



Arab Nationalism and Contemporary Arab Political Thought: Comparative Perspectives from Nasserism and Gaddafism

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Abstract: nationalism as a school of thought was one of the most important and influential intellectual currents affecting the political and social sphere of Arab societies in the twentieth century. By influencing contemporary Arab political thought, this movement prompted a rethinking and reorganisation of the fundamental policies and orientations of certain Arab states, as well as the adoption of specific policies with defined objectives, the most important of which were Arab unity and liberation from colonialism. Nasser and Gaddafi, the leaders of Egypt and Libya, were among the most prominent leaders who embraced the ideology of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century and sought to operationalise it within the actual context of Arab society. In order to realise the goals of Arab nationalism, these two Arab leaders, while modifying their countries' domestic and foreign policies, provided the necessary grounds for its popular acceptance. Recognising the necessity and importance of examining the issue of Arab nationalism and the possibility of reviving this intellectual and political current in the future, the author has investigated its roots. In this regard, while elucidating the concept of Arab nationalism, the study examines its intellectual and political origins as well as the foundations and principles of this school of thought. Subsequently, adopting an analytical-comparative approach, the study examines and compares the experiences of the two Arab leaders who were standard-bearers of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century—namely Nasser and Gaddafi—and discusses the successes and failures of their nationalist policies.

Keywords: Arab Nationalism, Political Thought, Arab Societies, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Muammar Gaddafi.

Introduction

Arab nationalism is one of the most prominent intellectual and political movements in the Islamic world, which emerged in some countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This movement was associated with a historical period marked by profound political, social and cultural transformations, including the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, increased European colonial interventions, and the rise of liberation movements in the Arab region. Arab nationalism emerged as an intellectual and political project seeking to unite the Arab peoples within a national framework based on a common language, history, culture and destiny, while at the same time striving to achieve political independence, development and cultural renaissance. Arab nationalism was a direct response to the fragmentation and dependency of the Arab world. The movement sought to strengthen Arab identity and counter attempts at foreign domination, and over time became one of the most important intellectual pillars of Arab political and liberation movements. Arab nationalist thought witnessed significant development throughout the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, coinciding with the emergence of several leaders and political movements that embraced the project of Arab unity and national liberation.

Gamal Abdel Nasser is considered one of the most prominent figures of this intellectual school, having effectively given identity to the idea of Arab nationalism. By calling on Arabs to unite, supporting national liberation movements, and striving to create a strong Arab state capable of confronting colonialism and international challenges, he transformed Arab nationalism from mere theoretical ideas into an influential political project in the Arab world. The Nasserist experience became a symbol of the revival of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Later, Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, emerged as one of the leaders influenced by Nasserist thought, seeking to continue the project of Arab nationalism. He supported the slogans of Arab unity and liberation, proposed numerous unity initiatives, and presented his "Third Universal Theory" in the *Green Book* as an attempt to build a political and intellectual model distinct from traditional systems. However, Gaddafi's experience was characterised by a unique

combination of nationalist ideology, revolutionary ambitions and multifaceted political developments. The importance of this research lies in examining the impact of Arab nationalism on contemporary Arab political thought through the study of two political experiences that significantly influenced the trajectory of Arab nationalism: the Nasserist and Gaddafi experiences. This research also seeks to analyse the similarities and differences between these two experiences, assess their success in implementing the project of Arab nationalism, and examine the reasons for the decline of Arab nationalism and the challenges it faces in the contemporary era. In this regard, while explaining the concept of Arab nationalism and its intellectual and political roots, the author adopts an analytical-comparative approach to examine the intellectual texts and practical policies associated with these two experiences and analyses their impact on contemporary Arab political thought.

1. Theoretical Foundation of the Research: Arab Nationalism

There is no doubt that Arab nationalism can be described as an intellectual and political endeavour to unite the Arab peoples within a national framework based on common language, history, culture and destiny, while at the same time striving to achieve independence, unity and development (Al-Tamimi, 2023: 54). Furthermore, it can be seen as a reaction to fragmentation and foreign domination, encompassing the aspirations of the Arab people for political freedom and the establishment of a strong Arab state capable of confronting external challenges. With the development of Arab political thought, Arab nationalism became a central theme for many political projects and liberation movements, especially in the post-Second World War period. Despite the diversity of intellectual tendencies within the Arab nationalist movement, they all agreed on the existence of a united Arab nation with common characteristics, and that this nation deserved a unified political entity expressing its will and cultural identity (Nasr, 2020: 95).

The term "nationalism" refers to a group of people bound together by specific ties such as common origin, language, territory or customs. Thus, nationalism means belonging to a human group

characterised by unifying features that give it an identity distinct from other groups. As for "Arabism" (*al-'urūbah*), it means belonging to the Arab nation, which speaks Arabic and shares a common history, culture and heritage. Therefore, Arab nationalism signifies the sense of common unity and belonging among Arabs and their efforts to preserve and defend that unity (Malik, 2021: 46). Some Arab scholars believe that Arab nationalism is one of the modern forms of European nationalism, but it became distinct because of its connection to Arab reality and issues of national liberation and resistance to colonialism (Al-Jabri, 2019: 69).

Arab nationalism was not merely a distinguishing label vis-à-vis other nationalities, but rather is defined as an intellectual and political movement aimed at uniting the Arab peoples within a single political framework based on the Arabic language, shared history, shared culture and common interests. This school of thought also seeks to achieve political independence, liberate from foreign domination, and bring about a comprehensive Arab renaissance. Thus, Arab nationalism can be considered a political project that seeks to eliminate the borders imposed by colonialism between Arab countries and to achieve Arab unity that would bring strength and progress to the Arab nation. This ideology was accompanied by slogans such as unity, freedom and socialism, especially during the heyday of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. The Emergence of Arab Nationalist Thought

The first signs of Arab nationalist thought emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The weakening and decline of the Ottoman Empire was one of the most important factors contributing to the emergence of Arab nationalist thought. Concurrent with the decline of the Empire's military and political power, various nationalist movements emerged in these lands. One of the contexts for the emergence of this thought was Arab dissatisfaction with the intensification of Turkification policies of the Ottoman Empire pursued by the Committee of Union and Progress, which led Arabs to suffer from political and administrative marginalisation (Al-Isawi, 2021: 102). This led to the growth of Arab national awareness and the

emergence of demands for broader political and cultural rights within the framework of the Ottoman state, though these had not yet developed into demands for independence. On the other hand, the modern Arab renaissance contributed to the revival of Arab national sentiment, as the Arab world witnessed a broad intellectual and cultural movement manifested in the expansion of journalism, printing, education, and the emergence of literary and cultural societies. Arab intellectuals also played an important role in promoting Arab identity by calling for the revival of the Arabic language and Arab-Islamic heritage, and emphasising the cultural and civilisational unity of the Arabs. Furthermore, anti-colonial thought and its growth in these countries had a significant impact on the formation and spread of Arab nationalism. The struggle against European colonialism was a powerful impetus for the development of Arab nationalist thought; the Arab peoples realised that their fragmentation and political weakness facilitated foreign control over their countries. Therefore, Arab nationalism as a school of thought gained the attention of the peoples of Arab countries as a means of liberation from colonialism and the achievement of unity and independence. The events and developments of the First World War also contributed to the growth of this thought. The conclusion of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the issuance of the Balfour Declaration by Britain were among the most important developments that helped the emergence of Arab nationalism; these agreements and declarations led Arabs to think that the colonial powers sought to fragment the Arab region and prevent its unity (Yasin, 2020: 111).

The Great Arab Revolt of 1916 is considered a pivotal point in the development of Arab nationalist thought, as it represented the Arabs' attempt to liberate themselves from Ottoman rule and establish an independent Arab state. Although the revolt did not achieve all its goals due to colonial interventions, it helped consolidate the idea of Arab unity and national independence (Darrāj, 2020: 79).

In theorising and constructing the discourse of Arab nationalism, a large number of Arab thinkers played a role. Through their works and scholarly and literary productions, they contributed to the development of Arab nationalist thought and the formulation of its

political and intellectual concepts, exerting a clear influence on Arab nationalist movements (Anīs, 2022: 71). Among these famous Arab theorists is Sati' al-Husri. This Syrian thinker, considered one of the founders of Arab nationalism and one of its most prominent theorists, emphasised the importance of language and history in the formation of the Arab nation. He believed that the Arab nation exists through the unity of language and culture, and that political unity should be based on this. Al-Husri also called for the spread of national education and the strengthening of Arab identity among new generations, believing that regional differences weaken the Arab nation (Al-Husri, 2021: 58). Among his most important works is the book *Arā' wa Ahādīth fī al-'Ilm wa al-Akhlāq wa al-Thaqāfah*. Another scholar in this field is Michel 'Aflaq. 'Aflaq was a Syrian philosopher, sociologist, theorist and nationalist political activist, considered one of the most important nationalist thinkers who played a fundamental role in founding the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. 'Aflaq, who later became Secretary-General of the Ba'ath Party, emphasised the idea of Arab unity, especially unity between Syria and Egypt, and the cultural revival of the Arab nation, linking Arab nationalism with socialism. He believed that the Arabs are one nation with a civilisational message, and that the Arab renaissance requires freedom, unity and intellectual renewal. In 1958, he published a book entitled *Ma'rakat al-Maṣīr al-Wāḥid* (The Battle for the Single Destiny), a collection of his writings and mainly his articles, in which he argued that Western imperialism and Zionism were the greatest obstacles to Arab unity (Sha'bān, 2022: 158). The intellectual influence of 'Aflaq on Arab nationalist thought was so great that some consider him the spiritual father of Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq from 1979 to 2003. Zaki al-Arsuzi, one of the early and main founders of the Ba'ath Party, was interested in the Arabic language as the true basis of Arab nationalism, believing that the language expresses the spirit of the nation and its civilisational existence. Another of the most important theorists in this field is Constantine Zurayq, a Syrian historian and president of the University of Syria, who published numerous works. In his book *Ma'nā al-Nakbah* (The Meaning of the Disaster, 1948), he writes that the Arab defeat in Palestine is not merely a temporary setback or violence, but

truly a disaster (Al-Anṣārī, 2020: 142). Zurayq considered the modern Arab renaissance to be his most important idea for Arab nationalism, calling for scientific and cultural development of Arab society to confront backwardness and colonialism (Būjilāl, 2023: 58). Finally, mention must be made of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, as one of the greatest Arab leaders, embodied Arab nationalist thought in practice, gave identity to the project of Arab unity, and provided practical support to national liberation movements in the Arab world. His impact on Arab nationalism was such that Nasserism became one of the most important nationalist tendencies in the twentieth century (Al-Bahnasī, 2022: 57). Overall, these thinkers organised the theoretical foundations of the Arab nationalist movement and played an important role in shaping the core concepts of this thought, including unity, identity and freedom, which later became the most prominent themes in contemporary Arab political thought. Drawing on their opinions and theories, we can determine the most important intellectual principles and foundations of Arab nationalism that played a fundamental role in the political thought of the Arab world in the twentieth century. Accordingly, the most important and central axis of this thought was unity, which was emphasised by these thinkers at various levels and in different subjects, presenting itself as the core of Arab nationalist thought. This interconnected set of intellectual foundations and principles, which will be mentioned below, constituted the core of the most important political movement of the Arabs in the twentieth century (see Al-Qadhdhāfi, 2020: 25):

A. **Linguistic Unity:** The Arabic language is one of the most important pillars of Arab nationalism, as it is an essential element in uniting the Arab people and their cultural and intellectual ties. Arabic is not merely a means of communication but a vessel for a shared civilisation, heritage and identity.

B. **Unity of History:** Arab nationalists believe that the Arabs have a long and interconnected history, ranging from ancient Arab civilisations, through the Islamic era, to modern times. This history is considered a vital factor in strengthening the sense of national belonging.

C. **Cultural Unity:** The Arab people share a wide range of customs, traditions, and social and cultural values that reinforce a sense of collective Arab identity. Islam has also played a very important role in shaping Arab culture, although Arab nationalism was not based solely on religion.

D. **Unity of Destiny:** Arab nationalist thought emphasises that Arab countries face common challenges and interests, such as issues of development, security, freedom and confronting foreign interventions, making cooperation and unity essential to achieving stability and progress.

E. **Unity and the Struggle against Colonialism:** Arab nationalism is founded on two main objectives: liberation from foreign domination and the achievement of Arab unity. Arab nationalists believed that political fragmentation weakened the Arab nation and prevented it from achieving development and strength. One of the ways to combat colonialism is unity among the Arab people.

F. **Social Justice:** Arab nationalism, especially in Nasserist and Ba'athist thought, was linked to the principles of social justice and the reduction of economic inequalities, believing that national renaissance could not be achieved without improving the conditions of the poor classes and achieving economic development.

3. Gamal Abdel Nasser and Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalism in the modern era is closely linked to the experience of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser, one of the most prominent political figures, played a pivotal and central role in transforming Arab nationalist thought from merely theoretical ideas into a practical political project that sought to achieve Arab unity, liberation from colonialism, and the creation of a comprehensive Arab renaissance. Under Nasser's rule, Egypt became a centre for nationalist and liberation movements in the Arab world. The Nasserist experience, which constitutes an important stage in the history of contemporary Arab political thought, was based on a set of principles, notably Arab unity, resistance to colonialism, the achievement of social justice, and support for national liberation movements. Through his nationalist actions and activities, especially after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and confronting the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, he created a

heroic image of himself among the peoples of Arab countries, making him a symbol of Arab nationalism and national liberation. Nasserism, or Arab nationalism based on Nasser's experience, despite its invaluable achievements, faced major internal and external challenges that ultimately led to the decline of the Arab nationalist project, especially after the 1967 defeat (Ghulayyūn, 2020: 39).

3.1. Nasser's Intellectual and Political Background

Gamal Abdel Nasser was born in Alexandria in 1918 into an environment where nationalist sentiment against British occupation of Egypt was increasingly on the rise. From a young age, he was influenced by the political situation in Egypt and the Arab world, particularly the prevalence of widespread poverty and corruption and the domination of foreign powers over political and economic decision-making in these countries. Upon joining the military academy, his political and nationalist ideas began to take shape. In those years, Nasser believed that British occupation should be brought to an end and a political system established in Egypt that would realise social justice and national independence. Arab nationalist ideas, especially the idea of Arab unity which was then a common thought in Arab societies, also attracted Nasser as a way to confront colonialism and fragmentation (Haykal, 2020: 126).

The 1948 Palestine War was one of the important factors shaping his political consciousness. Nasser came to believe that the weakness and fragmentation of Arab regimes were among the reasons for the defeat by the Zionist movement. Based on this view, he began to contemplate the necessity of radical political change and the establishment of a strong Arab system capable of confronting external challenges. He was also influenced by the idea of national liberation and came to believe that political independence must be accompanied by economic and cultural freedom, and that the Arab renaissance could not be achieved without social justice and economic development. Later, when he assumed political power, Nasser combined Arab nationalism and socialism, implementing policies such as land reform, nationalisation of some economic institutions, and expansion of the state's role in the economy (Uthmānī, 2023: 64).

The revolution of 23 July 1952 in Egypt is considered one of the most important political events in the modern history of Egypt and the Arab world, and a turning point in the political life of the Arabs. This revolution was led by the Free Officers Movement, of which Gamal Abdel Nasser was one of the most prominent leaders. The 1952 revolution occurred as a result of a combination of political, social and economic factors, especially the spread of corruption within the monarchy, British colonial control over Egypt's decision-making, and deteriorating economic and social conditions. It had six objectives, also known as the six principles of the revolution: the eradication of colonialism, the destruction of feudalism, the elimination of monopolies and control of capital, the establishment of social justice, the creation of a strong national army, and the establishment of a sound democratic life. One of the most important achievements of this revolution was the fall of the monarchical political system in 1953 and the proclamation of the republic. Nasser then gradually emerged as an effective leader in the Egyptian government. In fact, it can be said that this revolution marked the beginning of the emergence of the Arab nationalist project, because Nasser sought to turn Egypt into a centre for nationalist and liberation movements throughout the Arab world. He also consolidated Egypt's national independence by ending British influence and nationalising the Suez Canal in 1956. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal was one of the most prominent actions that strengthened Nasser's position in the Arab world and internationally. After this event, and especially after Egypt's success in confronting the tripartite aggression of Britain, France and the Zionist regime, the Arabs saw him as a symbol of national militancy and resistance to colonialism (Haykal, 2021: 91).

3.2. The Project of Arab Unity

The cornerstone of Nasser's political thought was Arab unity. He believed that the Arabs are one nation united by common language, history, culture and destiny. Nasser considered one of the main causes of weakness and backwardness in the Arab world to be the fragmentation imposed by colonialism. Accordingly, he placed on his agenda the establishment of comprehensive Arab unity based on

political, economic and military cooperation between Arab countries, aiming to create a joint force capable of confronting external challenges and achieving development. The emergence of national liberation movements and the spread of nationalist sentiment in Arab societies during the 1950s and 1960s provided the necessary context for the growth of this idea. Nasser's unity project sought to strengthen joint Arab action by supporting Arab nationalist movements, strengthening relations between Arab countries, calling for Arab solidarity, supporting the Palestinian cause, and confronting Western alliances in the region (Abd Allah, 2022: 91). Moreover, this project was closely linked to the idea of liberation from foreign influence, because he believed that Arab unity was a means to protect the independence of Arab countries and prevent foreign intervention. Despite its great popularity, this project faced various challenges, including differences in Arab political systems, conflicting regional interests, and international interventions that sought to prevent any Arab unity project (Abd al-Nāṣir, 2021: 52).

3.3. The United Arab Republic

The United Arab Republic (UAR) is one of the most prominent unity experiences in modern Arab history. In 1958, as a result of the union between Egypt and Syria led by Abdel Nasser, this republic was proclaimed. The formation of the UAR was a response to the growing nationalist sentiment in the Arab world and also a result of Syria's fear of internal and external threats at the time. The Arab masses welcomed this step and considered it the beginning of the achievement of comprehensive Arab unity. The UAR established a centralised political system, and Cairo became the centre of political decision-making. Gamal Abdel Nasser sought further to unify the political, economic and military institutions of the two countries. A few weeks later, Yemen also joined this union. The Egyptian press stated that the reason for forming this union was to create a defensive front against Western ambitions in the Middle East, especially after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Although the peoples of these countries welcomed this Arab union, in practice the union faced significant problems and obstacles. Excessive centralisation in public administration, arising

from the socialist approach of Nasser's government, economic and administrative differences that subsequently occurred between Egypt and Syria, and most importantly, the increase in political and social tensions in Syria, were among the consequences of this union that practically hampered its continuation (Al-Kawākibī, 2021: 33). In addition to these, one can mention the sense of frustration and marginalisation of Syrian elites, who had a lesser share of power in this centralised political structure.

All these factors and problems meant that the union between Egypt and Syria did not last long, and in late September 1961, with a coup in Syria, the union collapsed. Although the collapse of this union was a great blow to the Arab nationalist project and to Nasser's political personality, the experience of the UAR remained a symbol of the attempt to achieve Arab unity, revealing the challenges facing the unity project in the Arab world (Ziyādah, 2021: 44).

3.4. Support for Arab Liberation Movements

Nasser played a pivotal role in supporting national liberation movements in the Arab world and Africa, as he considered resistance to colonialism an essential part of the Arab nationalist project. During Nasser's rule, Egypt supported numerous liberation movements, with this support taking political, media and military forms. The Algerian revolution against French colonialism, support for Yemen during the Yemeni revolution, support for the Palestinian cause, and support for anti-colonial movements in Africa were among the causes that Nasser's government supported (Ḥusayb, 2022: 155). Nasser's government made great efforts to promote Arab nationalist thought and the spirit of resistance and freedom among the Arab people by launching the "Voice of the Arabs" radio station. This supportive role led to the strengthening of Egypt's regional position and turned Nasser into a symbol of national liberation in the Arab world and the Third World. At the international level, Gamal Abdel Nasser also played an important role in supporting currents and movements against the superpowers. In 1961, he played a fundamental role in the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement alongside other leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Marshal Tito. This movement sought to

keep developing countries independent from the conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs during the Cold War (Sha'bān, 2022: 149). The Nasserist project, founded on Arab nationalism and emphasising above all the unity of the Arab people, despite its widespread popularity and numerous successes during Nasser's years in power in Egypt, faced many challenges that led to its gradual decline. Among the fundamental challenges faced by the Egyptian government as a symbol of Arab nationalism, which dealt a severe blow to the edifice of Arab nationalism, are the following (Zurayq, 2019: 63):

A. **Failure of the Unity Experiment with Syria:** The collapse of the United Arab Republic in 1961 dealt a severe blow to the idea of Arab unity, as it revealed the political, administrative and economic problems that hindered unity between Arab countries.

B. **The 1967 Defeat:** The June 1967 defeat against Israel is one of the most prominent reasons that led to the decline of the Arab nationalist project, because after the military defeat and the loss of important Arab territories, the Arab masses lost a large part of their confidence in nationalist slogans.

C. **Economic Problems:** Egypt during Nasser's era faced major economic challenges resulting from the expansion of the public sector, increased military spending and the cost of wars, which affected the government's ability to achieve the economic development desired by Nasser.

D. **Arab Disputes:** Some Arab countries were dissatisfied with the idea of Arab nationalism and the leadership of the Arab world, which Nasser effectively directed, and they never stood by the Egyptian government in implementing these policies. For example, Jordan and Iraq, two countries that were concerned about the spread of Nasserist thought, opposed Nasser's policies and his nationalist project, and only two weeks after the formation of the UAR between Egypt and Syria, they entered into a mutual pact aimed at confronting the Damascus-Cairo alliance. Internal disagreements among the Arabs themselves prevented the full realisation of the Arab nationalist idea as desired by Nasser.

E. **Foreign Interventions:** Finally, foreign interventions can be cited as a factor in the failure of the Nasserist project. This policy of the

Egyptian government faced pressure from Western powers, who feared the growing influence of Arab nationalism in the region, especially in light of nationalisation policies and liberation from foreign influence.

Ultimately, Nasser's death in 1970 marked the end of an important phase of the Arab nationalist movement, but his intellectual and political influence on contemporary Arab political thought remains, because his experience remains one of the most prominent experiences of nationalism in the modern history of the Arab world (Al-Husri, 2021: 108).

4. Muammar Gaddafi and Arab Nationalism

The name of Muammar Gaddafi is tied to the projects of Arab unity and Arab nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century. From the moment he came to power in Libya in 1969, he sought to present himself as an extension of the Nasserist experience and the ideology of Arab nationalism that called for the unity of the Arab nation, liberation from colonialism and foreign dependency. Gaddafi was openly influenced by Gamal Abdel Nasser's ideas, especially regarding Arab unity, support for liberation movements and opposition to Western influence. Although Gaddafi, from the beginning of his rule, raised nationalist and unity slogans reminiscent of Nasser's ideas, his political experience was intellectually and organisationally distinct from the Nasserist experience. This issue became more serious after the presentation of the "Third Universal Theory". In his *Green Book*, through this theory, Gaddafi sought to offer an alternative political model to capitalism and socialism. Gaddafi's experience of nationalist actions also differed from the Nasserist experience in that it was accompanied by numerous transformations. Gradually, after his attempts at Arab unity failed, Gaddafi retreated from focusing on the issue of Arab unity and changed his policy to give priority to the African project. Nevertheless, the experience of Gaddafi's government is considered fundamental and important in studying the evolution and transformations of Arab nationalist thought in the modern era (Al-Durūbī, 2019: 82).

4.1. Gaddafi's Intellectual and Political Background

Muammar Gaddafi was born in 1942 into a simple Bedouin environment in Libya and grew up during the Italian colonial era and the subsequent political transformations in the Arab region. From a young age, especially after the emergence of Gamal Abdel Nasser as a symbol of Arab freedom and unity, he was strongly influenced by Arab nationalist ideas. Gaddafi saw in Nasser a model of an Arab leader capable of confronting colonialism and achieving an Arab renaissance, and was thus influenced by his political speeches and nationalist project. The "Voice of the Arabs" radio station also played an important role in shaping his political consciousness, as it broadcast nationalist and pan-Arab ideas throughout the Arab world. The influence of Gamal Abdel Nasser's political thought – itself influenced by Arab nationalism – on Gaddafi became even more apparent after the 1969 revolution and Gaddafi's rise to power. In that year, a group of young nationalist officers led by Gaddafi overthrew the monarchical rule of King Idris al-Sanusi and established the Libyan Arab Republic. After the revolution, Gaddafi declared Arab nationalism, unity and freedom to be fundamental principles of the Al-Fateh Revolution, stating that the Libyan revolution was a continuation of the Nasserist project. Gaddafi also implemented policies similar to Nasser's in Libya, such as calling on Arabs to unite, supporting liberation and anti-colonial and anti-Western movements, supporting the Palestinian cause, and adopting socialist orientations (Shunayb, 2022: 49). Gaddafi believed that the disunity of the Arabs was one of the main reasons for the weakness of the Arab nation, and therefore placed the issue of Arab unity at the forefront of his foreign policy in the early years of his rule (Al-Şallābī, 2021: 134).

4.2. Gaddafi's Unity Projects

From the time he came to power, Gaddafi sought to establish several Arab unity projects based on his belief that Arab unity is the path to power, independence and development (Ṭarāfī, 2019: 97). After Nasser's death in 1970, Gaddafi tried to preserve the idea of Arab unity by establishing closer relations with Egypt and Sudan. A tripartite union project between Libya, Egypt and Sudan was announced, but it

never materialised due to political differences and divergent orientations of the ruling regimes. In 1972, the Federation of Arab Republics was proclaimed, uniting Libya, Egypt and Syria with the aim of achieving some form of political and military unity among the three countries. However, this union remained largely symbolic and never became a real union due to political differences, especially after the change of policies during the era of Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt. Gaddafi also sought to establish a union with Tunisia, and in 1974 the "Djerba Agreement" between Libya and Tunisia was announced to create a single state. However, this project quickly failed due to internal opposition and political differences between the two sides. In addition, based on his Arab-African nationalist approach and perspective, Gaddafi proposed numerous projects for union with Arab and African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Chad and Sudan. These unions, however, practically failed for reasons such as political differences between political regimes, conflicting regional interests of states, the absence of effective unifying institutions, and reliance on personal relationships of leaders rather than institutional foundations (Al-Şallābī, 2021: 121). Despite their failure, these projects show how committed Gaddafi was at that stage to the idea of Arab unity and his attempt to play a leadership role in the Arab world.

4.3. The Green Book and the Third Universal Theory

In the mid-1970s, Gaddafi, in his *Green Book*, sought to propose a political, economic and social alternative to capitalism and socialism by presenting the "Third Universal Theory". Gaddafi's *Green Book* consisted of three parts proposing a political system, an economic system and social foundations (Ṭarāfī, 2019: 84).

4.3.1. The Political System

Gaddafi rejected the conventional political system based on traditional parliamentary forms and political parties, believing that true democracy is achieved through "people's power" via people's congresses and committees. He argued that parliamentary representation leads to the monopolisation of power and deprives people of direct participation in government (Belqazīz, 2021: 86).

4.3.2. The Economic System

Gaddafi supported a form of socialism based on the rejection of capitalist exploitation, while emphasising the redistribution of wealth and the achievement of social justice. He also raised slogans such as "the house belongs to its occupant" and "the land belongs to those who cultivate it" (Belqazīz, 2021: 73).

4.3.3. Social Foundations

This theory focused on the role of the family, society and social traditions, and also addressed issues of women, education and work. Although Gaddafi presented the Third Universal Theory as a global intellectual project, many scholars have considered it an attempt to justify the existing political system in Libya and to strengthen Gaddafi's personal authority (Shunayb, 2022: 38).

4.4. The Policy of Prioritising the African Unity Project

With the decline of Arab enthusiasm for unity projects and the failure of most Arab initiatives, Gaddafi gradually turned towards the African continent from the late 1980s and early 1990s. This new policy adopted by Gaddafi was due not only to the failure to implement Arab unity plans and disagreements with some Arab regimes, but also stemmed from Libya's international isolation and a desire to find a new regional and international role (Sha'bān, 2022: 173). In those years, Gaddafi became one of the most prominent advocates of African unity, seeking to establish the "United States of Africa" and calling for the creation of a political, economic and military union among the countries of the continent. He also played an important role in establishing the African Union in 2002 and provided financial and political support to many African countries. This policy shift led to the decline of Arab nationalist discourse in Libyan politics, and Africa effectively became the main focus of Gaddafi's foreign policy. Nevertheless, Gaddafi continued to emphasise that Libya's Arab identity does not contradict its African identity, but he considered African cooperation more realistic than the Arab unity projects that had faced repeated failures (Al-Kawākibī, 2021: 28).

Gaddafi's experience of governance based on Arab nationalism is one of the most controversial political experiences in the Arab world, because on the one hand he raised nationalist slogans and ideals of unity, and on the other hand he combined these with the establishment of a personalised political system (Abd Allah, 2022: 104). During Gaddafi's years in power, Libya, in the field of foreign policy, first emphasised Arab nationalism and the same Nasserist project, trying to play a central and pivotal role in the regional affairs of the Arab world. Accordingly, it supported Arab and African liberation movements, proposed unity based on Arab nationalism at various levels and dimensions and with numerous countries, and then, by shifting foreign policy priorities from the Arab region to Africa, tried to be the focal centre of unity in the African continent (Al-Durūbī, 2019: 67). Although this change in Libya's foreign policy priorities, as well as long-term international sanctions against the country, led to strained relations between Libya and a number of Arab and Western countries.

Finally, it can be said that Gaddafi played a prominent role in preserving the idea of Arab unity in Arab political discourse after the decline of the Nasserist project, and his government's experience greatly contributed to the continued presence of the idea of Arab nationalism and unity in Arab political discourse in the final decades of the twentieth century (Yasin, 2020: 132). At the same time, however, it revealed the challenges facing unity projects, especially given the absence of democratic institutions and real political coordination among Arab countries. This experience also showed that nationalist slogans alone are not sufficient to achieve unity or development, and that the success of any unity project requires strong political, economic and institutional foundations.

5. Comparison of the Two Experiences of Governance Based on Arab Nationalist Thought

The experiences of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muammar Gaddafi are among the most prominent political experiences related to the idea of nationalism and Arab unity in contemporary Arab political thought. Each of them sought to present a political project based on national liberation, Arab unity and confronting foreign influence, and both

strove to strengthen the regional role of their countries in the Arab world. Despite the obvious similarities between these two experiences, there are also fundamental differences regarding their intellectual foundations, the nature of their political systems, governance mechanisms, methods of managing state affairs and their foreign relations. These similarities and differences directly influenced the outcomes of both experiences and their place in Arab political thought. Furthermore, the comparative study of these two experiences helps to understand the development of Arab nationalist thought and the factors that played a role in its rise and subsequent decline in the second half of the twentieth century (Husayb, 2022: 132).

5.1. Similarities and Differences between the Political Experiences of Nasser and Gaddafi

Despite the different historical and political circumstances surrounding each of these two experiences, there were common aspects that linked Nasser's project and Gaddafi's project. Belief in the idea of Arab nationalism is one of the most important points of similarity between the two experiences, because both Nasser and Gaddafi considered the Arabs to be one nation united by common language, history, culture and destiny (Al-Tamīmī, 2023: 71). Both leaders regarded the fragmentation imposed by colonialism on the Arab world as one of the most important causes of political, military and economic weakness, and therefore called for achieving Arab unity as a means to achieve power, independence and development. Their political speeches were also accompanied by constant emphasis on the importance of Arab solidarity and joint action in the face of external challenges. Both Nasser and Gaddafi promoted a political discourse based on resistance to colonialism and rejection of any foreign interference in Arab affairs. Nasser, especially after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the tripartite aggression in 1956, assumed leadership of a political and military confrontation against British and French influence. He also supported national liberation movements in the Arab world and Africa. Gaddafi, too, adopted a revolutionary discourse against Western powers, tried to reduce foreign influence in Libya, and supported a number of liberation and revolutionary

movements in Africa and the Arab world. Adopting this stance was one of the reasons for the widespread popularity of these two leaders at certain junctures in the Arab world (Zurayq, 2019: 41).

Both experiences were associated with a kind of socialist orientation, as both Nasser and Gaddafi sought to achieve social justice and reduce economic inequalities. In Egypt, Nasser adopted policies of land reform, nationalisation of major institutions and expanding the role of the state in the economy, aiming to improve the conditions of the poor and middle classes. In Libya, Gaddafi advanced economic ideas derived from the "Third Universal Theory" that called for the distribution of wealth and rejection of capitalist exploitation. Both leaders sought to link the national project with social justice and economic development, despite the different nature of the economic system in the two countries. Both Nasser and Gaddafi relied on revolutionary rhetoric in addressing the Arab masses, presenting themselves as leaders of freedom, change and resistance to injustice and colonialism. Nasser used the media, especially the "Voice of the Arabs" radio station, to spread nationalist ideas and incitement against colonialism and pro-Western regimes. Gaddafi also relied on public speeches, revolutionary slogans and direct political language, seeking to present himself as a global revolutionary leader. Both leaders sought to play a leadership role in the Arab world; Nasser tried to make Egypt a centre for the Arab nationalist movement, while Gaddafi attempted to extend Libya's influence in the Arab world and Africa. This was reflected in their political interventions and support for political and liberation movements in a number of Arab and African countries (Naşr, 2020: 117).

Despite similarities in some slogans and objectives, there are significant differences between the two experiences at the intellectual, political and organisational levels. Gamal Abdel Nasser's political vision was consistent with the traditional realities of Arab societies and traditional state institutions. He emphasised building a strong state relying on the army, a centralised government and economic development. The same cannot be said for Gaddafi, however. He sought, through the "Third Universal Theory", to propose a new model of managing society by presenting a different political approach. In

this regard, he rejected traditional political systems, parties and parliaments, not considering them true representatives of the people (Al-Jābirī, 2019: 89). Therefore, he sought to establish a political system based on "people's committees" and "people's congresses", while abolishing many traditional political institutions. Despite the slogan of "people's power", real power remained concentrated in the hands of Gaddafi and the elites around him.

Nasser succeeded in achieving a real unity experiment by establishing the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria in 1958, despite its subsequent failure. In Gaddafi's case, he presented numerous unity projects, but most of them remained within the framework of political agreements or incomplete initiatives (Al-Anṣārī, 2020: 154). Indeed, it can be said that Nasser's foreign policy, especially through his role in the Non-Aligned Movement, was characterised by a kind of relative balance. But Gaddafi's foreign policy was marked by instability and sometimes adventurism, which led to strained relations between Libya and a number of Arab and Western countries. Moreover, Gaddafi later abandoned the focus on Arab nationalism in his foreign policy and placed the African priority policy on his agenda, whereas Nasser remained committed to the Arab cause until his death. Nasser enjoyed widespread popularity among the Arabs due to his nationalist stances, his confrontation with colonialism and the tripartite aggression, and became a symbol of national liberation in the Arab world. Finally, it can be said that Gaddafi played a prominent role in media activities, but did not reach the level of popular influence that Nasser achieved, especially because of the controversial nature of his domestic and foreign policies (Ziyādah, 2021: 59).

5.2. Evaluation of the Two Nationalist Experiences in Arab Political Thought

The experiences of Nasser and Gaddafi represent two important stages in the development of contemporary Arab political thought; both helped to highlight the idea of Arab nationalism and unity. Both Nasser and Gaddafi introduced concepts such as unity, freedom and independence into Arab political discourse in the second half of the

twentieth century. Moreover, both leaders played an important role in supporting national liberation movements and resisting colonialism, which gave Arab nationalist thought a broad popular dimension. However, they revealed the challenges facing nationalist projects in the Arab world; challenges that have always plagued Arab societies due to differences in Arab political systems, conflicting regional interests, the absence of democratic institutions, and continuous foreign interventions (Mālik, 2021: 63). A fundamental issue that has been neglected in evaluating the experiences of these two leaders in nationalist projects is that in both political systems, power was individualistic in nature and relied more on the personality of the leaders than on stable political institutions. This meant that the continuation of the nationalist project was conditional upon the existence of a political leader, and thus after these leaders, the projects were effectively accompanied by failure or decline. It must be acknowledged, however, that many Arab political movements and currents still draw inspiration from some of the ideas of these two experiences, albeit in different forms that are compatible with modern political developments. Both experiences based on Arab nationalism have shaped an important part of the history of contemporary Arab political thought, reflecting a historical stage that witnessed the emergence of the dream of Arab nationalism and the attempt to turn it into a realistic political project, with all the successes and failures that this entailed (Al-Qadhdhāfi, 2020: 42).

5.3. The Future of Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalism is one of the most prominent intellectual and political movements that has influenced the modern history of the Arab world. Throughout the twentieth century, this movement constituted a political and cultural project seeking to achieve Arab unity, liberation from colonialism, and a comprehensive Arab renaissance. Arab nationalism reached its zenith with the emergence of a number of political movements and leaders who believed in the existence of a single Arab nation united by common language, history, culture and destiny. However, at the beginning of the third millennium, this project has faced major challenges that have led to a

decline in its political and popular presence. Arab governments, in light of their regional interests and political inclinations towards foreign powers, especially Western governments, seldom mention Arab nationalism. Nevertheless, despite all these developments, the idea of Arab nationalism has not disappeared; it still exists in Arab political thought and in the cultural and media discourse of Arab societies, especially on issues relating to Arab identity, Arab solidarity and the Palestinian cause. Therefore, studying the future of Arab nationalism, analysing the reasons for its decline and the challenges it faces, the impact of modern political developments on it, and the possibility of reviving the idea of Arab unity in the future, is of great importance (Darrāj, 2020: 101).

5.4. The Decline of Arab Nationalism

From the 1970s onwards, Arab nationalism witnessed a clear decline resulting from a set of political, economic, social and intellectual factors that affected the position of the nationalist project in the Arab world (Al-'Isāwī, 2021: 125). The failure of the experiences of the Egyptian and Libyan governments in the field of Arab unity is one of the most important reasons for the decline of Arab nationalism, because the unity projects failed to achieve continuity and stability, as happened in the experiment of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria. This failure led to reduced confidence among the Arab people in the possibility of achieving unity, especially in light of the persistent political differences between Arab regimes. Another important factor in this regard is the June 1967 defeat by the Zionist regime. This event is considered a major turning point in the history of Arab nationalist thought, because it led to a decline in the prestige of nationalist regimes and a significant loss of confidence in the nationalist slogans that had promised to achieve power, freedom and unity. A notable issue in this context is that the defeat by the Zionist regime helped the emergence or strengthening of other intellectual and political currents that competed with Arab nationalism, including Islamic movements. On the other hand, the newly born Arab political systems emphasised strengthening the national identity of each country separately, rather than a broader pan-Arab identity, and often

prioritised their own narrow national interests over the idea of Arab unity (Būjilāl, 2023: 27). This has further consolidated political borders between Arab countries and thus reinforced regional differences among them (Al-Bahnasī, 2022: 74). Another issue is the greater attention these countries pay to internal affairs and prioritising domestic policy over foreign policy. The main reason for this policy is the major economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, weak development and corruption that Arab governments face. Moreover, these internal challenges and weak development have reduced the attractiveness of nationalist discourse among some social groups, especially new generations who are more interested in livelihoods and daily concerns.

5.6. Political and Regional Challenges

Arab nationalism currently faces a wide range of political and regional challenges that weaken the chances of reviving the nationalist project or achieving Arab unity. The existence of political and military conflicts between Arab countries has weakened the idea of Arab solidarity and led to the decline of unity discourse (Bishārah, 2021: 136). Regional and international interventions have also contributed to deepening these differences, making unity more difficult to achieve. Arab countries do not have a unified view or approach towards the issues and developments of Arab societies and regional matters, and consequently adopt contradictory policies. This is clearly evident, for example, in the issue of the Palestinian cause. Moreover, some Arab countries have tied their solution for development and internal and regional stability, as well as ensuring their survival and national security, to a power or extra-regional foreign powers, leading to the presence of extra-regional powers in the Arab world. This issue is fundamentally in contradiction and conflict with the approach and perspective of Arab nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century. This has significantly affected the image of Arab nationalism in contemporary Arab political thought.

These extensive regional and international interventions in the political, security and economic affairs of Arab societies have increased differences between Arab countries, prevented the implementation of

any independent project, and consequently weakened the institutions of joint Arab action (Haykal, 2020: 114). Joint Arab institutions, such as the Arab League, lack the effectiveness and efficiency necessary to resolve Arab crises or achieve political and economic integration (Abd al-Nāṣir, 2021: 47).

Furthermore, rapid developments in the international system, such as globalisation, technological development and the emergence of new economic powers, have changed the nature of international relations and imposed new challenges on traditional nationalist thought. As countries become more integrated into the global economy, some traditional national projects are no longer able to adapt to the new international reality, and this has contributed to the further decline of the unity discourse that was dominant during the nationalist movement (Uthmānī, 2023: 83).

5.7. The Future of Arab Unity

Arab unity, which was a fundamental pillar of Arab nationalist thought in the twentieth century, is a complex issue linked to a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural factors. Despite the great difficulties facing the Arab unity project, the idea of unity still maintains a symbolic and cultural presence in the minds of Arabs. Although comprehensive political unity may not be possible in the short term, there are opportunities to increase Arab cooperation in various fields, including economic integration, security cooperation, education and culture, technology and energy, and the support of common Arab causes (Anīs, 2022: 45). Such cooperation could be a gradual step towards strengthening Arab relations and achieving a kind of regional integration. On the other hand, any future unity project requires stable political systems capable of achieving development, political participation and respect for citizens' rights. True unity cannot be based solely on political slogans; it requires strong institutions, popular will and effective coordination among countries. The new Arab generations, with the media freedom and technology that connect them more than ever before, play an important role in determining the future of Arab nationalism. This could also lead to the creation of new forms of Arab nationalism that are based on

cultural, economic and technological cooperation rather than relying on traditional concepts associated with revolutionary political systems. Some scholars believe that the Arab nationalism of the future may emerge in a different form, adapted to the developments of the modern era, emphasising such matters as regional cooperation, common development, respect for the privacy of Arab countries, strengthening Arab cultural identity, and addressing common challenges (Ghulayyūn, 2020: 88). Thus, the concept of Arab unity in the third millennium may transform from a project of comprehensive integration into a project of cooperation and gradual integration among Arab countries (Belqaziz, 2021: 94). However, the success of any future Arab national project depends on the ability of Arab countries to overcome political differences, achieve development and stability, and create effective cooperation institutions that meet the requirements of the modern era. The future of Arab nationalism is also linked to the ability of Arab peoples and regimes to find a new formula for cooperation and unity based on political realism and common interests, while preserving the collective Arab identity in the face of increasing regional and international challenges.

Conclusion

Arab nationalism was one of the most prominent intellectual and political currents that influenced the course of contemporary Arab political thought. In the twentieth century, this intellectual current, given the contexts and grounds that emerged in Arab societies, received great acceptance from the people and some leaders of Arab societies. Indeed, it can be said that the emergence of this intellectual current coincided with the efforts of the Arab people to liberate themselves from colonialism, achieve unity and create a comprehensive Arab renaissance, and was seen as a fundamental solution to the problems and issues facing the Arabs. Accordingly, Arab nationalism emerged as a political and intellectual reaction to the fragmentation and colonialism that the Arab world experienced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout that century, Arab nationalism represented a political and intellectual project that, by emphasising the unity of language, history, culture and

common destiny, sought to overcome the fragmentation and disunity that plagued the Arab world. This influential intellectual current had consequences and effects on Arab political thought, and some political leaders in Arab countries in the second half of the twentieth century, by applying the ideas of Arab nationalism, rethought and reformulated their countries' domestic and foreign policies, and sought to shape regional equations and developments by using this approach and macro perspective. The most famous of these figures are Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muammar Gaddafi, the leaders of Egypt and Libya, who are always considered fundamental and prominent pioneers in operationalising the idea of Arab nationalism—leaders who not only accepted the Arab nationalist project but also tried to turn it into a practical political reality.

This article, by analysing the experiences of Egypt and Libya during the rule of Nasser and Gaddafi, examined and elucidated the impact of Arab nationalism on contemporary Arab political thought. In this regard, it first examined and defined Arab nationalism as a school of thought and a theoretical framework in the view of theorists and researchers, identified the characteristics, principles and important foundations of this school of thought, and then examined the experiences of the governments of Nasser and Gaddafi, who had chosen this political thought as the basis and foundation of their governance.

This study showed that the Nasserist experience constituted an important stage in the history of Arab nationalism. Nasser was able to link nationalist ideology with the issues of national liberation, social justice and Arab unity, and turned Egypt into the centre of the Arab nationalist movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The experience of the United Arab Republic, despite its subsequent failure due to political and administrative differences, was the most important attempt at Arab unity in the modern era, and was effectively Nasser's achievement. He also played a prominent role in supporting national liberation movements and confronting colonialism, which made him widely recognised in the Arab world. Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, by declaring the adoption of the idea of Arab unity and proposing several unity projects among the Arabs, sought to present himself as an

extension of the Nasserist nationalist project. Moreover, through the presentation of the "Third Universal Theory" in his *Green Book*, he sought a political and intellectual alternative to traditional regimes. The findings of this research showed that these two experiences, despite differences in political style and perspective, were similar in adopting the discourse of Arab nationalism and calling for unity, freedom from colonialism and social justice, but they faced major challenges, including Arab rivalries, foreign interventions, weak democratic institutions, and the failure of unity projects.



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