the foreign policy context, might have better highlighted the unique economic vision embedded in Nasserism from the outset. One of the strengths of this chapter lies in the use of primary sources, particularly the various versions of Egypt's constitutional documents. As stated in the thesis introduction, these texts offer a solid foundation for analyzing domestic policy and help structure the ideological inquiry. The third chapter focused on five main areas, each inspired by the constitutions themselves: the form of the state, the role of religion, the economic model, the education system, and constitutional freedoms of opinion and expression. Each topic is introduced through the relevant constitutional provisions, which serve as a basis for deeper ideological analysis. This is where the ideological dimension of the thesis is most fully developed. The decision to follow the thread established by the constitutional texts enabled the research to address a broad set of themes without losing coherence. However, certain areas, such as the judiciary under Nasserism or electoral processes, were excluded due to time and scope constraints and were sacrificed in favor of greater clarity and focus.

The second section of the conclusion will now delve into properly answering the main research questions in the following order: Is there an ideological framework in Nasserism, or those it respond to one of Nationalism? Is it proper to speak of Nasserism as an ideology, or should it be considered as a political phenomenon stemming from Nationalism? As previously outlined, to address these topics the theoretical framework of Freedman and Skinner will be respectively recalled and introduced.

The decision to use the framework of Freedman as the undertone for ideological analysis has been extensively explained in the second chapter and could be summarized in the necessity of finding a flexible and innovative perspective from which to examine a peculiar case such as Nasserism. Scholars have described Freedman's theory as an innovative and optimistic contribution to the study of ideology, an interpretation supported by Freedman himself, who writes: "Ideology is not a pernicious distortion of truth, but a necessary component of political thinking." Unlike classical approaches, Freedman accounts for the variety of conditions in which ideologies emerge and evolve, emphasizing the political sphere's role in shaping ideological thought. His conceptual framework stands in stark contrast to that of Marx and his followers. Moreover, a useful comparison can be drawn with Karl Popper, who famously denounced ideology as a form of dogmatism. Whereas Popper viewed ideology as a static and dangerous force, Freedman presents it as a dynamic and indispensable tool for understanding political reality. Freedman's approach has therefore proven particularly well-suited for analyzing Nasserism, as the thesis has consistently shown how the ideology is deeply shaped by its political context. However, a challenge emerges when attempting to fit Nasserism into Freedman's technical definition of ideology: "Ideologies are complex combinations and clusters of political concepts in suitable patterns" (p. 51). This is what the author refers to as the morphological

approach, the idea that each ideology arranges the same political concepts (such as equality, justice, or development) in specific positions within a conceptual structure. The unique configuration of these elements gives rise to different ideologies. To identify an ideology, then, one must assess the coherence and interaction among its core concepts. Coherence, in particular, is essential in this evaluative process. In the case of Nasserism, this research has focused on key concepts, such as economic development, defense, independence, distribution of power, constitutional freedoms, and rights, to uncover the ideological foundations behind his political actions. This raises a deeper question: to what extent can Nasserism be considered a coherent ideology in the Freedmanian sense, rather than a political phenomenon shaped by circumstantial needs? While Freedman's morphological approach has proven helpful in mapping the conceptual terrain of Nasser's political discourse, highlighting key notions such as development, equality, independence, and freedom, it also reveals the instability and shifting definitions of those very concepts over time. Nasser's understanding of development, for example, does not follow a linear evolution but rather changes in response to specific domestic or international challenges.

In this regard, one could argue that Nasserism functions less as a static ideology and more as a performative political act, in line with Quentin Skinner's view of political language. According to Skinner, political ideas must be interpreted as speech acts, deeply embedded in their historical and pragmatic context. The topic is further developed in the opera *On Interpretation* (2001), where Skinner focuses on the analysis of political speeches and texts, his idea is that "one is the question of what the text means, the other the question of what its author may have meant"²⁹⁶. The following paragraph will reflect on this theory and other related theoretical formulations proposed by Skinner.

Thanks to the analysis of several speeches and declarations by Nasser, this thesis highlights the central role that language played in the construction of Nasserism. It is important to highlight that one of the most significant characteristics of Nasser's speeches, which could not be fully explored in this thesis, is his choice to speak in dialect rather than in classical Arabic (الفصحى, *al-fusha*). This aspect is crucial to the broader analysis of political action and discourse from a Skinnerian perspective, as it underscores the Rais intention to be fully understood by the people, his people.

In this context, Quentin Skinner's theoretical framework proves useful in assessing whether Nasser's words and actions were intended to achieve the outcomes they ultimately produced. Skinner's theory of "contextualism" suggests that political discourse should always be interpreted within its historical setting. According to Skinner, there are no timeless ideas, only statements made at specific moments²⁹⁷. Thus, understanding the political context is key to uncovering the intended meaning behind political acts. This interpretative key is particularly useful in trying to answer the research question. Although this thesis does not explicitly adopt Skinner's contextualist method, attention to historical and political context has been a constant throughout the analysis. This focus has been essential in interpreting the shifting values and concepts expressed by Nasser. A clear example is the case of economic development: although he advocated socialism, Nasser never fully abandoned capitalist mechanisms.

²⁹⁶ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113.

²⁹⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Dell'interpretazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 52.

This ambiguity can be understood in light of the Cold War era, when taking a definitive stance was particularly difficult for a country like Egypt. Another example is the case of religion: Skinner's theory of contextualization helps address the critical tension between secularism and religion in Nasserism. Indeed, from the outset, Nasser openly stated his desire to keep state and religion separate. Nonetheless, he later endorsed constitutions that placed Islam among the state's core principles. Contextualism is particularly useful here as it highlights the inappropriateness of evaluating secularism in the 1950s using today's standards and comparing the concept of secularism in a country like Egypt with its Western counterpart. Throughout this thesis, it was shown how Nasser was often portrayed as a secularist by Western media, yet this label does not fully reflect the reality, as Islam remained embedded in the constitutional framework. However, in light of contextualism, it is important to acknowledge that Nasser's approach did contain elements of secularism, arguably, the degree of secularism that was both needed and feasible for Egypt at that specific historical moment. Therefore, Skinner's contextualism method might help in solving tensions in defining the element of Nasserism as an ideology.

At the same time, another aspect of Skinner's theory proves relevant to this analysis. As previously stated, according to the British scholar, political concepts do not have fixed or permanent definitions; rather, they are statements shaped by the needs of a specific historical moment. This perspective shifts the research question from "Is there an ideological framework in Nasserism, or does it merely reflect Nationalism?" to "Can Nasserism be properly understood as an ideology, or should it be seen as a political phenomenon derived from Nationalism?". Throughout the thesis, it has been argued that Nasserism largely follows the patterns and principles typical of Nationalism, especially in relation to education and identity-building. Therefore, it is reasonable to answer the first question by affirming that Nasserism aligns with the ideology of Nationalism. However, the question remains whether it can be considered a distinct and autonomous ideology in itself, beyond its roots in Nationalism. The difficulty in identifying a coherent ideological structure, as theorized by Freedman, within the realm of Nasserism, has made it challenging to apply Freedman's morphological approach to Nasser's thought. Instead, the political speeches and actions analyzed throughout this research have led to a reconsideration of Nasserism as a political phenomenon better understood through Skinner's theoretical framework.

If observed from this final perspective and thus accepting that Nasserism was a political phenomenon that developed within the framework of Nationalism, it becomes more coherent to explain why nothing truly similar occurred in the Middle East after Nasser's death. This statement does not imply that the legacy of Nasserism is entirely absent in the Arab Peninsula or North Africa, on the contrary, it remains quite significant. However, as noted in the introduction to both the thesis and this final section, another central aim of this research was to explore why Nasserism could no longer be applied in the region.

The problem with political phenomena is that they require a specific figure to embody them, whereas ideologies are like one-size-fits-all garments that different leaders can adopt. This metaphor is particularly relevant when looking at Egypt following Nasser's death on September 28, 1970. Sadat, one of Gamal's most loyal allies, assumed leadership seemingly with the intent to continue along the same path. However, he soon realized that he could not "wear that garment" and instead launched his own political project, defined by *الانفتاح* (*infital*): a policy of economic openness toward the West and a disengagement from the Soviet bloc. Sadat lacked the charisma and personal

magnetism that Nasser infused into his policies. Thus, even though some of Sadat's decisions were, in a sense, even more radical than Nasser's, their impact never matched the historical significance of his predecessor's legacy. One interesting event where interrogate the difference between Nasser and Sadat and thus realizing the lack of an ideological structure after Nasser's death, is reflecting on the case of the Camp David Agreement. As it is well known, this process of rapprochement between Egypt and Israel has been strongly pushed by Sadat, who he has paid with his life. One way of reading this episode could be that Sadat by sitting with the enemy has betrayed an element of the Egyptian identity, or better of the Arabic identity, and thus his figure represented the end of that nationalistic identity on which Nasser built his politics. Another way of interpreting the same event highlights Sadat's inability to justify his actions to the Egyptian people, something that Nasser had always managed to do. For Gamal Abdel Nasser, the people functioned as a kind of personal confessional, a space where he openly shared his mistakes and fears. The people, in turn, saw him as one of their own. They did not necessarily embrace all the ideological principles he promoted, but they supported him because of how he embodied and communicated those ideas. This dynamic exemplifies the distinction between the enduring power of an ideology and the more ephemeral impact of a political phenomenon rooted in personal leadership. This dynamic could serve as an explanation of why to Nasser every mistake was forgiven, while Sadat was never justified by his contemporaries, who perceived his decision as an error.

The power of Nasser as political phenomenon, and not as an ideology, is extremely visible in one specific event of his political life: after the Egyptian defeat of 1967, the Rais pronounced a speech which is today seen as "the apogee of his political career and the onset of his decline"²⁹⁸. What Nasser did the 9th June 1967 is what scholars define as a *coup de main*. Indeed, by presenting his resignation to his Union Socialist Council, he launches "an act of defiance toward the masses: if they accept it, power is lost, but if they reject it, Nasser will be saved from the defeat of the war, enacting a distortion of reality and establishing a direct relationship with the people that will allow him to concentrate all power in his hands"²⁹⁹. This move was built both on political and military strategy, but a consistent part of it was the emotional and rhetorical component in his speech, as always. The speech was built on a sentimental climax which culminated in: "I have decided to completely and permanently step down from any official post and any political role and return to the ranks of the people, fulfilling my duty alongside them as any other citizen" and concludes with "My heart is entirely with you, and I want all of your hearts to be with me, and may Allah be with us all, bringing hope, light, and guidance to our hearts"³⁰⁰. What happened after this speech is explicable only from an emotional perspective, the people occupied the streets of Cairo and children were waiting for "going to Gamal and ask him to stay"³⁰¹. Journalists described that reaction as a sign of anguish and thus as a desperate move that represented the inability of the people to discern the nation from the person. But that gesture

²⁹⁸ Melcangi, Alessia. "Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser tra mito pubblico e identità privata." *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 62, no. 3 (settembre 2007): 329–359.

²⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 351.

³⁰⁰ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Resignation Address*, June 9, 1967, American Rhetoric. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gamelabdelnasser1967resignationaddress.htm>.

³⁰¹ Daumal, J. Leroy, M. Nasser: *la vita, il pensiero, i testi esemplari*. Tradotto da Patrizia Mazzali. Milano: Accademia, 1970.

symbolized also the strength of the political phenomenon that Nasser incarnated, it was not the ideology moving the mass, it was the Rais himself. The personification of Gamal's politic had now become evident.

Thus, as was stated in the introduction, this thesis attempted to observe Nasserism as an ideology, following Freedman's framework, but ultimately it proposes another perspective on the issue, namely, Skinner's political acts theory. Throughout the second and the third chapter the impossibility, at least with these sources, of finding coherence among the ideological concepts in Nasserism through time, is evident. For this specific reason, the phenomenon of Nasserism seems to be better explained by Skinner's theory, completely opposite to Freedman's one. This parabola encapsulates the dynamism that the thesis sought to evoke and provoke throughout its development. Through the research question, an attempt was made to dismantle the static black-and-white portrait that so often stands alone in commemorating the legacy of Nasserism. Although Freedman's morphological method did not lead to a clearly defined ideology, the analysis nonetheless highlighted the dynamism and high degree of politicization that permeated Nasser's reasoning. Nationalism served as a crucial green screen onto which political and strategic needs were projected, patched over with ideological fragments drawn from various fabrics. This latter observation gives rise to further reflections. For instance, it has become clear that Gamal, fully aware of his charismatic appeal and the unconditional love he received from the people for his actions, consistently sought to include significant references to other ideologies in his speeches, socialism is a striking example. The word "socialism," along with its entire constellation of associated terms, became extremely common in Nasser's Egypt, despite, as has been noted, there being little to no real substance of socialism itself. This raises an important question: how did Nasser perceive ideologies? Did he respect them? Or did he use them crudely, like magic formulas?

In conclusion, this final paragraph seeks to reflect on what remains of Nasser's legacy in the Middle East today, what became of it, and in what ways it can still be observed. Nationalism in this region operates differently than in the West, as highlighted in the first chapter. Without returning to the theoretical frameworks presented at the beginning of the thesis, it might be sufficient to say that in the Middle East, nationalist outcomes often result in the military's rise to power. It is a secular form of Nationalism, one that ultimately clashes with religious identity. This, for instance, helps to explain Nasser's struggle in balancing his secularism. This dynamic remains highly relevant today, as demonstrated by cases such as Gaddafi in Libya, and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, who militarized Ba'athist Nationalism to consolidate control and project regional influence. The legacy of Panarabism remains elusive and intangible, just as it was in Nasser's time, and so it continues to be today. Nevertheless, it endures as a call that Arab leaders have repeatedly tried to echo, yet without ever truly capturing its tone. Another potential research project inspired by these reflections could be a comparative study of Nasserism in relation to Gaddafi. At least on the surface, both colonels sought to achieve that long-desired Arab unity; a vision that ultimately foundered in a sea of ideological concepts, exploited by politics. Still, another point deserves at least to be raised here, although it requires further investigation in future research. Specifically, while Nasserism may not fully meet the criteria of an ideology within Freedman's framework, it is worth exploring alternative, particularly non-Western, ideological frameworks and sources to assess whether the conclusion that Nasserism is not an ideology can be universally applied. Moreover, this assertion is not meant to imply that Nasserism is not perceived as an ideology within Egypt

or the broader Middle East. On the contrary, several political parties have drawn inspiration from Nasserism and incorporated its core concepts into their platforms. A notable example is the Egyptian Dignity Party (حزب الكرامة, *ḥizb Al-Karāma*), whose very name “dignity” evokes one of the central pillars of Nasser’s legacy.

Reflecting on what remains of Nasserism in Cairo today inevitably leads to an analysis of Gamal’s successors, but that is not the aim here. Indeed, the legacy of Nationalism shaped by Nasser still lingers in the succession of military leaders who struggle to orient themselves within their own value systems. It is evident that the ghost of Gamal Abdel Nasser haunts the palaces of Cairo, reminding his successors of the immanence of both the military class and the religious authorities over the Egyptian population. Spring, and all seasons, pass through Cairo brushing the branches of the trees but not their roots. Perhaps this is why, at the height of the protests, Tahrir Square increasingly displayed posters bearing Nasser’s face, and young people sang Umm Kulthum’s songs dedicated to Nasserism³⁰². What remains is the image, the sound, the memory of the true feeling of being independent for the first time since the formal independence of Egypt. Yet while Nasser himself was able to erase or overshadow his mistakes to make them seem negligible, his memory does not possess this power. The errors of Nasserism, produced by a politics rooted more in unpredictability and hunger than in reflection and faith were paid for by Egyptians and Arabs alike (an example is the Palestinian question).

This section has offered some reflections that emerge from the conclusion of this thesis. The final answer provided by this research to the questions posed at the outset can be summarized as follows: no, there is no independent and autonomous ideology underpinning the structure of the Nasserist phenomenon. Some ideologies play a marginal role, such as socialism, while others, like Nationalism, constitute their vast backdrop. However, in the analysis of Nasser as a figure and of his political actions, it becomes clear that what we are dealing with is a political phenomenon rather than an ideology.

This distinction between political phenomenon and ideology serves as a starting point for diving into the *mare magnum* of the contemporary Middle East and asking why Gamal Abdel Nasser came to be seen as the Last Arab, why no one after him has fully embraced his legacy. It has already been noted that Gaddafi, at least initially, tried to use Nasser’s image to revive the dream of Arab unity, and it cannot be said that he lacked charisma. Yet the results were disappointing and, at times, disconcerting.

Certainly, the absence of a coherent ideological framework does not help in attempts at Nasserism replication; it’s like trying to bake a cake without a mold: using the same ingredients, in the same quantities, following the recipe step by step, but without the mold, the cake will never come out the same. Nasser took that mold and absorbed it completely into his persona, making it now impossible to replicate; or perhaps the mold never existed in the first place, as this thesis has tried to argue, it was merely a convenient container that turned out to be useful or not depending on the purpose, but which eventually melted together with the batter under the oven’s heat. From any angle one looks at it, one must acknowledge that Nasserism was and still is a pillar of Arab political heritage, but its legacy seems extremely difficult to revive. A substantial sorting of what did not work would be necessary, to

³⁰² Claudio Agostoni, “Musica: rivoluzione rap e i suoni del nuovo Medio Oriente,” *Style Magazine*, Corriere della Sera, 4 gennaio 2019, <https://style.corriere.it/lifestyle/musica-rap-rivoluzione-hip-hop-medioriente/>.

isolate it; peoples do not forget authoritarianism, deprivation of liberty, or the fear of dying in war, they simply get used to it. And Nasser was very easy to get used to.

Still, even though one may spot photos of Gamal around the Arab peninsula and its surroundings, hung like holy images, we do not witness a genuine re-evaluation of his figure. Perhaps because, for Arabs, it's better that he remains as he is: not in need of re-evaluation, only of contextualization, which is what this thesis has attempted to offer. Faced with such a phenomenon, one cannot ignore the spirit of immanence and determinism that is particularly evident among the peoples who have grown up on the shores of the sea, especially the Mediterranean: a highway of colonizers and conquests, of cultures tossed in the holds of ships. That hypnotic sway of the sea can still be felt on the land of these regions. It almost seems that Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, with its dynamism, never arrived there, and so, those lands preserve their stillness, their certainty that *panta rei*, and thus everything remains the same. The notion of flow understood as return, rather than renewal, is what characterizes this region. The urgency to "connect the dots" does not seem to have taken root there. Dots are observed, not as stars to trace into constellations, but as planets whose influence must be accepted. In the end, the figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser is just that: a point in the history of the Arabs that cannot, or will not, be connected and turned into a line.

Aburish writes of Nasser as the Last Arab, and there is much truth in that epithet. At the end of this research, and at the beginning of many others on this topic, it seems crucial to ask whether being the Last Arab was the last thing Gamal Abdel Nasser would have ever wanted to be.

Bibliography

- Abd al-Monein Said, Aly, e Wenner, Manfred W. "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt." *Middle East Journal* 36 (1982). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4326425>.
- Aburish, Saïd K. "Nasser: The Last Arab". London: Duckworth, 2004.
- Al-Gurg, Easa Saleh, e James Craig. "The Wells of Memory: An Autobiography". London: J. Murray, 1998.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism". Revised edition. London New York: Verso, 2016.
- Anshen, Ruth Nanda, e Ernst Jäckh, a c. di. *Mid-East: "World-Center: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow"*. Science of Culture Series 7. New York, NY: Cooper Square Publishers, 1975.
- Breuilly, John. "The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism". 1. ed. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013.
- Brown, Nathan J. e Project Muse, a c. di. "Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government". Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Campanini, Massimo. "Storia dell'Egitto contemporaneo: dalla rinascita ottocentesca a Mubarak. Islam. Popoli e culture". Roma: Lavoro, 2005.
- Cleveland, William L., e Martin Bunton, a c. di. "A History of the Modern Middle East". 6. ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016.
- Cochran, Judith. "Education in Egypt". Routledge Library Editions. Egypt. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Corrao, Maria Francesca. "La Rinascita islamica. Il nazionalismo di Muhammad Farîd (a study on National Egyptian party and unedited letters)". Quaderni del Laboratorio Antropologico 2. Palermo: Università di Palermo, 1985.
- Danielson, Virginia. "The voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthûm, Arabic song, and Egyptian society in the twentieth century". Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Dawn, Clarence Ernest. "From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism". Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973.
- Delanoue, Gilbert, "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir: Syrie, Égypte, Tunisie, Algérie". CEDEJ - Égypte/Soudan, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cedej.2817>.
- Di Peri, Rosita, e Francesco Mazzucotelli. "Guida alla politica mediorientale". Firenze: Mondadori Università, 2021.

- Downie, R. S. "An Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767). By Adam Ferguson. Edited with an Introduction by Duncan Forbes." *Philosophy* 42, fasc. 162 (ottobre 1967). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100001595>.
- Dressler, Markus, Armando Salvatore, e Monika Wohlrab-Sahr. "Islamicate Secularities: Neue Perspektiven Auf Ein Umstrittenes Konzept Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept". *Historical Social Research* 44 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.12759/HSR.44.2019.3.7-34>.
- Egypt. Provisional Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1954. Cairo, 1954.
- Egypt. Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1956. Cairo, 1956.
- Egypt. Constitutional Charter of the United Arab Republic, 1962. Cairo, 1962.
- Egypt. Constitution of the United Arab Republic, 1964. Cairo, 1964.
- El Shakry, Omnia S. *Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014.
- ElGhouty, Amal Soliman. "Public Debt and Economic Growth in Egypt". *Business and Economic Research* 8, fasc. 3 (4 settembre 2018). <https://doi.org/10.5296/ber.v8i3.13443>.
- Esposito, John L. *Islam and Politics*. 4. ed. "Contemporary Issues in the Middle East". Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1998.
- Ferrand, Antoinette. "'Youth' in Nasser's Time: A Class Identity". *ZMO Working Papers*, 2024, fasc. 38. <https://doi.org/10.58144/20240410-000>.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, e Gregory Moore. "Addresses to the German Nation". *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008.
- Freedon, Michael, "Ideology: A Very Short Introduction". Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment". New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Gellner, Ernest. "Nations and Nationalism". 2nd ed. *New Perspectives on the Past*. Malden (Mass.) Oxford (GB): Blackwell, 2006.
- . "Thought and Change". *The Nature of Human Society Series*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.
- Gerges, Fawaz. "Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East". Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Gerschenkron, Alexander. "Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays". Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Pr, 1979.

- Ghiglia, Marianna. "Journalists and Social Welfare Provisions in Egypt (1952-Today): A Contribution to the Understanding of the Welfare-State Transformation Process". *Égypte Soudan Mondes Arabes*, fasc. 25 (1 giugno 2024). <https://journals.openedition.org/esma/3407>.
- Gordon, Joel S. "Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation. Makers of the Muslim World". Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2012.
- Hale, William M. "Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774". 3 ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013.
- Halid, Halil. "Crescent Versus The Cross" (Classic Reprint). Forgotten Books, 2022.
- Harik, Iliya. "The Single Party as a Subordinate Movement: The Case of Egypt". *World Politics* 26, fasc. 1 (ottobre 1973). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009918>.
- Hatem, Mervat F. "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, fasc. 2 (maggio 1992). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800021541>.
- Haykal, Muhammad Hasanayn. "Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes". London: Corgi Books, 1988.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried von. "Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings". Indianapolis, Ind. Cambridge, Mass: Hackett, 2004.
- Hobsbawm, E J. "On Nationalism". London: Little, 2021.
- Hutchinson, John, "Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science". London: Routledge, 2002.
- "International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities". [Accessed 19 May 2025]. <https://portal.issn.org/resource/ISSN/2615-7403>.
- Jacquemond, Richard, e Richard Jacquemond. « Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt ». Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008.
- Keddie, Nikki R., e Yann Richard, a c. di. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Kellner, Douglas. "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention." *Polity* 25, fasc. 3 (primavera 1993): 397–417.
- Khalidi, Rashid. *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Khalil, Esam Abdel. "Ecco l'Egitto di Nasser, socialista senza rivoluzione". *Limes*, 20 dicembre 2019. <https://www.limesonline.com/ecco-legitto-di-nasser-socialista-senza-rivoluzione/>.

- Korany, Bahgat, e Ali E. Hillal Dessouki. "The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization". Cairo, Egypt: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 1994.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 50th anniversary edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Lazzara, Michela. "Nasser and the Revolution's Philosophy." *Itinerari Rivista di Studi Politici* 2 (2023): 91–100.
- Levtzion, Nehemia, and Randall L. Pouwels. The History of Islam in Africa. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000.
- Lorenzetti, Gianluca. "Nasser e il suo pensiero nella filosofia della rivoluzione". *Academia*, s.d. https://www.academia.edu/36765670/NASSER_E_IL_SUO_PENSIERO_NE_LA_FILOSOFIA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE.
- Lukes, Steven. "Power: A Radical View". 2. ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism". Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Maraffi, Silvia. "Resilience and Postcolonial Political Thought". *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, fasc. 3 2020.
- Markovitz, Daniel. "The 1956 War and the Reshaping of the Middle East". New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2023.
- Marx, Karl. "Il capitale: critica dell'economia politica". Edited by Eugenio Sbardella. Translated by da Ruth Meyer. Ed. integrale. Roma: Newton Compton, 2015
- Masarwa, Amira, e Mehdi Abdou. "The Politics of Nasserism: Rethinking Revolutionary Arab Nationalism". *Arab Studies Quarterly* 40, fasc. 2 (2018): 144–58.
- McDowall, David. "A Modern History of the Kurds". 3. ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.
- Mearsheimer, John J. "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics". New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.
- Meier, Daniel P. "Fanon, Nkrumah and the African Revolution: A Historical Perspective on Political Ideologies". *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 44, fasc. 1 2019.
- Merriam-Webster. "Modernity." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Accessed 20 May 2025. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/modernity>.
- Messina, Antonio. "Una rivoluzione per l'Egitto: il progetto di Nasser (prima parte)." *Il pensiero storico*. Accessed 1 February 2025. <https://ilpensierostorico.com/una-rivoluzione-per-legitto-il-progetto-di-nasser-prima-parte/>.

- Miller, Terry. "The Gulf Cooperation Council: Contemporary Directions". Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.
- Mitra, Debraj, e Elena Biletskaya. "The Impact of Nationalism on Regional Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa". *International Journal of Political Science and Development Studies* 3 (2021): 15–28.
- Mouline, Nabil. "Tahar Haddad and the Question of Women in Tunisia". *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, fasc. 2 (2006): 1–33.
- Murray, John Courtney. "We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition". 1st ed. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.
- Nagel, Thomas. "The View from Nowhere." Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Nasser, Gamal Abdel. "Philosophy of Revolution". A cura di Enrico Galoppini. Passaggio al Bosco, 2023.
- Nasser, Gamal Abdel, e Leila Ahmed. "Selected Speeches and Writings." In *Voices of Egypt: The New Generation*, edited by James Jankowski. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004.
- Nassib, Sélim. "Ti ho amata per la tua voce". edigita 2024, 2024
- Norton, Augustus Richard. "Hezbollah: A Short History". Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Owen, Roger. "State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East". London: Routledge, 2004.
- Parsons, Talcott. "The Structure of Social Action". New York: Free Press, 1937.
- Perkins, Kenneth J. "A History of Modern Tunisia". Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Petersen, Andrew. "Dictionary of Islamic Architecture". London: Routledge, 1996.
- Poullada, Leon B. "Arab Nationalism and the Iranian Revolution". *Middle East Journal* 41, fasc. 3 (estate 1987): 371–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4327754>.
- Powell, Jonathan M. "Nasser and the 1956 War: A Reappraisal." *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, fasc. 4 (ottobre 2008): 589–614.
- Qaddumi, Hanan. "The Palestinian Nationalism: Historical and Ideological Perspectives". *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, fasc. 1 (2021): 45–70.
- Rabinovich, Itamar. "The War for Lebanon, 1970–1985". Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Richards, Alan, and John Waterbury. "A Political Economy of the Middle East". 4. ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008.

- Robinson, Cynthia. "The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage", edited by Norman Itzkowitz. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Rogan, Eugene L. "The Arabs: A History". New York: Basic Books, 2009.
- Rugh, William A. "Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics". Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004.
- Said, Edward W. "Orientalism". New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de, Richard Howard, e Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. "The Little Prince". 1st ed. San Diego: Harcourt, 2000.
- Sater, James N. "The Military and the Egyptian State". *Middle East Report*, no. 189 (1994): 4–9.
- Sayigh, Yezid. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Schmid, Alex P. "The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research". 2. ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.
- Shlaim, Avi. "The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World". New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Sinno, Abdulkader H. "Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond". Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Smith, Anthony D. "Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History". Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- Sperber, Jonathan. "Revolutionary Europe, 1780-1850". 1. ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Starr, Stephen. "The Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt". *Middle East Quarterly* 10, fasc. 2 (primavera 2003): 19–27.
- Stora, Benjamin. "Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History". Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Taha, Salma. "The Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian Society". *Middle East Journal* 42, fasc. 1 (1988): 21–35.
- Tawil, Ziad. "Revolution and Social Change in the Arab World". *Journal of Arab Studies* 10, fasc. 2 (2020): 130–50.
- Thucydides, Rex Warner, Moses I. Finley, e Thucydides. "History of the Peloponnesian War". Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Tibi, Bassam. "The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder". Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Tripp, Charles. "A History of Iraq". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007.

Unamuno, Miguel de. "Essenza della Spagna e altri saggi". Edited by Gianni Puglisi e Carlo Bo. Ed. riv. /. Gli anelli mancanti. Milano: Bompiani, 2015.

Van Dyke, Paul. "The Palestine Liberation Organization and the Politics of Terrorism". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, fasc. 3 (1994): 37–58.

Vatikiotis, Panayiotis J. "The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak". Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Weinstein, Bruce. "Egyptian Nationalism and the Struggle for Independence". *Middle East Journal* 22, fasc. 3 (1968): 300–12.

Winter, Stefan. "The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1788". Cambridge Middle East Library. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Giovanni Orsina, my thesis supervisor, whose classes first introduced me to the fascinating world of political thought. From the very first lecture, I was struck by his ability to read the world through the lens of ideologies with such depth and clarity. Having the opportunity to engage in academic dialogue with him throughout this research has allowed me to approach systems of thought and political structures that once felt distant, and in many ways still do, as I am just beginning. I sincerely thank him for his availability, his guidance, and for encouraging me to dig into this topic as patiently and attentively as archaeologists at work.

I also wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Maria Francesca Corrao, my co-supervisor, whose classes and guidance have profoundly shaped the trajectory of my academic journey. Being welcomed into her Arabic classroom was not only an intellectual experience but a transformative one. Her passion, for Middle East, for its history, for the deep meanings behind its culture, its languages, and its complex stories, has inspired me to dedicate myself to studying this region with the same curiosity, care, and commitment. Whether explaining intricate grammatical rules or unraveling the historical layers that shape today's realities, her enthusiasm has been contagious and has fueled my own desire to explore and understand this fascinating part of the world. I am especially grateful for our many conversations in her office, the books she generously lent me, her insightful advice, and the wealth of recommendations she offered, which enriched both my thinking and my soul. Her professionalism, kindness, and warmth have left a lasting impact.

A special and heartfelt thank you goes to Professor Mervat Abbas. Without her, understanding Nasser would have been, quite frankly, far less fun, and far more difficult. I am immensely grateful for her personal stories, which brought me closer to *her* Egypt. Thank you for your patience and dedication in correcting my translations and for always encouraging me to dig deeper.

I am also deeply thankful to my Arabic language teachers, Professor Hussein Al-Kazraji and Professor Abdulkadir, whose teaching laid the foundations for my journey into a language I deeply love. Nothing in this thesis could have been written without Arabic, and I am grateful to all my Arabic professors, Professor Corrao, Professor Abbas, Professor Al-Kazraji, and Professor Abdulkadir, for opening the door not merely to a language, but to an entire culture and worldview that have deeply shaped my journey. ألف شكر لكم

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the librarians at Luiss University, who not only supported me with great professionalism in finding sources but also provided emotional support. Their genuine interest in my research, kindness, and patience made the journey lighter and more encouraging.

Navigating between the language of ideology and Arabic has been both a challenging and fascinating journey. I am grateful to have been able to breathe in the passion each one of these extraordinary professors puts into their work. I can only hope I have done justice to their teachings in this piece of research.