

# FAR MIDDLE EAST, BRAVE NEW WORLD: THE BUILDING OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ARAB SPRING\*

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to explain the so-called Arab Spring not mainly in the political context of the last few decades, but rather from a wider historical perspective on the region. The Arab Spring is just one moment in a complex process of settlement and overlap of political, social, ethnic, economic, religious and national forces. This text is as much about the main historical issues related to the Middle East as it is about the main contemporary perspectives on it – the Middle East is defined here as a cultural area. This text seeks to answer the following questions: what caused the Arab Spring and what does it imply politically? What is intended with these revolts and, thus, what will come next? Finally, should we fear “the Islamists”?

**Keywords:** Arabic Spring; revolution; post-colonialism; Middle East; nationalism; religion; ethnicity.

## RESUMO

A principal tese deste artigo é que o que explica a chamada Primavera Árabe não é especialmente o contexto político das últimas décadas, mas sim, o contexto histórico mais amplo da região. Isto é, a chamada Primavera Árabe é apenas mais um momento em um complexo processo de assentamento e imbricação de forças políticas, sociais, econômicas, étnicas, religiosas e nacionais. O texto aborda as principais questões históricas relacionadas ao Oriente Médio, assim como as principais perspectivas contemporâneas sobre este. O Oriente Médio é aqui definido enquanto uma área cultural e o texto visa responder as seguintes questões: o que levou à Primavera Árabe e no que ela consiste politicamente? O que se pretende com estas revoltas e, portanto o que virá depois? E, por fim, deve-se temer os “islamistas”?

**Palavras-chave:** Primavera Árabe; revolução; pós-colonialismo; Oriente Médio; nacionalismo; religião; etnicidade.

## 1 BRAVE NEW WORLD?

Osama Bin Laden is dead and the West rejoices in his execution. Despite his real importance in the Middle East and the Muslim World, Bin Laden still evokes a disproportionate significance in the West. But the world once again contemplates the Middle East and the Muslims, seeing something new. The events that took place in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, which some call the Arab Spring, have been challenging much of what people thought they knew about the

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region. In the process, much of Bin Laden's significant power has waned. Some believe that the mid-2011 Arab riots are a form of sociocultural and political-historical redemption, in which a past that needs to be redeemed because it is imbued with religious meanings, is the one that the riots leave behind headed toward (our) Brave New World. How can we understand today, then, the role of Islam as a political force in the Middle East?

Many political analysts have been tempted to explain the possibility of the so-called Arab Spring, for which few had previously suggested tangibility. Where would be the political actors capable of transforming the region in this way? Who would be the political elites behind this process, the transnational ties and interests of the great powers? Little did the majority know that the main agent was already right there: their own people. They did not know why in the "West" the people in the Middle East evoked other imaginary forms. These forms are today, especially after 9/11, dominated by representations of a conflict understood as ontological between the cultural forces of the "West" and the cultural forces of "Islam".

A world in which the hegemonic view of the West-Middle East relations is that of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" (1993, 1996), is a radically polarized world. And, mainly because of people like Samuel Huntington, our times have been increasingly polarized. We could say this, at least until the political flourishing in mid-2011. In this Huntingtonian world, the Middle East belongs to the "Islamic Civilization" – classified not in accordance with unilinearity typical of positivist history, but with anthropological plurilinearity similar to that of the classical – and, for modern anthropology, deceased – concept of "race". In other words, for Huntington and his followers, civilizations are plural according to their origins and their intrinsic characteristics; and these intrinsic characteristics are then seen as essential. So from this "culturalist" viewpoint, Huntington believes that "Islamic Civilization" is not politically backward but almost ontologically different – an argument that in logical perversion finds fertile ground in a pluralistic and relativistic world like the Western world today. Huntington borrows the term *clash of civilizations* from Bernard Lewis (Lewis, 1990). Lewis is an expert in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and he typically focuses on issues such as "the roots of Muslim rage" or "what went wrong in the Arab world", which have now earned him a prominent place as an enemy of Islam – and labeled him as lacking neutrality because of his Jewish origin. However, some argue that Lewis, unlike Huntington, believes that the supposed radicalism inherent to Arabs and Muslims today is a 20<sup>th</sup> century development, which finds no justification in Islamic texts or in Islamic tradition.

The conclusion of many who follow Huntington's theory is that authoritarianism, violence and other qualities so characteristic of Islamic Civilization – such as their intrinsic (Islamic) values – make the Middle East practically incompat-

ible with the idea of democracy (which, in turn, was based on Western values). Thus, given the expansion of the Islamic world within and outside the borders of the West, many Huntingtonians today conclude that the post-Cold War world is bound to see a clash between “us” and the “Muslims” in which the latter are represented as potentially bringing “our” twilight. That is, unless “we” – superior in technology and values – now protect ourselves, we will be in danger of losing the freedoms that have taken us so long to achieve.

Another part of humanity dubbed this form of characterizing Islam, as radically incompatible and intrinsically hostile to the West, “Islamophobia,” also characterizing the Middle East as deeply Islamic in this sense. The purpose of this paper is to demystify some of these views on the Middle East by placing the region in a new historical and cultural context in order to provide input and analysis for thinking about the uprisings that began in January 2011, especially in the Arab world. More directly, this paper focuses on the following key questions: what led to the Arab Spring and what does it consist of politically? What is the idea behind these riots and, therefore, what will come next? And lastly, should the “Islamists” be feared?

The main thesis of this article is that what explains the so-called Arab Spring today is not particularly the political context of the last decades, but rather the broader historical context of the region. That is, the so-called Arab Spring is just another moment in a complex settlement and overlapping process of political, social, economic, ethnic, religious and national forces. This moment is more clearly understood by adopting a broader historical view (not only Arab) centered on events that pervasively and permanently marked and transformed the region. Some of these major events worth mentioning, for example, are the Ottoman domination, European colonization and transformation of the territories into nation-states, the creation of Israel and the Palestinian question, and the Cold War.

This first section should be understood as a provocation to essentializing a Middle Eastern “East” as a “Western” “other”, while aiming to present arguments related to the key issue addressed in this paper (presented in the preceding paragraph). Thus, the subsequent discursive strategy adopts the following logic: section 2, entitled *Far Middle East*, seeks to provide elements to denaturalize the Middle East and Middle Eastern ideas widely held by public opinion, especially those based on a mystification of a faraway East without much western influence.

Section 3, *The Middle East as a Cultural Area*, intends to discuss further these definitions, offering others in their place – which will be the basis for discussions in the rest of the article. The focus on the inclusion of North Africa as part of the proposed definition of the Middle East is to act as a basis for understanding why the uprisings in the Arab world began in Tunisia and Egypt, spreading “so suddenly” and solidly to the rest of the Arab world.

Section 4, *The reinvention of the Middle East in nation-states*, continues to develop the historical context of the region, this time calling attention to a more recent context, in marked relation to European colonial powers and the development of national realities bound to the creation and maintenance of the local nation-states. Here the main historical elements are addressed to establish the thesis that the Arab Spring is much more a continuation of a long historical settlement process of political, religious, ethnic and national elements almost continuously expressed by uprisings throughout the region, than a historical moment *sui generis* to be understood as a historical rupture.

Next, section 5, *The Arab Renaissance and Post-colonial Context*, goes further in depth on building the region's historical context by putting in perspective a myriad of ideologies such as socialism, pan-Arabism and various nationalisms in the region, which today are forces essential for understanding the current context of uprisings in the region.

Continuing this topic, *A new era in the Middle East: Israel and the Palestinians between Yom Ha'atzmaut and Nakba* (section 6), states that the creation of Israel redefined the terms of the political, ethnic, religious and national vernacular of the region, highlighting the atypical case of Palestinian nationalism that develops in the practical impossibility of building a nation-state. This section also presents the creation of Israel as a symbol of the beginning of a policy largely defined by the Cold War in which the political developments of the region – including the creation of most nation-states in the Middle East – were inscribed. Both the creation of Israel and the Cold War even now strongly mark the Middle Eastern policy setting that has culminated today in the Arab Spring.

*The (re)ascension of Islam* (section 7), questions how, partly linked to Israel's own politics and the post-Cold War context, Islam is now increasingly the political language of the Middle East. However, social motivations encoded as religious do not necessarily have such origins, and other sorts of motivations dispute space with local pre-1948 elaborations. It is stated then that the essentialization of Islam (and especially of a fundamental theological distance between this and Christianity) as a source of friction with “the West” (*sic*) – an explanation already broken down in the previous sections – prevents the understanding of Islam as a “cultural language” in which other motivations (for example, political and national) are expressed.

Such thinking deepens a rift between a liberal “West” and extreme “East” created and maintained very much on account of discourses generated earlier by non-Middle Easterners. Here Islam as archenemy of the “West” is demystified. This, in turn, provides important elements for understanding the future of regional policy and relations between the Middle East countries and the Western

world as an imagined community – beyond the imagination of a nation-state according to Benedict Anderson (2006).

Finally, *The Arab Modernity* (section 8) discusses an essentialized construction of modernity as an inherently Western characteristic, to which other regions of the world are either close or distant. In criticizing this posture, this section presents some of the key features of Arab modernities and how they fit into the region's history. This section also intends to tie down the discussion in the previous section. Here the (re)ascension of Islam as a major force of the regional cultural language is understood to a large degree as an autochthonous modern reaction to the post-Cold War contemporary political language rather than “fundamentalism” and social backwardness.

Hence, the Middle Eastern social context is finally reintroduced in a new light to permit the final conclusion of the article. Thus, the “conclusion” based on the historical discussion herein discusses the five aforementioned interrelated issues: *i*) what led to the Arab Spring; *ii*) what does it politically comprise; *iii*) what is the reason behind such uprisings; *iv*) what comes next; and finally, *v*) should the “Islamists” be feared?

## 2 FAR MIDDLE EAST

Since the days of the Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire and the Crusades, the European imaginary about the East was largely defined as an inverted mirror image of the West, which should be transformed (civilized) through the European imperial conquests. The 19<sup>th</sup> century showed special interest in whatever was Oriental. The attraction was precisely because the East continued to occupy the extreme place of the “other”: harsh lands (desert); another morality; uncontrollable sensuality; the exotic oasis to be conquered by Western adventures, and often the East was celebrated for such qualities. Many artists, writers and travelers portrayed their views of the East, usually after brief (or not so brief) stays among the Orientals. These were the Orientalists and the ones responsible for much of the knowledge production about this Eastern world – depicted in the form of travel journals, stories, poems, novels, paintings, photography and so on.

This East, an old and always exoticized acquaintance of Europe, an extreme “other,” did not correspond to what we call East (East Asia) today, but to what we call North Africa and the Middle East. And, given that the Orientalists represented what they called East from a Western (European) view, Edward Said coined the term *Orientalism* meaning the Westerner's own view of the East – denouncing that this knowledge, thus located, creates an asymmetry that informs the interventions of the West in the East and, therefore, is a form of imperialism. Thus, an Orientalist is anyone who looks to this East through interests, categories



of understanding, and exoticised social representations that have little or nothing to do with the viewpoint of those thus represented. Bernard Lewis is severely criticized in *Orientalism* (SAID, 1978), but on other occasions Said denounced even anthropology as a discipline based on keeping the distance between “us” and “others” (SAID, 1989), therefore still completely bound to its colonial past.

Although this criticism certainly has an element of truth, it is also a little too categorical – losing precisely by demonstrating the same lack of nuance that Said’s own concept criticizes in his statement. Perhaps no discipline has criticized and opposed colonialism more than anthropology – witness the production of anthropologists such as Talal Asad and others (ASAD, 1973; 1993; 2003; 2007). Today, the so-called Middle Eastern Studies – coming from anthropology or any other discipline of the humanities – are established largely in contrast to the Orientalists. For example, the logic of anthropology strongly counters the logic of the cult of folklore (a counterpoint that somehow encompasses its opposite). Anthropology, at least today, does not regard culture as something given, static and uniform, as Huntington regards “Islamic Civilization”, but precisely as something relative to the viewpoint of subject and context, a complex, dynamic and heterogeneous construct. It is therefore unfortunate that the idea of “culture” is being used to justify the political analysis of this “Culturalist” branch represented by Huntington, which tends to essentialize subjects according to characteristics that have little or nothing to do with those that the actual subjects so classified recognize in themselves and in how they see the world. This Culturalism – quite different from what anthropologists understand by the term, incidentally – is nothing less than a form of prejudice. And, with each new disciple of the thesis, the world grows increasingly the same as the Orientalist world imagined by Huntington.

In terms of this article another definition is needed for the Middle East, stressing that the Middle East and what I call the “Islamic world” are not the same thing, although they have various angles in common. Bearing this in mind, emphasis is given here to some of the Middle Eastern continuities and social fractures in order to understand the Arab Spring without having to immediately assign “the” agency to the “Islamists”, or without immediately thinking that a new post-revolutionary order would or will be necessarily printed by radical Islamic groups.

From the Roman Empire until today, the ideas about the Middle East certainly have changed considerably. However, I am inclined to agree with Said when he says that this exercise of exoticism tends to pervade our ideas about the Middle East ever since the days of the founding of the dichotomy between East and West. This exoticism is so entrenched in our views of the world that it is hard to leave behind premises and start looking at the Middle East with fresh eyes.

As mentioned previously, many political and social analysts tended to consider that such uprisings would not be a common occurrence in the Middle East, not only because of the inscrutable iron fist of dictators, but also because of the inevitable submissive character of the people dominated under their charismatic leadership or religious legitimacy. In other words, such people had the leaders that they “deserved”.

To understand the “domino effect” that the uprisings had (and still have) in the region, it is first necessary to understand the continuities of more general social processes in the region – and not attribute the local continuities to a theology of violence or to an essential out-of-context symbology. In other words, the following is an attempt to present some of the political forces in the Middle East and to address the region as a sociological unit. This will be the basis to understand the nature of such uprisings through the tensions and divisions of the region’s social fabric. Therefore, it is necessary to understand a little more of the current political context of the region beyond mere Orientalist Culturalism, the developmentalist label (whether Marxist or positivist) of “backwardness”, or fragmentary analyses of recent times. Below are some of the concrete socio-historical processes that help to understand such uprisings.

### **3 THE MIDDLE EAST AS A CULTURAL AREA**

What connects North Africa and the Middle East? The straightest answer is: North Africa is composed of an Arab and Muslim majority, and has undergone similar historical and social processes. Many empires have passed through the region. It is possible to perceive the interconnection between the Near East and the region of Egypt from 3,000 years ago, and later, even before the expansion of Islam, there is the political, cultural and social approximation of the whole of North Africa to the Near East and Mesopotamia. To see more clearly this connection, however, it is necessary to take a short trip in time to understand the depth of historical political regimes in the region. The intention here is to show traditional historical ties between the present countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

We could start more or less 3,000 years ago with the beginning of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt. The Hittite Empire appeared soon after, followed by the Kingdom of Israel. Then came the Assyrian Empire, and with its dissolution the Babylonian and Persian Empire. Throughout this time – more than 3,350 years – Egypt was always much more closely linked to the Middle East than to the rest of North Africa. With the arrival of the Persians, the Mediterranean coastline of North Africa became definitively politically bound to the Middle East in a more radical way.

Only then did the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great emerge – a symbolic milestone for most Westerners as the beginning of Western culture.<sup>1</sup> It is well known that Rome (the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire) brought the downfall of the Empire of Alexander the Great. The greatest empire the world had ever seen had roots, like its predecessor, in what is now considered Western territory. The fall of the Roman Empire, however, brought dominion over the Mediterranean once more to the edge of Europe with the rise of the Byzantine Empire – the first empire to rule the region that from start to finish was defined as Christian.<sup>2</sup> During the Byzantine Empire the powerful Sassanid Empire appeared and disappeared. However, until then the region had developed without Islam, as did the rest of the world.

Since its dawn, Islam did not take long to spread to the farthest corners of the Middle East already with the Umayyad Dynasty. The territories of the Muslims at the time of Muhammad's death had spread throughout the Persian Gulf. But it was during the reign of the *Rashidun* (the first four caliphs, known as the Rightly Guided) that Islam (and with it, the Arabs) became a political landmark throughout the Middle East occupying from the north of Libya through the Persian Gulf, as far as Syria and the Caucasus in the north, and to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west. Since then, many other Islamic dynasties followed, often occupying different parts of the Muslim domain. At their peak, these territories included the Iberian Peninsula, Morocco, almost all of Algeria, Tunisia, most of Libya, Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Territories, the Persian Gulf, Syria, Lebanon, Eastern Turkey, the Caucasus, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (LAPIDUS, 1988; LINDHOLM, 2002). The spread of Islam by Arabs can be today understood as a “critical event” – to use the term of Veena Das (DAS, 1997). This is so because of its transforming power, since Islam and Arabs have come to radically influence the region that largely still today is defined by this event. It is also important to note that most of the Arabian Peninsula and Morocco just started to share the same flows and historical processes of the Middle East after the expansion of Islam.

Not only Arabs represented Islam. Soon other ethnic groups in the region joined the list of Muslim empires that somehow sought political legitimacy through this religion. First came the Seljuk Empire (Turkish), followed by the dynasty of the Ayyubids (Kurdish) – known as Saladin's empire – the Mongol Empire (Mongolian) and finally the Ottoman Empire (Turkish). Meanwhile, other ethnic groups of Muslim religion came to power, such as the Persians in Iran under the Shia dynasty of the Safavid (LAPIDUS, 1988; LINDHOLM, 2002).

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1. Via the rise of Greek civilization.

2. Along with the Kingdom of Armenia, in the medieval period, the Byzantine Empire was the only one in the Middle East that from beginning to end was defined as Christian.



During the Seljuk Dynasty, Europe on behalf of Christianity decided to fight back its political and religious losses by beginning the Crusades – which took place in several different periods between the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is when the Ayyubids appeared, reclaiming Jerusalem and expanding into other territories. Then came the rise of the Mongol Empire conquering everything in its path. This was the largest empire ever in the world in terms of adjoining land occupation; it occupied what is today Korea and all of China to the Romanian border with Serbia, passing through Iran, Northern Iraq, a stretch to the north of Syria, the Caucasus and almost all of Turkey, among others. It is worth recalling that the Mongol Empire became Muslim during its expansion and after contact with the Middle East. Finally came the power that ruled the Middle East for longer, the Ottoman Empire. This empire over time conquered Northern Algeria, Tunisia, almost all of Libya, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Northwest and East boundaries of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, most of Yemen and a stretch to the East and another to the North of Saudi Arabia (LAPIDUS, 1988).

Both because of the extremely long duration of the Ottoman Empire, and because of the relatively short period of its dissolution, this empire is undoubtedly among those that most marked the region today. For example, currently many of the countries that emerged in the Middle East are based on Ottoman administrative regions – many of which, in turn, were based on enclaves and ethnic and political flows. Another good example is the Lebanese political system (confessionalism), which is the result of political relationships and social organization in the remaining lands of the late empire. Such bonds were mostly informal, but very important. They owed part of their origins to the Ottoman *millet* system, which eventually defined the religious minorities as corporate groups, in addition to then assigning differentiated rights and duties to each group thus formed.

As a result of all this history of occupation, the Middle East should be understood not only as formed by Arab Muslims, but also by ethnic and religious minorities that today dispute political space complicating the regional political arena. Another major lesson that history teaches is that, beyond the critical event of the spread of Islam, North Africa already belonged both to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The term belonging here refers to the anthropological concept of “social belonging”, which means something similar to familial belonging and the possibility of multiple forms of loyalty (SCHIOCCHET, 2011b). However, while the European Mediterranean now had a relatively separate development, especially with the arrival of the Middle Ages, North Africa from the Arab conquest on was increasingly linked to historical and social processes in the Middle East. That is, its identity was linked historically, socially, ethnically, politically, economically and religiously to the Middle East – at least as much as the

local ethnic, political and religious discontinuities link different groups to other imagined geographies. A key part of the argument of this article is that it is precisely the imagined historical continuities between this whole region – stretching from North Africa, through the Caucasus and Arabian Peninsula and reaching East to Pakistan and Afghanistan – that explain why the uprisings in Tunisia spread so quickly and so consistently through the whole region. Moreover, as will be explained at the end of this article, the same regional continuities explain why the Arab Spring should be understood according to a historical context broader than just the Arab World, one that also includes recent elections in Turkey and uprisings in Iran (called the Green Revolution).

Hence, from now on, the term Middle East is now referred to as encompassing North Africa. For this paper, the definition of “Middle East” follows neither a geological definition nor a political geography that tends to emphasize continental continuities and discontinuities, but rather social and cultural affiliations among which politics, ethnicity and religion are subsumed.

Finally, this history also exposes some of the weaknesses behind the Eurocentric thesis (like Huntington’s) that, while Western Civilization has Greece and Rome as founding members, the East is founded on a completely different basis. It was in fact, to a great extent, through a majority of Jewish intellectuals during the Arab caliphates, that Greek scholars became part of the so-called Western intellectual tradition. Beyond the sequence of political belonging mentioned here – which shows that Greece and Rome are part of the historic heritage of both Europe and the Middle East – it should also be remembered that many of the great ideas and inventions of the West were actually iterations of elements from the East. Two major inventions worth mentioning are the Latin alphabet itself (and even Cyrillic), which comes from modifications to the Greek alphabet, which in turn was a modification of the Phoenician alphabet (Middle East – region of today’s Lebanon). Some argue that even the very dichotomy between good and evil, a foundation of Christian theology, is indeed borrowed from the Manichean doctrine of Persian Zoroastrianism disseminated through the imperial conquests of the East. The list of such elements is virtually endless.

We can conclude, therefore, that both Westerners and Easterners built civilizations based on this common knowledge, beyond particularities. The stronger emphasis on differences rather than similarities that civilizations choose for themselves is a selective construction of ancestral “lineages” (with all their implications) rather than the supposed truth perpetrated by the axiom that their origins are completely distinct and that any parallel historical developments they have with each other is only seldom tangential. Such “invention of tradition” (HOBBSAWM & RANGER, 1983) is then, first and foremost, a political-ideological attitude with illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects that very often escape the intention

of those who see the world as such (AUSTIN, 1975). Consequently, we can only understand that this “other Easterner” is not as distant from “us” as both sides sometimes make it seem. Although different, Westerners and Easterners share much common history and many social processes.

#### 4 REINVENTION OF THE MIDDLE EAST IN NATION-STATES

Whereas much of the Middle East was under Ottoman rule until the end of World War I, what happened to the region after liberation from this imperial yoke is the key to understanding the Middle East today. Essentially, since the Ottomans had aligned with Germany, the British and their allies (especially France) sought political support from local groups dissatisfied with the “Porte” (name given to the Ottoman state bureaucracy). Ethnic minorities of the Ottoman Empire, including the Arabs, Armenians and Jews (the latter being Arab or otherwise), formed the hard core of internal fighting against the Ottomans.

Records show that the British negotiated with one group and another, sometimes promising the same concessions without one group being aware of the negotiations with the other. Support for the Jews, mainly through Zionist entities linked to Theodor Hertzl (the father of modern political Zionism), was assured by the promise of founding a land for them. Some of the most important Zionists and their allies were not Jews but English Christians who at that time held some of the top positions in the British bureaucracy (FROMKIN, 2009). The Arab support, on the other hand, was assured by the promise of devolution of Arab lands under Ottoman command to the Arabs and resulted in the 1916 Arab Revolt led by the Hashemite Sherif Hussein Bin Ali (emir of Mecca). The vast volume of correspondence between the British and Hussein Bin Ali shows such promise and illustrates the mediation.<sup>3</sup> However, the ultimate downfall of the Ottoman Empire brought the realization of different political projects, now in preparation for negotiations concurrently with the internal groups that had rebelled against the Ottoman Empire. In the end, what prevailed were the agreements with France and the more immediate political interests of the British Empire, first and foremost, agreements and treaties such as Balfour and Sykes-Picot. Some of these coincided with demands of the elites from ethnic minorities that had supported the Europeans, but almost never corresponded to the interests of the masses, and often failed to coincide with any local interest.

The 1916 Arab Revolt happened partly because the Ottoman caliphate had never been fully accepted by the Arabs. In the views of Britain and France, this

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3. Some of this correspondence between Hussein Bin Ali and the British (especially in the figure of the High Commissioner Henry McMahon) are found in British archives analyzed by Fromkin (2009). This transaction was famously portrayed in novels and even in a movie. The most famous example is undoubtedly the classic novel (later released as a movie) *Lawrence of Arabia*.

then meant that to win the trust of the Arabs, they should support another leader who had a good claim to the title. This leader was, from the European viewpoint (partly misunderstood, partly actively constructed), Hussein Bin Ali, Sharif and Emir of Mecca, who back in 1917 had conquered space between the Europeans proclaiming himself “king of Hijaz.” In fact, when the Ottoman Caliphate was formally abolished in 1924, Hussein Bin Ali was briefly vested with the new title of Caliph. The Europeans did not understand that there was more than one leader qualified for the position of caliph, that this title was not exactly equivalent to that of “king of the Arabs”, and that even when someone called himself “king of Arabs”, this meant little to the vast majority of the local population. Because of this equation, both Hussein Bin Ali and most of the leaders that the Europeans had chosen as “puppets”<sup>4</sup> to their mandates lacked sufficient legitimacy to answer to the territories that they now controlled (and even fewer had the legitimacy to represent the Arabs as a whole). Even in Hijaz itself, and under British protection, Hussein suffered humiliating defeat among Arabs. Early on, Britain tried to safeguard the kingdom of Hussein from the Ibn Saud domain (also a British ally),<sup>5</sup> but, after 1925, the Brotherhood of Purity had conquered the whole of what is now Saudi Arabia. The Brotherhood also tried to extend its borders to areas of the British mandate in Iraq and Jordan, but the good diplomat Ibn Saud – also known as Abdul Aziz – tried to reach an agreement with the British, who in turn ended up butchering the Brotherhood and legitimizing the reign of Abdul Aziz under what had then become Saudi Arabia (FROMKIN, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

European colonies (or mandates) in the Middle East spread to what today corresponds to the territories of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Cyprus, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, part of Yemen and Oman. This colonization, however, had

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4. The term “puppet”, far from my choice, was the term used by the British to refer to King Hussein during the conquest of Ibn Saud: “We shall look fools all over the East if our puppet is knocked off his perch as easily as this” – said a British officer at the time, according to Fromkin (2009, p. 426).

5. Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud had more than British support, as the alliance between the Saud and Wahhab “houses” (one of the names for family in Arabic) dates back to the 18th century, when Muhammad Ibn Saud (founder of the first Saudi state and ancestor Ibn Saud) offered protection to Muhammad Bin Abdul-Wahhab in Al-Dariya. The alliance between the Wahhab and Ibn Saud houses was also greatly strengthened by frequent marriages between the two families. Since late 1912 a revivalist religious Wahhabi movement (al-Ikhwan al-Safa – Brotherhood of Purity) took power in today’s Saudi Arabia. This both boosted Ibn Saud militarily, and reinforced the legitimacy of his appeal to conquer the Arabian Peninsula. As had happened with the original Islamic movement of Muhammad, the religious movement of the Brotherhood of Purity diminished or even sometimes obliterated tribal and other local disputes.

6. Wahhabism may be considered a neo-traditionalist movement that became a hybrid with Salafism in the 1960s, with the influence of Saudi petrodollars. Salafism preaches a return to the caliphate in its search for an original Islam, for it finds a perfect Islam at the time of the Rashidun (the first caliphs). Many of the Salafi movements have in the caliphate a replacement for the nation-states of today. Many of these Salafi groups are, therefore, anti-nationalists (more than trans-nationalists) and offer extensive support to those Muslim militants who by proselytizing Islam (whether through violence or not) make it their universal cause. In this sense, both the massacre of the Brotherhood of Purity by Ibn Saud and the cordial relationship between the Saudi kingdom and England and the USA, nurture the political-religious view of some radical Sunni Islamist networks such as al-Qaeda (source: personal communication with Paul Pinto). For more about Islam and politics, read *Islã: Religião e Civilização*, by Paulo Pinto (2010).

already begun even before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and lasted more precisely from 1830 (with the conquest of Algeria by France) until 1975 (with the departure of the British from Oman). At the end of the First World War, France kept the land that today corresponds to Syria and Lebanon, while the British created mandates in Palestine and Mesopotamia. However, France had already conquered Algeria in 1830 (for a long time treated as an integral part of French territory), signed an agreement (Treaty of Bardo) that transformed Tunisia into French colony in 1883, and established a protectorate in Morocco in 1912. In addition, the British had already made Kuwait a protectorate in 1899, and taken Egypt from the Ottomans<sup>7</sup> making it officially a protectorate in 1914. The mandate of Palestine was soon divided into Palestine and Transjordan (today Israel, the Occupied Territories and Jordan). The remaining Ottoman territories with an Arab population in the Arabian Peninsula were then distributed as favors to the Arab political elites who supported them during the war.

The outcome of this partitioning was a series of treaties relating to the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, among which the most important were the secret Sykes-Picot agreement (1916), the Balfour Declaration (1917), the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

The Sykes-Picot agreement was so named because it was signed by Sir Mark Sykes (lieutenant colonel in the British Army during the World War I and *protégé* of Lord Kitchener, then Secretary of War of the British Army) and François Georges-Picot (French diplomat), besides the minor participation of the Russian government. According to David Fromkin, drawing the sphere of influence of the European powers obeyed first and foremost the wishes of the British. Thus, a French mandate over Syria was well regarded by the British, for it would generate a proxy zone between them and the Russians that would protect the Empire in case of war between the two powers (FROMKIN, 2009). The agreement provided that the territories of the Middle East then belonging to the Ottoman Empire would be administrated as follows: *i*) an international mandate over most part of what are now the Occupied Territories and Israel; *ii*) a French direct zone of control over what is now Lebanon, the Syrian coastline and southern Turkey; *iii*) a zone of French influence over most of what is now Syria and western Iraq; *iv*) direct British control of a territory that stretched from Baghdad, passed through Basra and as far as Kuwait today, and includes a narrow strip of land linking

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7. From the beginning of their governing of Egyptian territory, the British conceived of Sudan according to the same logic that connected the entire course of the Nile River. Since then – and until Sudan's independence in 1956 – its fate would be linked to that of Egypt. According to Fromkin, the British ruled Sudan in the name of Egypt, which allowed them to defend it from other European demands, but they dealt with the territory as if it were part of their own empire (Fromkin: 2009). From 1924 the British ruled Sudan according to two different administrative areas: the Muslim north and Christian south. This division was the basis for the recent creation of the state of "South Sudan" (tentative name), which is scheduled for July 9, 2011 – after a referendum suggested the separation of the territory, and the Sudanese President, Omar el-Bashir, approved the separation.



Kuwait to the west of the Arabian Peninsula; and *v*) a narrow band of British influence that would extend from the territory that is today Jordan and southern Israel to Persian lands, while at the same time following the path of direct British control on the left of the map to the south of the Arabian Peninsula. When at the advent of the Russian Revolution of 1917 the Russians made the agreement public, the Arabs – especially Hussein Bin Ali – felt discredited (MANSFIELD, 1973) because the treaty violated the promises made to them by T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) and others.

In turn, the Balfour Declaration was a letter from the British government addressed to Baron Rothschild – one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Britain. While the correspondence promised “a Jewish home” in Palestine, it did not specify how the Jewish settlement would proceed nor whether it would be a national state. The declaration also pledged not to harm “the rights and political status of non-Jewish communities in Palestine” (ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, [s.d.]). At the time, most Arabs in Palestine viewed the Zionist plans with suspicion, because since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they had witnessed the arrival of Zionist Jews with intent to repopulate the entire country. At the time, Jews bought Arab land – sold mostly by absent landowners many of whom were not even Palestinian – while the peasants, who were then the vast majority of the Palestinian population, found themselves jobless and landless as Jewish labor replaced them (KHALIDI, 1998). Nevertheless, the lack of clarity in the Balfour declaration allowed the British to negotiate with Arabs and Zionist Jews simultaneously, without being completely unmasked by either.

The Treaty of Sèvres was the peace treaty signed in San Remo between the late Ottoman Empire and the Allies. It was signed after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 (which stipulated the creation of the League of Nations), and canceled anything that differed therein from the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne. The Treaty of Sèvres consolidated the Ottoman sharing agreements among the European powers along the lines of Sykes-Picot, with the exception of Palestine, which eventually became yet another British mandate. This treaty also led to the creation of the Kingdom of Hijaz under the leadership of Hussein Bin Ali – later annexed to what became Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom of Hijaz corresponded then to the East of the current Saudi Arabia, more precisely, the region of Mecca, Medina and the first center of expansion of Islam as early as the times of Muhammad. Moreover, Sèvres allowed for the creation of Armenia, expanded the Greek borders, prescribed British sovereignty over Cyprus and the creation of Kurdistan to the east of what is now Turkey. Of these last proposals, only that relating to Kurdistan was rejected in the later Treaty of Lausanne, because it was unsatisfactory even from the Kurdish viewpoint as it excluded the lands claimed by the Kurds in current Iraq, Syria and Iran. Since

Lausanne did not discuss Kurdistan again, the Kurdish demand for autonomy persists today in several different ways.

Both Zionists and Arabs had signed the Treaty of Sèvres (UNISPAL, 2011a), but the Arab elite that signed the document was far from representing all Arabs, as will be examined below. Also worth pointing out, upon being interviewed about the Treaty of Sèvres, Lord Arthur Balfour said the mandates had been a limitation imposed by the very powers who conquered the region, since the autonomy of the League of Nations only allowed it to supervise putting in place the agreement (UNISPAL, 2011b). In other words, England and France would have to decide what to do with the newly acquired lands.

Finally, the Versailles Treaty annulled that of Sèvres with regard to the territory of Anatolia, which was once again disputed during the Turkish War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal “Ataturk”. This treaty defined the boundaries of the newly created state of Turkey on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, and was ratified in 1924 by Turkey itself and also by Britain, Japan, Greece and Italy, and finally filed with the League of Nations. In this treaty, Turkey formally abdicated its former territories in the Middle East (including North Africa), Cyprus, and other places.

The British appointed Faisal, son of Sherif Hussein, as leader of the mandate over Mesopotamia. The British mandate over Palestine was registered at the League of Nations in 1920 in the San Remo Conference. In 1922 the mandatory power, Britain, through the so-called Memorandum of Transjordan, then separated the territory of Transjordan (those to the east of the Jordan River) from Palestine (to the west of the Jordan River). To Transjordan (which later became Jordan) was granted the right to autonomy, and another of Hussein’s sons, Abudullah, was appointed ruler of the new kingdom. Meanwhile in Palestine, Britain imposed direct rule, which lasted until 1948 with the creation of the State of Israel – at British recommendation and by approval at a meeting of the new international entity created from the League of Nations, the Organization of the United Nations (UN).<sup>8</sup> During the mandate period there were two small changes to the territorial constitution with major consequences in the present.<sup>9</sup>

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8. The UN Commission in charge of partitioning Palestine in 1948 was chaired by the Brazilian Osvaldo Aranha. Some insist that on that same occasion Osvaldo Aranha also gave the casting vote in favor of the creation of Israel, but this is still today a controversial point.

9. The first was known as the issue of the “Seven Villages” (*Kura Saba’a* in Arabic): in 1920 the British Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Newcombe suggested that the border dividing the lands of the Near East between Britain and France not divide villages and social groups. Of the 24 villages that were in question, all then became part of the British Mandate (today incorporated into Israel), except the seven Shiite villages that at the suggestion of the French General Henri Gouraud, were incorporated into the French territory (now Lebanese) (Schicchet, 2011a). The second was in 1923, when the Golan Heights were transferred by the British to the French dominion of Syria in exchange for the Metula region, part of today’s Israeli territory (Pappe, 2004).

Similar to the British intent towards Jews in Palestine, Lebanon was created from the French mandate in Syria. This means, the French intention was to give autonomy to the Maronite Christians in a territory that for centuries was shelter for ethnic minorities in the Middle East in order to gain absolute influence in the region.<sup>10</sup> Conflicts between various political groups, organized according to religious belonging especially among Maronites and Druze, eventually took on a sectarian tone at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (still during the Ottoman rule). This was largely on account of how France, especially through the Lebanese Maronite church, and the British, mainly through Druze leadership, offered support to these local elites who thus came under the respective European influences (MAKDISI, 2000).<sup>11</sup>

In general, the Arabs from the start did not accept this new Middle East shaped by European hands and the interests of local elites. After 1919, uprisings were felt throughout the Middle East. The prelude was the revolt in Egypt for independence in 1918, followed by the revolt of 1919. Later still in 1919, war broke out on the border between Afghanistan and India. In 1920, there was an Arab revolt against Zionist Jews in the Western Palestine mandate, and shortly after, also in 1920, a revolt broke out in Iraq (FROMKIN, 2009). On the other side of the European border, France decided to wage war against Syria, which demanded independence. Meanwhile, part of the new “Lebanese”, especially Sunni and other inhabitants of the largest coastal cities, took up arms to try to prevent

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10. There were already Sunni Muslim Arabs in Lebanon, of course, since the early Islamic expansion in the 7th century. But, in the 11th century the region of Mount Lebanon (now part of Lebanon), and the entire region around Antioch (now in Turkey), received an influx of Maronite Christians who sought refuge from persecution by the Byzantine Empire. In 1016 many of those Muslims (and even Christians and Jews) in Mount Lebanon, Jabal 'Amil (today southern Lebanon), Galilee (today northern Israel) and Jabal el-Druzi (today in western Syria) became Druze. The Shiites were added to these groups departing from the 12th century – first through a mass conversion to Shiism in the region of Kesrawan (part of Mount Lebanon) and then in Tyre – in southern Lebanon – (Trabulsi, 2007). As the Kesrawan community migrated into the Beqa Valley (west of Lebanon), both the south and the east of the country today (to the border with Syria) are majority Shiite. These two Shiite communities lived almost entirely politically disengaged and almost isolated from each other until the coming of the Iranian cleric of Lebanese origin Musa al-Sadr to the Lebanon in 1959 (Ajami, 1986). After the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (year of the creation of Hezbollah), many Shiites fled from southern Lebanon toward the southern Beirut suburbs (especially Dahyeh), which today is also one of the Shiite majority areas in Lebanon.

11. The Lebanese political system was then conceived by the French as follows: the President of the Republic would always be Maronite; the prime minister always Sunni; the spokesman of the government, Shiite; and there would be a ratio of 6:5 in favor of the Christians in parliament. Because Lebanese citizens were represented by a political authority based on their religious belongings, such a system was called “confessionalist democracy” (in Arabic, *ta'ifiyah*) and provided that legal issues related to the spheres of private life of citizens (such as marriage, inheritance, etc.) would be regulated by denominational bodies within the state itself. This, in effect, meant that not all Lebanese citizens had the same rights and duties, and that civil marriage would not exist, in addition to other specifics (Saadeh, 1993). Apart from Mount Lebanon (of absolute Christian majority), this Grand Liban created by the French in 1920 incorporated the following territories: the large coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and their surroundings, and the Akkar region to the north of Mount Lebanon (all Sunni majority); and South and East Lebanon, including Tyre and Baalbek (of Shiite majority). The equation helped make an economically viable country because it annexed the important port cities, and the fertile lands of the Beqa Valley and of the South, while at the same time putting the Maronite elite in a position of control. Altogether, in a Lebanon so created, about 51% of the Lebanese citizens were then Christian, while 49% were Muslim, which to the French legitimized – a confessional state in the hands of the Maronites (Trabulsi, 2007).

autonomy of the new state of Lebanon (TRABULSI, 2007).<sup>12</sup> The Turks, supposedly politically destroyed, also resisted the European treaties in 1920, and even Russia suffered political resistance in Central Asia. Moreover, virtually all conflicts in the Middle East even today (including the Arab Spring) should be viewed as having at least some inspiration and motivation in this process of building national borders initiated by European colonization – as will become clearer in the next sections.

It is evident, given all that has been addressed in the previous section, that the nation-states of the Middle East were created in line with a certain respect for local boundaries. However, it is also clear from this section that such boundaries, like those sometimes used as imperial frontiers, served the interests of the conquerors. There was a popular uprising in the Arab world against the Ottomans, but this was contained by European powers through the appointment of local puppet leaders. Neither local leaders nor Europe was able to successfully contain the riots that followed such appointments, even though both had sought to stay in power using violence especially. Some of these leaders fell during the socio-political processes that followed, while the iron fists of others (often joined by European military aid) kept them in power. Many of the social rifts that began with these local processes, such as tribal, religious and social affiliations, persisted (muffled) under a cloak of normality (and legality).

Moreover, the social rifts that were the basis for Europe in redesigning the map of the Arab World merely obeyed the logic of local loyalties that had to be accommodated and that of European interests. Thus, while Mosul gained special status under the semblance of Kurdish autonomy and Lebanon gained independence under the discreet protection flag of Christianity,<sup>13</sup> other regions and social rifts have not had the same fate – triggering persistent social and territorial demands from other minorities. In the years that followed, the map of the Middle East would suffer further major changes that will be addressed in the following sections.

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning that Western common sense and even many political analysts such as Huntington failed to realize the broader social context and the widespread desire for autonomy and self-determination of the people of the region. The goal here is to understand the Arab Spring focusing on its continuity with the social processes described so far and others

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12. It was a Christian who led the resistance against the creation of Lebanon. His name was Antoun Saadeh, founder and president of Hizb al-Qawmi al-Suri (Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party) of nationalist orientation inspired in part by European Nazism. Antoun Saadeh had an important connection with Brazil, where he lived in two different periods, and where for a time he led his party founded in 1932. He was killed by the Lebanese government in 1949 (Saadeh, 2000).

13. Because of this, the West has seen the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990) not as a legitimately secular and democratic revolution of the majority of the Lebanese people, but through the prism of sectarianism. In that regard, it is also important to note that for political and not necessarily religious reasons, most but not all Lebanese involved in this initially very secular revolution were Muslims.

that will follow, although in political terms today's uprisings have indeed generated a number of major disruptions. Therefore, it is important to clarify that my analytical position implies that the only way to properly understand the major social, ethnic, political and religious issues of the Middle East today is from a post-colonial perspective. In other words, rather than understanding the Middle East through theology, out-of-context cultural symbolism, or its supposed political and social backwardness, this article proposes understanding the flows and social processes of the Middle East today as an expression of modern social processes that persist in the contemporary world.

### 5 THE ARAB RENAISSANCE AND POST-COLONIAL CONTEXT

On one hand, as seen in the previous section, the process of forming nation-states in the Middle East cannot be understood as being only related to the post-colonial period and the actual declarations of independence of the countries as they are today. Religious, ethnic and political borders were drawn centuries ago – long before the European colonial invention. On the other hand, the mandates and colonies were responsible for bringing a final (or almost final) shape to the vast majority of nation-states that followed. Moreover, they also acted as political artifice to internationally legitimize certain local political leaders (allied to the West) at the expense of others before the League of Nations, a body custom-made for this purpose.

Even considering important specificities, what most independence processes among Middle Eastern countries have in common is that local governors suffered from a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the people under them. Moreover, such processes of independence – some very long – tended to be quite marked by the popular desire for political autonomy, which was now regarded as having been curtailed by European imperialism. The impact of such changes, collective desires and their influence as a mobilizing agent still today should not be overlooked, since the process of independence from the European yoke in the region lasted from 1922 until 1971, and the vast majority of the countries that are known currently in the region became independent between the late 1940s and late 1960s.

Egypt formally became the first country free from the colonial yoke in 1922, although colonial relations were to persist for much longer.<sup>14</sup> Then, came Iraq in 1932, followed by Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in 1946, Israel in 1948,<sup>15</sup> Libya in

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14. The colonial yoke persisted directly until 1936 and indirectly until at least 1953, when finally the Free Officers Movement (movement from which emerged Gamal Abdel Nasser) decided to nationalize the Suez Canal. At that time, it belonged to the British and French, who in turn kept about 80,000 troops in the region – so far the world's largest military concentration (Scholze, 2008). Over the years, the Suez Crisis involved Israel and led to the Six-Day War.

15. However, its present official territory was defined only after the widespread expansion of 1967 and other later acquisitions, still not recognized by UN or the international community.



1951, Morocco and Sudan in 1956, Kuwait in 1961, Algeria in 1962, Yemen in 1967, Oman in 1970, and finally Qatar and the United Emirates in 1971.

Driven mainly by anti-colonial feelings, the vast majority of these independence processes involved a dialectic between the armed resistance by local groups and violent repression by the colonial powers – the case of Algeria perhaps being the most emblematic case. And since the vast majority of these processes were consolidated in the midst of the Cold War (1947-1991), many countries benefited from or found themselves compelled to align with one party or another. Some tended to align with the USA and its *ad hoc* partners, while others tended to join somehow the Soviet Union.

However, such alignment is only illustrative of a trend since in practice, the Middle East was not so polarized and local leaders would play one power against another to facilitate their own agenda. For example, during the Lebanese civil war, a myriad of internal political forces would align themselves more or less with one or the other side of the bipolarized world. The Middle East, with its oil and natural gas reserves, had become an important political arena of the Cold War. Almost the full spectrum of political forces there, however, tended to align with the Soviet Block especially because of the centrality of the Palestine question after the creation of Israel in 1948, and the anti-European (and therefore anti-American) post-colonial political position of many countries in the region. These last two questions were and still are closely linked, as discussed below.

The creation of Israel by designation of the UN General Assembly in 1948 was one of the strongest expressions of modernity in the Middle East, and one still decisively influencing the region. Thus, together with the Arab and Islamic expansion, the creation of Israel can be understood as a key point in the history of the region. However, before understanding the Arab reaction to the creation of Israel, it is necessary to understand a little more of the context of the region at the time.

In 1948, the prevailing thought in the Near East was a direct effect of centuries of Ottoman rule and almost three decades of European hegemony. Pan-Arabism, which emerged in the 1920s, became a central force in local political processes, and the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was seen by many as the great representative of this ideology. The ideology was based on the aesthetic movement called “*Nahda*”, or “Arab Renaissance”, which in turn had already emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt and spread to most of the region decades later. Besides Cairo, other key centers of *Nahda* were Beirut,<sup>16</sup> Damascus and Baghdad (KASSIR, 2006).

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16. Many journalists who participated or covered the *Nahda* in Egypt were of Lebanese descent, which caused the rapid spread of the movement to Lebanon and the rest of the Near East (Kassir, 2006).

During the rule of Muhammad Ali<sup>17</sup> over Egypt and Syria, the *Nahda* found inspiration for the rearticulation of what was genuinely Arabic, especially nationalist ideas (KASSIR, 2006). Accordingly, the *Nahda* was a movement that stimulated not only a fresh artistic aesthetic, but also an innovative Arab nationalist political aesthetic.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Muhammad Ali inspired not only the definition of what was considered truly local, but also the idea that the Arab world should now be free of Ottoman rule. In the book *Being Arab*, Samir Kassir's main idea is that the Arabs themselves divide their legacy in three main phases besides the current one, partly as a result of Orientalist interpretations of Arab history. These are: *i*) the Golden Age, roughly four centuries around the time of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties; *ii*) '*Asr al-Inhithat*<sup>19</sup> ("Age of Decadence"), also called the Arab Middle Ages and marked by the fall of the Abbasids, the invasions of the Mongols and the Crusades, the rise of the Mamluk dynasty<sup>20</sup> and most of the Ottoman rule;<sup>21</sup> *iii*) the *Nahda*, with its roots in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and lasting until the end of World War I according to some, while others consider that it continued until the creation of Israel; *iv*) the present day, represented by a new decadence (KASSIR, 2006).

Although according to the most generous hypotheses the *Nahda* ended at the time of Israel's creation, many of the ideas on which it fed are very important forces in today's Arab world – its major political result being Pan-Arabism. Most nationalist variations that appeared then also arose from a similar feeling of ethnic belonging and are still more or less influential in the Arab world today. For example, with clear inspiration from the *Nahda*, a number of political parties of nationalist and socialist orientations have appeared in the post-colonial Arab world. The Syrian National Socialist Party (of Antun Sa'adeh in Lebanon) is just one example. Another good example is the myriad of socialist and nationalist parties that appeared throughout the Arab world under the name of *Ba'ath* (in Arabic: "renaissance" or "resurrection") that are quite different from each other in practice. At one end, the Syrian *Ba'ath* (of Hafez al-Asad) and the Iraqi *Ba'ath* (Saddam Hussein) were in fact historical political archenemies, but what is common among them all is the search for something autochthonous with both ethnic and "anti-imperialist" political tones, which in turn can be seen as fundamental to a popular Arab socialist trend.<sup>22</sup>

17. Or Ali Pasha, an Albanian who first "liberated" Egypt from Napoleon for the Ottomans, and then established Egypt's autonomy against the Ottoman Empire.

18. According to Akram Khater, in addition to the influence of the *Nahda*, nationalist ideas in the Middle East (especially in the uprising) would have emerged precisely in the *Mahjar* (migration places) due to devices of contrast occasioned by the contact with "the other" and the influence of the *Muhajirin* (immigrants) once back in their homeland (Khater, 2001).

19. In Arabic, *inhithat* is exactly the opposite of *Nahda*.

20. The origin of the word comes from the Arabic *mamluk*, which means "belonged" or "slave." Part of the reason why this dynasty figures here is because they were not Arabs, but mostly Turkmen (Cumans and others).

21. Until the series of modernizing political reforms called the *Tanzimat*.

22. In order to have an idea of the scope of such ideals, between 1958 and 1961 such an inspiration caused even the union between Syria and Egypt, forming a country then called the United Arab Republic led by Gamal Nasser.

Thus, it can be said that both Pan-Arabism and Arab National Socialism arose directly as a result of the *Nahda*. This is one of the more concrete reasons for the abovementioned political alignment of countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and for the importance of parties such as the Syrian National Socialist Party (a political minority in Lebanon) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the latter gestated by Nasser himself. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia had first the British and then the Americans as political partners, Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union (USSR), Israel was created at the behest of the British themselves and the Lebanese state had secured its Christian hegemony through French effort. Of all these Arab countries (on one side or the other), the most divided was Lebanon, where the bipolarization of the world at that time encouraged internal divisions strongly fostering the wars that followed.

Between 1920 and 1948 the major political events in the Middle East were mostly motivated by the social and political reorganization that came with the desire and utopian possibility of autonomy. Egypt, a strong influence throughout the modern Arab world since the *Nahda*, soon expressed this trend and inspired much of what happened later elsewhere in the region.

In 1914, Britain declared Egypt its protectorate by creating the Sultanate of Egypt. After the war, Saad Zaghlul – leader of the nationalist party *Wafd* – then exiled by the British in Malta, led the Egyptian nationalist movement that culminated in a revolution in 1919. This movement caused the British to declare unilaterally the independence of Egypt in 1922. In 1923 a constitution was drafted, and in 1924 Zaghlul became Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Egypt, which existed until the 1953 Revolution led by the Free Officers, who in turn deposed King Farouk and finally made Egypt a Republic (HOURANI, 1991).<sup>23</sup>

Just ten years after the Egyptian independence, Iraq also became nominally independent. In 1932, Britain entered into an agreement with the Hashemite King Faisal (the family whom the British had granted the territory of the mandate years ago) in which the British had accepted the formal independence of Iraq in exchange for maintaining its military bases and right of passage for its troops. Then, in 1941, a coup by a group of Iraqi army officers called the Golden Square, inspired by pan-Arabist secularist ideals, overthrew the then representative of the Hashemite monarchy Abd al-Ilah (the regent for Faisal II who was Faisal's grandson and still too young to govern). This caused Britain to invade Iraq using troops stationed in India and Jordan, restoring the Hashemite monarchy, which lasted until another Iraqi military coup in 1958 that transformed the country into a republic (HOURANI, 1991).

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23. This event definitively put Nasser on the political map of the Middle East as one of its main social actors.

In 1946 (and then 1948) the Middle East was again politically redefined. In addition to specific locations – such as Palestine, Mount Lebanon or the Damascus region – the Middle East had a common identity that came from before the Ottoman rule (HOURANI, 1991). The entire area that today includes Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel and the Occupied Territories, was called “Greater Syria”, or “*Bilad al-Sham*”<sup>24</sup> – the name given by the Mamluks. As mentioned in the previous section, after the Ottoman defeat, Greater Syria was divided between the French (responsible for the northern part) and the British (responsible for the southern part). While the French divided the northern part into Syria and Lebanon, the British divided the south into Jordan and Palestine. That was when in 1946 Lebanon, Syria and Jordan became independent.

Regarding the ideal of extending French culture – which included language, customs and behavior<sup>25</sup> – the French mandate in Lebanon adopted a model similar to that imposed in Algeria decades before. Its main specificity was the deployment of the confessional system (*ta'ifiyah*), based on the Ottoman *millet* system – as previously defined – when “*Grand Liban*” was created in 1921. The first creation came in 1926, but Lebanon became independent from the French as late as 1941. And, it was only in 1943 through cooperative action between Muslims and Christians, that Lebanon was truly independent, despite continuing French influence until today. The so-called 1943 “National Pact” acknowledged that the political power of the State would be divided respectively according to the size of each confession (*ta'if*, singular; *tawa'if*, plural). Although today most of the country is Shiite (VERDEIL, FAOUR & VELUT, 2007), the National Pact is maintained with minor modifications, such as the largely Christian concession made at the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990.<sup>26</sup>

The “Arab Kingdom of Syria”, formed in 1920 under the local leadership of King Faisal (son of Bin Ali Hussen), was short-lived. Neither France nor Britain recognized the kingdom as such. France then disposed of Faisal, having the mandate stipulated by the League of Nations and signed in the Treaty of Sèvres

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24. *Bilad al-Sham* in Arabic means “northern country” and comprises the Muslim lands that were to the north of Mecca. Today, Sham is the city of Damascus as many in the region still call it. This understanding was largely cultural and political, and was the basis for the integralist nationalism of parties such as the Syrian National-Socialist Party (*Hizb al-Qawmi al-Suri*).

25. To date there is an Arab elite of French tradition in Lebanon, and many within it still have French as their first language and Arabic as a second. Many of them also claim to be descendants of the Phoenicians, and some (mostly Christians) even completely reject an Arab identity. This ideology – in the sense described by Dumont (1994) – is called Phoenicianism (SALIBI, 1971). Despite the historical relationship due to the Phoenician maritime expansion, this ideology is not found in the same way in other Arab regions such as Tunisia, Libya or Morocco.

26. This new human geography is one of the main motivations behind the political demands of the Lebanese Shiite groups such as Hezbollah and Amal. But it is important to note that today the demands of both groups are not specifically Shia, and it is possible to find a relatively large number of Christians who politically support Hezbollah in particular.

as a justification, and about 9,000 troops as agents.<sup>27</sup> Between 1925 and 1946 the Syrians fought for their independence from the French. In the first phase, Sultan al-Atrash fought the French between 1925 and 1936, after which a treaty of independence was signed. However, the French refused to ratify the treaty. Syria then unilaterally declared its independence in 1941, taking advantage of the fall of the French in 1940 during World War II and the establishment of the Vichy government. However, it was only in 1944 that Charles de Gaulle, leading a reemerging France, recognized the independence of Syria. Thus, in 1946 the last French troops left the country (HOURANI, 1991).

In the British part of the former Ottoman territories, in 1921 Abdullah Bin Hussein – another of Hussein Bin Ali's sons – was sworn in for his emirate in the lands to the east of the Jordan River and west of Mesopotamia, then called Transjordan. Not until 1923 did Transjordan gain some autonomy. In 1928, it formally became independent and only in 1929 was the treaty ratified, although the region remained under very strong British political and financial influence. While on one hand the Mufti of Palestine refused to accept the separation of Transjordan from the rest of Palestine, on the other hand a group of Zionists<sup>28</sup> also took a dim view of this separation since they were seeking a Jewish state in all Mandatory Palestine. It was only after the end of World War II in 1946 that Transjordan became a kingdom under the leadership of then King Abdullah (FROMKIN, 2009).

By way of concluding this section, between 1920 and 1948 the main motivation of the major political events in the Middle East was the social and political reorganization that came with the desire and utopian possibility of autonomy. Egypt, a strong influence throughout the modern Arab world since the *Nabda*, demonstrated this trend earlier and inspired much of what came later in other parts of the region. But it was the creation of Israel, which is also the “myth<sup>29</sup> of origin” of Palestinian refugeeness, that became a critical event (DAS, 1997). National independence of other States of the Middle East and, in particular, the Arab World, only occurred after 1948. All these were marked then, somehow, by the Palestine issue and all the leaders of the emerging independent nations today, somehow, express their political commitment to the “Palestinian cause”. I call the urge to express this solidarity (sincere or not), which constitutes a political vernacular language among Arabs and Muslims (WICKHAM, 2002, WHITE, 2002), “nominal solidarity”. It is understood that this nominal solidarity toward

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27. Across the treaty line, the British, suffering at the hands of rebels in the Mesopotamia protectorate, decided to create the Kingdom of Iraq under the local command of Faisal I (this a de facto British command).

28. Revisionist Zionists, whose names today are associated with the Likud Party in Israel.

29. In the anthropological sense of the word, independent of attributing the value of truth or untruth to the fact described as myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1981). In this sense, science itself can be considered as a founding myth of society whose ideal is to be modern (Latour, 1994).



what one actor or another would consider the “Palestinian cause” is since the creation of Israel an element of profound influence and impact on Arab and Muslim politics. Therefore, nominal solidarity is today yet another key element composing the spectrum of forces and political discourses expressed in the Arab Spring.

To recapitulate, while in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Middle East was marked by colonialism and European protectorates, the end of World War II submitted the region to the context of the Cold War (1947-1991). Therefore, the creation of Israel in 1948 is also a landmark from one context to another. Since during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Middle East was completely at the mercy of Europe, there were many countries or social groups that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached the USSR.<sup>30</sup> These Middle Eastern groups with anti-imperialist inspiration and/or national socialist tendency that looked to the USSR for support were precisely those perceived by the West – of growing American influence – as a threat. Thus, the “threat” at that time, far from being Islam,<sup>31</sup> was first and foremost Arab national socialism and Pan-Arabism, which flirted with ideas common to Communism, and for this reason approached the West’s enemy number one at the time. Such political forces (arising from kingdoms and elites allied to the West as much as from socialist-inspired social groups, pan-Arabist or Arab nationalisms) persist to a greater or lesser extent until today and are also expressed in the political myriad enclosed in the Arab Spring.

## **6 A NEW ERA IN THE MIDDLE EAST: ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS BETWEEN YOM HA’ATZMAUT AND THE NAKBA**

At the same time as the historical processes described in the previous section, the newly created UN was discussing a plan for the partition of Palestine between the Zionists and the Arabs who lived there. In 1947 Resolution no.181 from the UN General Assembly decided to divide the area in two, while Jerusalem would be under international mandate on behalf of the UN itself. However, only the Zionists accepted the proposal. This was the beginning of the main phase of the conflict that continues to this day, with about 250,000 Palestinians fleeing or being expelled from Palestine. When the term of the mandate expired in 1948, Ben Gurion declared Israel’s independence, causing a declaration of war by a junta of Arab countries comprising Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Seven hundred thousand Palestinians had to leave the region during the conflict. With the ceasefire in 1949, Egypt annexed the Gaza region (now known as the “Gaza Strip”) and Transjordan annexed the West Bank, where East Jerusalem is located. After annexation of the West Bank, Transjordan was renamed simply Jordan (PAPPE, 2004; SAYIGH, 2007).<sup>32</sup>

30. Just as Hajj Amin al-Husseini had once approached Nazi Germany.

31. See, for instance, the U.S. support of Afghan *mujahedeen* (holy warriors) against the Soviet invasion around 1979.

32. The United States officially recognized both Israel and Jordan only in January 1949.

While the independence of Israel (Hebrew, *Yom Ha'atzmaut*) is celebrated every year, the event that caused the exodus of Palestinians from almost all the lands of the mandate to the neighboring Arab countries was called by Palestinians and Arabs in general “*al-Nakbah*” (The Catastrophe). This event changed the Middle East forever informing social actions of individuals who somehow relate to the region. More directly, the construction of “Palestinianness” and the daily lives of Palestinians is marked by the *Nakbah* (SCHIOCCHET, 2011a; 2011b), as much as the establishment of Israel radically qualifies the identity of Israeli Jews and Zionists worldwide. Hence, the creation of Israel as the myth of origin of Palestinian refugeeness.

Israel would also extend its borders to face up to what it claimed to be a constant Arab threat. Nevertheless, the decisive moment did not come with one of the many internal Palestinian uprisings, but with a joint military operation between England, France and Israel, based on a French plan to regain control of the Suez Canal located on Egyptian territory. According to the plan, Israel invaded Egypt, which had already nationalized the Suez Canal under the leadership of Nasser in 1956 (a year before the invasion). The so-called Suez Crisis brought two immediate results: a profound crisis of legitimacy of the British themselves and the international community in the region, and the intensification of the conflict between the Arab World on one hand and Israel and European powers on the other. Nasser found an ally in the USSR – a fact that branded forever the political configuration of the Arab World as a potential enemy of the West (PAPPE, 2004).

It would be impossible to cover here all the events relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict due to its length and nuances. However, the idea below is to highlight some of its key points. To start, the conjunction of three elements resulted in the official recognition of Yasser Arafat's PLO as the legitimate representative of Palestinian interests across the Arab world in 1964. These consist of the centrality of Arab solidarity for the Palestinian cause, the importance of Nasser's leadership, and the momentum gained from the Suez crisis between the Arabs and Israel. Prior to this, the Palestinians saw themselves represented in practice according to the interests of non-Palestinian Arab leaders, especially the King of Jordan (SAYIGH, 2007).

The Six-Day War started in 1967 largely motivated by the Suez Crisis, but also because one of the most important platforms of Nasser's Pan-Arabism was precisely the “liberation of Palestine”. The trigger for the onset of the war was the expulsion of UN troops from the Sinai Peninsula (one of the banks of the Suez Canal), which according to the Israeli government justified an invasion. Not only Egypt but also Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon were involved in the conflict, and as a result of the invasion, Israel occupied in addition to the Sinai, the Golan Heights and Shebaa

Farms, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>33</sup> Israel left the Suez Canal just after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, in exchange for the right to use the Canal. Yet an effective peace accord came only in 1978, now in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War and with Egypt under the leadership of Anwar Sadat. Israel agreed to permanently vacate the Sinai in 1979 with the “Camp David” agreement, and the eviction took place gradually between 1979 and 1982. Jordan sought the restoration of the West Bank as part of its own territory giving up only in 1988 on behalf of the PLO. Both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would then be under the military control of Israel. As time passed, Israel gradually left the interior of these territories so as to more effectively control their borders, and during this period made only periodic military incursions into them. However, East Jerusalem, the Shebaa Farms and the Golan Heights were never completely returned to their own governments and are still today at the center of the Arab-Israeli conflict (PAPPE, 2004).

The national independence of other states in the Middle East, and in particular the Arab World, occurred only after 1948. The Palestine question marked all of them somehow, and virtually all their leaders even today feel the need to express their political commitment to the “Palestinian cause” in one way or another.

Libya gained independence in 1951, following the suggestion of a UN resolution dated from 1949, and became a monarchy under the rule of King Idris. The influence of Arab National Socialism and pan-Arabism can be felt in Libya since the 1950s resulting from Nasserism. However it was only in 1969 that Muammar al-Qaddafi performed the coup called “Libyan Revolution” that established the Republic of Libya today. Since then Qaddafi ruled with an extremely heavy hand, trying to stay in the position of leader of the Arab World – this post once occupied by Nasser. One of the points in common with Nasser’s policy was solidarity to the Palestinian cause as a motto for his government, blending inextricably with the anti-imperialist discourse, which in turn, in the view of Qaddafi, placed him as legitimate representative of the Arab people (HOURANI, 1991). However, it is necessary to emphasize here that there are many differences between the two, although addressing them is not relevant in this paper.

The year 1956 brought independence to Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. Morocco became independent from the French colonial yoke, although part of the territory claimed by the Moroccan government is still in dispute, particularly with Spain, which retains control over Ceuta and Melilla along the Moroccan coast (in addition to some islands in the Mediterranean). Moreover, Western Sahara, although annexed by Morocco, is still awaiting final international legitimization. Unlike Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Syria and others – and like Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf – Morocco never underwent an

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33. Hence the term used by the United Nations, “Occupied Territories”.

Arab national socialist phase, and even today retains the original monarchical form legitimized by European powers after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Morocco, as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and others are regarded by the West as political allies in the region (HOURANI, 1991).

Sudan, on the other hand, became independent from Britain and Egypt in 1956 when Nasser's Egypt abandoned its effective demand for the territory and the British were able to secure their influence. However, the civil war (1955-1972 and from 1983-) between the north, ethnically of Arab and Muslim majority, and South Sudan, mostly of other ethnic groups and Christian majority, had broken out a year earlier. The violent struggle between these parties continues today with a succession of military governments in Sudan since then. Tunisia, meanwhile, became independent from France through the efforts of Habib Bourguiba, who ruled until the coup d'état of Zine El-'Abddine Ben Ali in 1987 (HOURANI, 1991).

The civil war for independence in Algeria began in 1954, and in 1961 the then French President Charles de Gaulle called a referendum. While in "European France" the vast majority of citizens voted for independence of the then African province, less than half of the population voted for independence in Algeria. Negotiations between the National Liberation Front (NLF – in Arabic, *Jabha al-Tyahrir al-Watany*) and the French government were held in 1961 in Évian-les-Bains/France, and in 1962 the French government called for a new referendum, which resulted in 90% of people in favor of independence this time. As a result of independence, however, by 1962 a large number of Algerian-French moved to France, causing one of the first mass migrations of an ex-colony (in this case, considered part of the French territory) to a colonizer country. In 1965, the national socialist inspired government of the then President Ahmad Bin Bella (NLF) was deposed by Houari Boumedienne, who launched an even greater investment policy in the country's industrialization, and further reinforced the Arab national socialist character of the state. Boumedienne stayed in power until 1978, when he was succeeded by Chadli Benjedid, who at the end of the 1980s ended the one-party policy stipulated in 1962 (HOURANI, 1991). Since 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika has governed the country, and from mid-2011 his government has been threatened more than ever by the will of the people.

In the Arabian Peninsula, the 1960s brought one more critical event: after prospecting in 1960, in 1962 the Arab Emirates region began exporting oil. Also in 1962, Yemen saw its genesis as a republic under a socialist government, when monarch Muhammad al-Badr was deposed and British rule was reduced to only the southern territory, and North Yemen was created.<sup>34</sup> It was only in 1967 that

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34. At that time Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported the regime of Muhammad al-Badr, and Egypt supported the coup that created North Yemen.

the territory remaining under the British became South Yemen, adopting a Communist government in 1970 (HOURANI, 1991). And as late as 1990 the two territories were united under the same flag of Ali Abdullah Saleh. In 1994, the country broke into civil war the consequences of which are felt to this day. In 2011 the Arab Spring in Yemen found a post-civil war context between the North and South of the country, where Zaydi rebels (a Shia denomination that holds just under 50% of Yemen's population) fight against the State regime, which they believe favors the Sunni.

Since the late 1950s the Sultanate of Oman has ruled the entire territory with relative success. Previously, other local authorities – notably the imamate of Zanzibar – had relative control over part of the Oman territory. In the period 1960-1980, Zanzibar still claimed authority supported by local communist-inspired guerrillas (subsidized by the then government of South Yemen). Then in 1970, Qabus bin Said al-Said came to power and there remained until today. His success in staying in power is due largely to the relatively open economic and political policies that he adopted in order to contain the rebellions started in previous decades, while actively reprimanding those who continued with attempts to remove him from power. He has even received direct military aid from Iran, Jordan, the UK and USA (HOURANI, 1991).

In 1968, under international pressure, Britain announced its plans to leave its protectorates in the Persian Gulf. Qatar and Bahrain announced their independence in 1971, abandoning negotiations to form a single united state in conjunction with the various emirates of the eastern Gulf that had remained independent from Saudi Arabia and Oman because of agreements with the United Kingdom. Four of the remaining emirates decided to join Abu Dhabi and Dubai that same year. The following year, the last emirate joined the proposal, resulting in today's United Arab Emirates. Like Saudi Arabia and others, none of these countries had a secular nationalist or pan-Arab government, and their main political alliances have been marked by the oil trade with the West (HOURANI, 1991).

The autonomy of Kuwait in relation to Iraq had been provided by the British under the Uqair Protocol in 1922, and put in place in 1923 when the British (and not Faisal I, King of Iraq)<sup>35</sup> recognized the borders mentioned in the previous year's protocol. Then, in 1961 Kuwait gained its independence from the British. Saddam Hussein invaded and annexed Kuwait in 1990, using the illegality of the Uqair Protocol as one of his main justifications. This event caused the Gulf War, when the UN countries led by the United States launched a military

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35. It is worth remembering that Iraq itself was only recognized as independent in 1932, when the British Mandate officially ended. The reign of the Sunni Muslim Faisal I was immediately met with protests from the Shiites in the South (the majority in the territory of the new country).



offensive against Iraq. In 1994, Iraq finally accepted the independence of Kuwait, which became a major American and European political ally in the region.

To conclude this section, while in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Middle East was marked by colonialism and European protectorates, the end of World War II submitted the region to the context of the Cold War (1947-1991). Since the Middle East was completely at the mercy of Europe during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were many groups that, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, moved closer to the USSR. It was these Middle Eastern groups with anti-imperialist and/or socialist tendencies seeking support from the USSR that were perceived by the West as a threat. As a result of this, the older Islamic governments in the region are precisely those who stayed to the West of the political border during the Cold War. However, on one hand some social elites discontent with their place in local politics and political groups of pan-Arabist, nationalist or socialist ideology can be found in most of these countries with governments historically aligned with Europe and the United States. On the other hand, traditional elites and other social groups dissatisfied with the pan-Arab, nationalist or socialist governments can be found today in opposition to their governments. Thus, on both sides and for different reasons, groups are found avowedly of Islamic ideology. All these groups, and those mentioned in the previous sections, can be found today as part of the social and political movement expressed by the Arab Spring. It is these so-called “Islamists” – not yet properly introduced – that will be discussed below.

## 7 THE (RE)ASCENSION OF ISLAM

Turkey, one of the non-Arab Middle Eastern countries, has also withstood a long secularizing period. This period began with the package of political reforms called *Tanzimat* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, passed through the new political vision of Cemal Pasha and the Young Turks (“*Jön Türkler*”, in Turkish) in 1908, and finally reached its most radical stage with the revolution of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1922.<sup>36</sup>

Iran, during 1953-1979, under the command of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, became an important European and then American ally. In fact, in 1970 the Iranians were the largest group of immigrants to the United States. In 1979 a people’s revolution erupted in Iran. Several Western intellectuals supported the revolution, for example, Michel Foucault. However, after the Shah’s government

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36. When recalling all the empires that passed through the Middle East before the Europeans, it should be mentioned that the Hittite Empire (with its capital in the center of Anatolia) was not only restricted to the Middle Eastern territory, but also occupied only a small part of it. Partly because of that, Atatürk chose Ankara (and not Istanbul), where there are the remains of a large Hittite castle, to be the capital of the new Turkish State. The change emphasizes the new territory and the political break with Islam. Atatürk’s own mausoleum in Ankara is illustrated by typical Hittite figures on the walls, while modern soldiers with modern weapons mix in similar style to the Hittite figures. The symbolic power of this new image should not be underestimated.

was overthrown, Ayatollah Khomeini took control of Iran with a moralizing and rectifying platform against the Shah's corrupt government. Most Western intellectuals who had supported the revolution withdrew their support when they realized that the uprising had been appropriated by a group of clerics who founded an Islamic Republic that used repression as its main form of legitimization; among them was Michel Foucault (AFARY, 2005). Inside Iran, the new Islamic Republic was warmly welcomed, but popular support had been eroding over the years, culminating in the largely urban and young so-called Green Movement of 2009.<sup>37</sup> However, the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad severely rebuked the riots and is still in power.

Much of the Western fear of governments that expressed themselves somehow as Islamic had its origin in the example of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Iran is not the only example, however, of a government committed to Islam. In addition to the Gulf states, Jordan and Morocco, there was a change recently in the Turkish political paradigm when the Justice and Development Party (JDP – *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, in Turkish) won the elections as a result of its religious appeal – for the first time in decades the power has waned for the Kemalists and their secularism. Nevertheless, the new Turkish government represents a fresh moderate Islamic trend, unlike the hereditary governments of the Gulf, Morocco and Jordan, and diametrically opposes the Islamic Republic of Iran. Politically, the new government has not agreed to either end of the current international political configuration, a position that has secured strong popular support for the JDP.

In 1978, when the Iranian revolution was still only a strong people's uprising, Israel invaded Lebanon for the first time<sup>38</sup> during the Lebanese Civil War. And, in 1982, in a second Israeli invasion, Hezbollah emerged claiming its existence as necessary resistance against the Israeli occupation. With close ties with Iran, Hezbollah still keeps its main goal, which is the resistance to Israeli occupation that continues to hold the Shebaa Farms. However, Hezbollah has evolved from a military organization involved in terrorist attacks and an Islamist agenda in the 1980s and 1990s, to a complex entity composed of an armed militia, a political party and numerous charity institutions. Since then, Hezbollah has refrained from attacking civilian targets directly, with the exception of outright war especially after the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when bombings involving Israel and Hezbollah became common (NORTON, 2007).

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37. The Green Movement was an uprising of notably young people that questioned the legitimacy of the regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the results of the Iranian presidential election of 2009.

38. In addition to Shebaa farms.

Also, in 1982, after years of planning and undertaking the Palestinian armed struggle, especially outside the Occupied Territories, the PLO withdrew from Lebanon and went first to Tunisia and then to the Occupied Territories. In 1987 political competition emerged that could actually challenge the PLO leadership: Hamas. Before that, only smaller organizations, most of which had once participated in the PLO, existed beyond the PLO's authority.

Hamas emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine (*Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), which in the 1970s had renounced violent means to achieve its goal of making Islam a benchmark in the lives of Muslim-majority countries (STARRETT, 1998; WICKHAM, 2002; MAHMOOD, 2005). Thus, from the outset, Hamas kept its autonomy.

Another Palestinian Islamist group, Islamic Jihad (*Harakat al-Jihad al-Islamy fy Falastin*) appeared in the 1970s, withdrawing from the Muslim Brotherhood for reasons similar to those of Hamas: to join the armed struggle that they understood was political resistance to the imperialist Christian West. Apart from the fact that Islamic Jihad had firmly established itself only in the 1980s (concurrently with Hamas), the movement is much smaller than that of its closest relative and with much less popular appeal within the Occupied Territories.<sup>39</sup>

Another common element between the two movements is a very strong nationalist component, which at least in the case of Hamas in practice is even more important than its Islamist component. Thus, the actions of both are always directly linked to the Palestinian issue, though often expressed through religious jargon. In terms of discourse, Hamas continues to present a rhetoric marked by symbols of the sacred law of armed struggle against an imperialist West, as is clear from the reaction of Ismail Haniyeh – the Hamas leader in Gaza – to the recent death of Osama Bin Laden at the hands US forces:

We condemn the killing of an Arab holy warrior. We ask God to offer him His mercy with the true believers and the martyrs. We take this as the continuation of the American policy based on oppression and the shedding of Muslim and Arab blood (AL-JAZEERA, 2011a).

Nevertheless, this kind of discourse, at least in the case of Hamas, must be understood as arising partly from a “nominal solidarity” this time addressed to the *Ummah* (transnational community of Muslims), similar to what Arabs and Muslims feel compelled to address toward the “Palestinian cause”.

Although possessing some common genesis, each branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in each country became something relatively distinct, adapting to

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39. As a counterpoint, the Islamic Jihad operates firmly from bases in Lebanon and Syria, which provide important popular support, especially among Palestinian refugees.

the different local realities. While in some countries the Brotherhood became a political party acquiring all its qualities, in others it continued as a social movement (MITCHELL, 1993). Almost everywhere, the Brotherhood's commitment today with a vision of political and social reform through religious devotion and adherence to Islamic values – not violence – is striking (WICKHAM, 2002). See for instance, in Europe, the convictions of Tariq Ramadan (grandson of Hassan al-Banna – founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt). For this reason many groups chose to leave the Brotherhood or maintain militias in parallel to follow the path of armed struggle.

Because of the local context, the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine was historically more willing to engage more directly in politics – even though its political participation during the entire time of the PLO hegemony (from the late 1960s until the rise of Hamas) had been marginalized. This marginalization occurred not only in Palestine, but also in most Arab countries that had adopted secularist and nationalist militaristic dictatorial political regimes, whose platform was the formal policy of resistance against European colonialism and its local “puppets”. For example, the Egypt of Gamal Nasser,<sup>40</sup> Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Syria of Bashar al-Asad and others (WICKHAM, 2002). Thus, there was a trend in Arab nationalism toward a post-colonialist repression (sometimes brutal) against the Muslim Brotherhood. Not surprising, therefore, that Islam returns today as an icon of freedom and as the main element capable of sustaining the authenticity and legitimacy of a new Arab government regime and that the Brotherhood represents this ideal.

The outbreak of the First Intifada was also in 1987, at the same time as the rise of Hamas. And like many of the uprisings presented in this article, the first Intifada was also a people's revolt without clear leadership in any political faction. Later, in 1990 *al-Aqsa Intifada* (or the Second Intifada) burst onto the scene. Although this also was a people's uprising, one of its main consequences was the exponential growth of support for Hamas and the concomitant growing power of social mobilization – and therefore control of the event itself – by the Islamist group. Another factor that mobilized popular support around the group was the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, at the end of the Second Intifada in 2004. Ahmed Yassin has since become one of the great martyrs of the Palestinian cause and symbol of Hamas' Islamic libertarian cause.

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40. After the death of Nasser, Egypt gradually became part of the U.S. sphere of influence, first with Anwar Sadat and then with Hosni Mubarak. Sadat tried to capitalize political resources building an image of a president devoted to religion, making a gradual political opening to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, seeing that the group's influence grew because of the new political context, Sadat tried again to control the Brotherhood and eventually ended up assassinated by a radical member. Mubarak, besides trying to control the Nasserists, severely rebuked the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups with Islamist character. Partially because of that, Mubarak's popularity was very low at the time of his deposition in mid-2011.

During the Intifada period, other political processes in the early 1990s had shaken the confidence that the Palestinian people had in the PLO led by the Fatah of Yasser Arafat, further motivating popular support for Hamas and other similar groups. The first was the Madrid Conference in 1991, and the second was the subsequent Oslo Peace Process started in 1993. After such events, due to political concessions that Arafat was willing to make on behalf of a peace agreement with Israel, the Palestinian popular support for the PLO was permanently damaged. One of the most important of these concessions was not mentioning the *Right of Return* of about four million Palestinian refugees to Palestine (now Israel), which meant for many refugees that their national representation had forsaken Palestinians outside the Occupied Territories in exchange for the possibility of building a nation-state (SCHIOCCHEIT, 2011a). In 1994, the Palestinian Authority emerged following guidelines stipulated in the Oslo Peace Process that also had foreseen its creation from within the ranks of the PLO. Hamas and other movements (Islamist and secularist) outside the PLO felt snubbed by the decision, and in 2007, Hamas consolidated its power by taking the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority led by President Mamhoud Abbas.<sup>41</sup>

## 8 THE ARAB MODERNITY

The Middle Eastern context, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and even before it, as outlined here, points to a constant influence of the West either because of colonialism, protectorates, zones of influence, military interventions, economic treaties, political ideologies, annexations as part of Europe's own national territory, or other factors. Thus, I suggest that the Middle East today cannot be seen as politically "backward" when compared to the West, since this version of history demands an evolutionary perspective – be it liberal, Marxist, or other. In particular, I suggest that to grasp the Middle East, one should first understand it as "modern", just like the West. This is because the Middle East actively participated in virtually every social process generally listed as a trigger of modernity in the West. From my point of view, some of these major social processes include: the territorial construction of social identities tied to nation-states beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; people's uprisings in favor of self-determination very often

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41. In early May 2011 Hamas and Fatah (majority faction in the PLO and the Palestinian Authority) announced an agreement of understanding. Such an agreement, on the part of the PLO, also encompassed negotiations to include Hamas in the PLO itself. It was not the first time that such negotiations had been announced, but it was perhaps the most serious announcement to that effect since Hamas seized the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority. Although it is too early to predict the extent to which such negotiations will accrue on a new alignment of forces in practice, this disposition to trading can be seen as directly motivated by the Arab Spring. As part of the process, Ismael Hanyiah, the Hamas leader also announced that he would support the decision of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to opt for a two-state creation (one Palestinian and one Israeli) as a way to resolve the conflict. However, unlike the PA, the Hamas leader expressed that this does not mean the renunciation of the "original" territory of Palestine, the renunciation of violence as a form of resistance, or the renunciation of The Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees to what now corresponds to the State of Israel as a precondition for resolving the conflict.



democratically – albeit democracy in the Middle East may mean something quite different from the liberal canon proposal; ideological reordering caused by the Cold War, and later the post-polarized world; an intellectual and revolutionary modern art movement (in the case of the Arab world, the *Nahdah*); and so on.

However it would be wrong to think that these social processes would provoke the same kind of effect worldwide. According to Turkish sociologist Nilufer Göle, it is understood, therefore, that these processes were responsible for generating a world of multiple modernities (GÖLE, 2000), and that the various forms of modernities generated in the Middle East were unique. There are several examples of the specificities of such modernities, many of which were addressed here such as those listed below:

- The *Nakbah* (creation of Israel according to the Palestinians) and the pan-Arabist and nationalist ideologies that made the event a central ideological theme;
- transformation of a large number of Palestinians into refugees and their relationship with new social actors called “humanitarian” and with the establishment of the nation-state of Israel;
- the radical secularism of Atatürk in Turkey;
- Lebanese sectarianism as an early form of affirmative action (MAKDISI, 2000);<sup>42</sup>
- the advent of an Islamic Republic in Iran (although its totalitarian character has confused many analysts who fail to understand the government as an effect of modernity);
- the economic rise of the Persian Gulf countries and their role in the oil production and trade policy; and
- the rise of avowedly anti-imperialist Islamist guerrillas.

Concerning Islam more directly, the strong popular support that Islamic-oriented groups find in some regions of the Middle East occurs largely because of their given ideology of liberation through politics, and not only through personal religious devotion. Thus, during the time when I lived in the Middle East, I met many atheists, including some Communists, who supported Hamas or Hezbollah for political and not necessarily religious reasons.

In these terms, the entire social structure of certain groups deemed “Islamist”, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Turkish JDP and Egyptian Muslim

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42. In this sense, the comparisons of the Lebanese case with the Belgian case and with the Dutch case in Europe are interesting.

Brotherhood, depends on a highly modern format developing a political, social, religious and very often military complex. The following set of elements partially composes such a complex: the use of media as many of these groups have their own newspapers and television channels; the provision of community and humanitarian services to Muslims and very often non-Muslims, such as what Hezbollah does in Lebanon; the acceptance of political participation as only a faction of the whole – such as a party in the case of Hamas, Hezbollah and the JDP, or a social movement in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, and so on (MITCHELL, 1993; STARRETT, 1998; WICKHAM, 2002; NORTON, 2007).

However, there are indeed other kinds of Islamist groups. For example, those based on informal solidarity networks and a decentralized transnationalist structure, such as the *al-Qa'eda* “franchising”, or others more centralized such as *Fatah al-Islam*. Many of these groups (the majority perhaps of Salafi ideology) seek the restitution of the Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world, and are therefore frequently labeled pre-modern by analysts and public opinion. However, I agree with Oliver Roy (2004) that these groups are best understood as a consequence of post-modernity; noting also that many of their leaders had a Western education (Osama Bin Laden himself, for example). Therefore, the return to a caliphate, and thus to the Golden Age of Islam, is a desire that only emerges among those who Kassir (2006) mentions as accepting the modern history division of the Arab periods, as presented earlier in this paper. According to such division, the current period is one of Arab decline that followed the *Nahdah*, which, in turn, ended at the time when the nation-states were created in the Middle East, and especially with the emergence of Israel. Moreover, like Kassir, I hold reservations about the ideological characterization of such historical periods.

## 9 CONCLUSION

Relying on the historical lessons learned here, some conclusions can be finally reached about the current Arab Spring. First and foremost, it should be understood why the Arab Spring occurred and what it implies politically. What drove Middle Easterners, especially Arabs, to the mid-2011 uprisings were some of the same forces generated shortly before the fall of the Ottoman Empire, synthesized in the desire for self-determination. These forces caused Middle Easterners to revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Later, they caused them to rebel against Europeans in the region and against local leaders imposed on the new nation-states. In some cases, this led to internal pan-Arabist or nationalist uprisings, in addition to other internal conflicts of ethnic or religious character, which today are generally also in one way or another strongly marked by nationalism. Some of the social groups involved in the different affected countries are, depending on the context: those that in one way or another express support for the Palestinian cause; traditional

elites dislocated by nationalist or socialist pan-Arabist movements, as well as popular political movements against these trends; elites and popular political groups of nationalist, socialist and pan-Arabist ideology that fail to find space in the political regimes of local monarchies; Islamists of various tendencies; human rights groups; democracy-inspired youth; groups who demand better economic conditions and/or political and moral autonomy; and so on.

The title “Arab Spring”<sup>43</sup> suggests a blooming of something that has remained dormant for decades. It even suggests that the present decline of the Arab World, from an Arab perspective itself or even that of Lewis, has come to an end. The term does not indicate exactly what will come next, but implies that it will be better than what existed before. History as presented here suggests a different understanding. It highlights that decades of domination by secular or religious dictatorships, socialist-oriented or not, did not quench most Arabs’ desire for self-determination. Therefore, this Brave New World is not that new. The events of mid-2011 may still be called the Arab Spring if meaning a *momentum* gain in feelings, desires, political goals, and other forces that were already in motion before Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution – the event that triggered the whole wave of uprisings that followed in 2011.

That said, the media and many analysts also seem to forget that these forces are not only in motion in the Arab World. In the Middle East they were also responsible, for example, first for the 1979 Iranian Revolution – whether applauded or otherwise – and then for the “Green Movement” in 2009 and 2010<sup>44</sup> that can be widely understood as a counter-revolution to the Iranian Revolution. More recently, a more peaceful transition of a governist paradigm in Turkey – radically secularist for an Islamist-revisionist model – can also be seen as having been leveraged by the same forces that leveraged the Arab Spring.

The following question is: what does this Spring, which is so far more or less successful depending on the context, mean? The Green Movement of millions of Iranians criticized especially the authoritarianism of the current regime and its over-involvement in the private sector. While the rise of the JDP in Turkey was a sign of popular support for a less antithetical commitment to Islamic values and local secularism of the State. However, Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution began with a riot against the high cost of living for the local population and ended as a revolution against the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. The Jasmine Revolution took

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43. Although it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the origin of the term “Arab Spring” as a reference to its current meaning, it began to be used profusely by the Al-Jazeera network. This term had also been used by other media since 2005 with another meaning concerning the Iraq War. Since mid-2011, however, its meaning has radically changed, as instead of having the Iraqi invasion as a reference, today the concept suggests the character of popular revolts of mid-2011.

44. This happened when, after the fraud in the national Iranian elections, several people of distinct ideological positions went to the streets seeking the deposition of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

on a new dimension when, more by contagion as Sir James Frazer would say,<sup>45</sup> it spread to the rest of the Arab world becoming the Arab Spring, and thus adopting a much more complex form of diverse inspirations and demands. Despite the differences, what all these uprisings have in common is that they all began at least as popular movements, the goal of which was somehow to improve the quality of life and political accommodation of local social values. One was inspired by the success of another, moving on to believe in a success that had until then seemed unattainable. In the process, not only dictators of nationalist and secularist ideology but also monarchs or emirs with strong ties to the West and seeking legitimacy in Islam have come under strong public pressure.

The next question is about what will come next. Comprising the spectrum of rebellious forces, especially in countries with an Arab secular-nationalist government, are Islam-motivated social movements and individuals. However, by the very popular nature of the uprisings, Islam is just one force among others. Although some parties and social movements use Islam as a moralizing discourse of politics, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Islam is much more than just a political or even religious perspective. Proof of this lies in the variety of discourses on politics in the Middle East, using a language with a variable Islamist component, by the insurgents themselves. Similarly, in Libya and Syria, for example, some of those who have supported the current state leaders are also adopting a partly Islamic language. The point here is that Islam should not be addressed only as a religion in the Middle East, and Islam in politics should not be understood necessarily as anti-secularist. Islam is, first and foremost, a cultural component of the Middle East, and as such a source of building and maintaining local values in general.

Thus, a government with Islamic values is not necessarily more religious than a Western secular government whose values are grounded on the history of Christianity. Similarly, the current Turkish “Islamic” democracy is no less democratic than the US or Brazilian democracy. This answers the last important question that the West has put to the Arab Spring: should the Islamists be feared? According to the previous idea, the straightest answer to this question is *no* – at least not unconditionally as if Islam were essentially a source of problems, while Christianity is not; as if a government with Islamic ideals would raise more problems than a government – even secular – built on Christian values; as if Muslims were by definition (for example, by some theological ethic) more religious or more radical than Christians.

As mentioned at the start of this article, such thinking is partly an Orientalist construction – and, therefore, Western – and partly the reality of a radical minority strongly influenced by Western thinking and political practices.

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45. In *The Golden Bough* (Frazer, 1982).

In practice, in a large part of the post-colonialist Middle East, repression (sometimes brutal) against the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups has been the rule. Not surprisingly, therefore, Islam comes back as an icon of freedom and the main element that can sustain the authenticity and legitimacy of new government regimes in the Muslim World, and it tends to be seen as a viable alternative between the harshness of colonialist repression and the severity of Western-inspired and secularly aligned post-colonialist repression.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, Islam is the current language of not only radical Muslims but also of those with more moderate reformist political views that seek accommodation of the “East” with the “West”. Islam is the local cultural language, or at least an important part of it. It does not follow, however, that we are in any way authorized to reify a fictional and radical anti-Western Islamic theology at the expense of the region’s entire post-colonial context. As mentioned earlier, the Arab Spring is only part of a much broader movement that for some time has been happening in the Middle East. Accordingly, a wave of protests has happened in practically the entire Middle East, except for Turkey (or at least not in the same way), in which new political trends are accommodated democratically and relatively peacefully, a fact that only demonstrates a commitment between some form of secularism and Islam.

In light of the above, if on one hand the Middle East is certainly modern in its own way even before the Arab Spring, on the other hand Western World views such as those of Samuel Huntington – and his paradigm of the clash of civilizations – have been absorbed by Arabs and other Middle Easterners (such as Pakistanis, Iranians, Afghans), strengthening the cultural estrangement between Muslims and the West (with economic, ethnic, political and religious repercussions). Bin Laden’s point of view was not, in that sense, very far from Huntington’s. According to Samir Kassir,<sup>47</sup> the decline of the Arab World has been attributed to an impossibility to modernize it. The current problem is precisely to understand the Middle East from an Orientalist view,<sup>48</sup> according to which modernization and Islam cannot go hand in hand (KASSIR, 2006), and consequently democracy and Islam are incompatible.

This was precisely where the Arab Spring surprised everyone, since it is possible to understand that the current uprisings can turn the history page of the Arab World according to the Arabs themselves, bringing with it the start of a new era in the Middle East as a whole. Robert Fisk, who interviewed Bin Laden in person on two occasions, actually said that the Arab Spring has made Bin Laden

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46. A comparison with the process of democratization in Latin America would be interesting here, as the major religion of the colonized Middle East was different – and remained different – from that of the colonizer, while in Latin America religion was very little, if at all, related to the autochthonous character of the anti-colonial forces.

47. Kassir was assassinated in 2006, shortly after Rafiq al-Hariri, by forces not yet fully known.

48. The term is used here in the sense given by Said, since Kassir does not use this term.



and the kind of ideology that he held much less appealing to the Arab World (ALJAZEERA, 2011). Agreeing with Fisk, I also point out that the Arab Spring will only succeed in bringing the Middle East to a new phase of history if it can find a middle ground between the two main regional modern trends, as addressed in this article: *i*) on one side nationalism and pan-Arabism flirting with socialism and authoritarianism; *ii*) on the other, a transnationalist radical and sectarian Islamism, both in its Sunni and Shia forms. Therefore, the reformist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood appears among the Arabs as one of the possible sources of idealization of the new Middle East, while post-modern Turkey of today (religious but more tolerant than the earlier authoritarian laïcité) is sometimes seen as a practical model. Despite all its limitations, which do not need to be mentioned here, the example of Turkey shows how a democratic government based on Islamic values can exist in practice.

Nonetheless, the Arab Spring has not brought and probably will not bring a Brave New World characterized as an Islamic Middle Eastern utopia seen with disbelief by the West, or as a liberal democratic Western utopia seen with disbelief by the East. Nor is this about thinking that moderate Islam will bring solutions to some of the major social issues of the Middle East, for example, sectarianism and ethnic politics. Sectarianism is indeed present in the basic political and legal system in Lebanon, on the rise in the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, Egypt (mainly between Copts and Muslims), Yemen (between Zaydi Shiites and Sunnis) and Bahrain (between Sunnis and Shiites). Ethnicity very much defines the relationship of the Kurds, Armenians, Berbers, Jews and Palestinians in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Israel and the Occupied Territories, and also elsewhere. The case of Jews and Palestinians who live all over the Middle East shows how religion and nationality are very often treated as ethnicity in the Middle East – as I pointed out on more than one occasion (SCHIOCCHET, 2011th; 2011b). In Egypt, the Arab Spring has seen rare images, for example of Copts forming a human chain to protect Muslims praying in Liberation Square (*Saha al-Tahrir*) during the demonstrations. However, as soon as the Mubarak government bowed to pressure, sectarian violence regained momentum. It would be naive to think that the Arab Spring or a moderate political Islam will accommodate all social forces in the Middle East, and even to think that such accommodation is possible anywhere. Nevertheless, there is apparently no reason to think that an Islamist government would necessarily aggravate ethnic or sectarian tensions even further – at least no more than many of the secular governments that were or are threatened by the Arab Spring.

Moreover, right at the heart of the friction between the Huntingtonian East and West – which I suggest that as such should cease to exist among Easterners and Westerners alike – there is still the question of Palestine as an essential diffusing element of any force that emerges in order to accommodate the differences

between “us” and “them.” In other words, a “more permanent” accommodation<sup>49</sup> of the borders between the West and the Muslim East will only be possible when a solution to the Palestinian issue is finally underway. Thus, by means of conclusion, the Arab Spring is best understood as a process of accommodation of forces (ethnic, political, religious and social) that have not yet emerged in a definite direction and that can last much longer than uprisings normally last. It is also not a revolution, as many claim, because revolutions usually have a defined ideology, or at least produce one as soon as a power vacuum is in place.

Academically speaking, I understand – as does Samir Kassir – that in order to better understand this historic moment, the Huntingtonian clash of civilizations should be replaced by the Lévi-Straussian concept of civilization, whereby

civilization (...) is not a category and hence cannot contain ‘natural’ hierarchies; and humanity is one, since it rests on a common anthropological foundation (...) we must not confuse terrorism with resistance, as the West confuses resistance with terrorism.<sup>50</sup>

Kassir hoped that, accordingly, the Arabs would learn how to “integrate plurality in their unit of time and space” and stop thinking about the differences as a form of division. Symmetrically, not only Arabs should consider Kassir’s advice, but also other Middle Easterners, and especially “us” Westerners. Only then, perhaps, the next Samir Kassir will not be murdered – as he was – for repudiating on the one hand a world as seen by radical Muslims such as Bin Laden, and on the other hand the world of Bin Laden’s executor that recently displayed his head as a trophy of the supposed Western victory over a terrorism that it locates, mistakenly, quite far from itself.

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49. The quotation marks express my relative opinion that in no social context is there a permanent accommodation of forces.

50. KASSIR, 2006, p. 85-86

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