

EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI NATIONALISM: A VIEW INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND VIOLENCE*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the relationship between nationalism and fundamentalism, paying close attention to the historical and cultural influences that affect this relationship in both Egypt and Israel. In addition, this paper will review the events leading up to Egypt's more traditional sense of nationalism, and Israel's religious centered nationalism in order to give the reader an historical perspective from which to view and consider the link between nationalism and violence.

Introduction

Nationalism has been a dominating force in Europe, both politically and militarily, since the turn of the 19th century, but only recently has it been introduced to the Middle East. Nationalism has been defined by Merriam-Webster as, "sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups." While the secular west makes the connection between nationalism and culture, nationalism in the Middle East has been rooted more firmly in religion and ethnicity and given less of an attachment to other aspects of culture. The contrast between Egypt and Israel reveals that countries with a more western model of nationalism tend to breed less religious fundamentalism and terrorism than those countries that connect nationalism to a religion. Egypt and Israel will act as models of the two types of nationalism in the Middle East, which this paper will explore. Egypt represents the more western view of nationalism because its government is more secular and it has a deeper cultural history. Israel represents religious nationalism because it is difficult to separate the Jewish faith from the pride the citizens feel towards the state.

Recent History

Egypt's history is one of constant foreign rule over the once great Egyptian Empire, but Egypt begins its move towards the modern concept of nationalism in the late 19th century. Between 1882 and 1906, a nationalist movement began to grow among the Egyptian people. The Egyptian government had been under British control since 1882, the last foreign power that would rule the country. It was during the twenty-four year period, from 1882 to 1906 that the first political parties began to form. Following World War I, the Ward Party, led by Saad Zaghlul, took over the nationalist movement, but the British exiled Zaghlul to Malta in 1919. Due to the rising Egyptian consciousness of the unjust British occupation, revolts ensued throughout the country, eventually leading to Egypt's independence in 1922.

After Egypt achieved independence Zaghlul was elected Prime Minister of the new parliamentary government. Though Egypt was independent, Britain still held considerable control over the government due to its economic and political connections, which led to a coup d'état in 1952. The coup established the Republic of Egypt, which was headed by General Muhammad Naguib. After Gamal Abdel Nasser

forced Naguib's resignation, he pronounced full independence from the United Kingdom and nationalized the Suez Canal, which caused the Suez Crisis in 1956. A few years following the Six Day War in 1967, Nasser died of a heart attack and was succeeded by Anwar Sadat. Egypt would go on to be involved in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and later sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1978. Sadat was eventually assassinated by members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad group.

Unlike Egypt, Israel's conception as a nation was a much more contemporary affair. Many Jews claim that Israel is the promised land of the Jewish people and has been for over three thousand years. The idea of creating a Jewish state came from Theodore Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, in 1896. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, issued by British Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour, revealed that the British favored the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

Between the early 20th century and the end of World War II, Palestine saw mass migrations of Jews into Jerusalem. In accordance with the terms of the Palestine Mandate, Britain was in control of the land that would later become Israel. The League of Nations had entrusted Britain with the area including parts of Palestine, Jordan, and Israel during the war. Once the war was over, Britain decided to withdraw from the Middle East for a number of reasons, one being the rising violence in the area. In 1947, the U.N. General Assembly gave roughly 55% of the land held by the British during the war to the Jews and the remainder was left to the Arabs. The State of Israel was officially created on May 14, 1948, one day before the expiration of the Palestine Mandate, and amongst strong protest by the Arab League.

Effects of History on Culture

Being ruled by foreign powers for several hundred years has made Egypt very different from other Middle Eastern nations. The constant dominance from a foreign entity has helped the Egyptian people come together over the common goal of independence. Egyptians wanted to get their own identity back, as seen with the growth of the nationalist movement at the turn of the century. Egypt is different in its approach to independence because it did not need to rely on a common religious bond for unity, but rather united over a common idea that Egypt should be able to rule itself once more. In an article entitled, *The debate on Islam and secularism in Egypt*, scholar Fauzi Najjar writes, "When the Ward Party was established in 1919, it was called Hizb 'Almani (Secular Party), meaning that it was based on social, political and national identities, with no reference to religion. Its slogan was al-din li-Lah wa al-watan li al-jami' (religion belongs to God, the homeland belongs to all)" (Najjar).

Even though the Egyptians united over the goal of independence from Britain and any future occupation, it is the western influence brought by Britain into the country that helped spark the revolution. The idea of nationalism and other western ideas were introduced into the area by the British. The combination of foreign occupation and the new concept of nationalism helped the Egyptians gain their independence and model their new government. Egypt, like many western nations, has a parliamentary government and President Muhammad Hosni Said Mubarak, who is leader of the National Democratic Party, has been in power since 1981. The western influence and prolonged period of foreign rule that permeated Egyptian culture were ultimately responsible for its present inclination towards secularism and true nationalism in the western sense.

As a nation, Israel did not have as much of a history behind it as Egypt. Created specifically for a religious group, Israelis' common bond was not one of independence as with the Egyptians, but a religious one. Ephraim Tabory writes in his article, *Jewish Identity, Israeli Nationalism, and Soviet Jewish Migration*:

From its inception, Israeli leaders have struggled over the definition of Israel as a Jewish state. One position espoused is that Israel should be a secular, universalist-oriented state that is inhabited primarily by Jews. An opposite position is that Israel's identity is religiously constructed, and that the Jewish religion should affect all aspects of society and government.

Following Israel's creation in 1948, the Arab Higher Committee ordered a violent three-day attack on all Jewish citizens. Fighting between Jews and Arabs began to spread in what would be the beginning of the 1948 War of Independence. The fighting after the establishment of the Israeli Nation shows that Israel was, and would continue to be, a nation defined by religion.

The violence of 1948 created an environment of fear and uneasiness for the majority of the citizens in Israel. The Arab attack on the Jews was not only an attack on the Jewish people, but also on their faith. According to Paul Brass's book *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, the fighting between the Arabs and the Jews falls under one of the three types of struggles encountered in ethnic identity formation. He writes, "The second takes place between ethnic groups as a competition for rights, privileges, and available resources" (247). Britain and the recently established United Nations took land and resources away from the Arabs living in Palestine when they gave land over to the Jews for the creation of Israel. Not only did the Arabs retaliate due to a loss of territory, but also because they felt they held a right to that land. Israel became a religious nation due to the history of the Jewish people. Many Jews viewed Israel as the land promised them for millennia, a totally religious notion. Believing they had a right to the land, the Jews banded together under the common cause of Judaism.

How Nationalism Relates to Fundamentalism

Egypt

Egypt is one of the most stable nations in the Middle East due to its connection with the western world, its economy, and its government. Anwar Sadat was the first president of Egypt who embodied secularist ideas. He tried to enter into peace agreements with the United States and Israel, but neither nation accepted the terms he proposed. He would later enter into the Yom Kippur War against Israel. It is important to note that Egypt was in a formal war with Israel and did not use terrorism as the Palestinians did after Israel's conception. By going into war, Sadat created a sense of nationalism in Egypt that was not directly connected to a specific religion. Later, Egypt and Israel would begin the Camp David Peace Agreement, which would lead to peace between the two nations.

Egypt's alliance with the Soviet Union may have played a role in the formation of its sense of nationalism. The Camp David Peace Agreement was not taken well by many Muslims and Jews, but it is not the modern state's role to cater to specific ethnic groups. Brass writes that some neo-Marxist groups have noted that "the modern capitalist state has played a protective and even an emancipatory role in relation to some minority groups, but their spokesmen have ignored or treated only in the most peripheral way the roles of ethnic groups" (251). Although Egypt is far from being a model of capitalism, it is heading that way and picking up many of capitalism's characteristics in the process. It is true that Egypt is one of the most powerful Arab nations in the world, but the state does not allow popular opinion to interfere with what is best for the country. Even though much of the Arab community viewed the peace talks with Israel as treason to the Islamic faith, the modern state must remain a "neutral arena" (Brass 250). As John Stuart Mill said, "Where the sentiment of a nationality exists in any

force, there is a prima facie case for uniting all members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart (Dawisha 7). In other words, the government, though comprised of members who share a connection, is apart from those who created it.

As a result of the neutrality of the state, Egypt's nationalism is more western than that of other nations in the Middle East. What a neutral and more western state means for fundamentalism is that Arab fundamentalists will not find as large a community in Egypt as they would in countries whose governments are more centered on Islam. Nicola Pratt, a professor at the University of East Anglia, writes:

...in the course of searching for an "authentic" Egyptian identity, uncorrupted by Western influences, a critical mass of Egyptian civil society participates in producing a political consensus that excludes the possibility of fluidity and heterogeneity, thereby contributing to creating a climate in which civil and political freedoms may be legitimately sacrificed in the name of national unity and security (Pratt).

Civil freedoms were sacrificed following the assassination of Sadat in 1981. Joseph Mayton writes in *Middle East*, "Emergency laws put in place after the 1981 assassination of President Anwar Sadat are set to expire in June. The president has hinted they may be extended but, ultimately they will probably be replaced by more permanent anti-terrorism legislation" (Mayton). He goes on to write that, "Activist groups such as Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood are worried this will mean the Cairo government will launch a clampdown on civil liberties" (Mayton). Sadat wanted to unite Egypt as a nation, not just its Arab population and, as a result, agitated some groups into acting out against this change. One of the groups that took the course Egypt was heading in especially hard was the Muslim Brotherhood.

When speaking of religious fundamentalism and Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is always brought to attention. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in the 1928 as a reaction against British imperialism, but has come to promote Islamic unity in recent years. Although responsible for such acts as the assassination of Sadat, the Muslim Brotherhood is a primarily non-violent group. The reason for earlier violence was the drastic changes facing the country. Egypt went from British occupation to a parliamentary representative system to a republic in only about thirty years. The Arab identity which had united Egypt during its occupation was no longer needed as the country began its transformation into a modern state with a western sense of nationalism. Violence from the Brotherhood was not born out of Egyptian nationalism, but was rather a sign that the old order was being overtaken by the new. Violence marks the transformation of any society into a new way of thinking, such as the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Civil Rights Movement. As the new Egyptian nationalism took root over the years, violence against the change lessened.

After the triple suicide-bombing at Dahab and two bombings near Goura in late April of 2006, the Muslim Brotherhood denounced the attacks. An article in the *Economist* reads:

The vast bulk of Egypt's broad Islamist movement condemns the violence of the radicals. The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's strongest opposition party and also the historical model for groups such as Hamas, called the Dahab attacks a heinous crime and "a flagrant violation of the tolerant and peaceful teachings of Islam" (Punishing).

Egypt's emergence into a modern state has led to decreased fundamentalism and violence. President Hosni Mubarak said about terrorism, "We will besiege it, uproot it, and dry up its sources"

(Omestad). After the initial period of adjustment, Egypt's more secular stance has deterred terrorism because Egyptians now have a true Egyptian identity, one that is not solely dependent on religion, although religion does play a part in it. Martha Cottam writes, "Egypt, probably alone in the Arabic-speaking world, meets the criteria of a nation state. The Egyptian territorial community appears to be the focus of a primary-intensity identity attachment for the overwhelming majority of Egyptians (66). What Cottam means is that the majority of Egyptians identify themselves through their sense of Egyptian nationalism rather than with a particular religion.

One of the reasons the western style of nationalism was able to take hold in Egypt is due to its extensive history. Citizens of Egypt have something to feel proud of more than just a religion. Islam acts as a common bond for most Egyptians, but it alone cannot differentiate between those living in Egypt and the rest of the Islamic world. By having a deep-rooted culture, Egyptian citizens have something in common that makes them purely Egyptian. Cottam writes that nations "are attractive as groups with which one can identify because they satisfy needs and they can embody commonly shared values" (94). Egyptians share not only a religion, but a history as well. Because nations can satisfy some of those needs filled by religion, religion becomes much less of a power in society, as seen in many developed countries. Benedict Anderson writes, "What then [is] required [is] a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning...Few things...[are] better suited to this end than an idea of nation" (Cottam 94). Though there will always be those who feel the need to use violence in order to react against a changing world, Egypt is heading in the right direction to reduce this violence as much as possible.

Israel

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is as old as the nation of Israel itself. Created solely for the Jewish people, Israel represents more than just a home for the Jews; it is a home for Judaism. The Palestinian attack during Israel's conception was seen not only as an attack on a country which had taken over half of Palestine's land, but an attack on the faith of the citizens of Israel. Louis Snyder writes that although Israeli nationalism seems to be heading in a more political direction, "its origins were in the religious...traditions of Judaism. On the surface the rivalry between Arabs and Jews had a political complexion; at its root it was patently a religious impulse" (185).

One of the reasons fundamentalism is more prevalent in Israel is the perceived Arab threat exasperated by the Palestinian bombings in Israel and the growing Arab population on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The idea that fundamentalists and terrorists were defending the Jewish faith gave credence to their cause. Juergensmeyer writes, "In talking with Israel's religious activists, it became clear to me that what they were defending was not only the political entity of the state...but a vision of a Jewish society that had ancient roots" (46). Having a concrete enemy such as the Palestinians or Arabs makes it much easier for fundamentalism to thrive because it is easier to justify their cause. While Egyptian terrorists were reacting against the idea of secularism or symbols of the western world, Israeli terrorists have a flesh and blood embodiment of what they are fighting against.

The conflict between the Arabs and the Israeli's comes down to the Jewish connection to the land. Israel as a nation did not exist until after World War II, but the connection between the Jews and the land reaches as far back as 1211 B.C., a date many scholars connect to the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. The sacredness of the land holds special significance for the Jews and it is out of this significance that the Israelis base their claim on the land they now inhabit. The difference between the Israeli connection to the land and the Egyptians' connection to their land is that the Israelis' is one based primarily on

religion where as the Egyptian connection is based primarily on history and culture. Not to say that religion does not play a vital role in culture, but the Jews view Israel as the land promised them by God. An Israeli soldier guarding Baruch Goldstein's grave said of his wife, "she was...explaining why it is necessary to maintain and defend Jewish outposts on the West Bank, how the Jewish faith is inextricably linked with the land" (Juergensmeyer 53). Because the Jews link their faith with the land, the Palestinian attacks on Israel are seen as attacks on their faith, attacks the Israeli people must defend themselves against at all costs.

Increased fundamentalism and terrorism in Israel is born out of the connection between the Jewish faith and the land. Mark Juergensmeyer writes, "Jewish control over the sacred city was essential, Lerner said, and he regarded it as heretical to give up the least bit of biblical land...to Arabs and their Palestinian Authority" (47). As right-wing Jewish activist Yoel Lerner reveals, Israeli terrorism is not only directed toward the Arabs, but at the Israeli government as well. When a government is based on a particular religion, as in Israel's case, it promotes, though not intentionally, religious terrorism and at the same time makes itself vulnerable to the religious population it serves.

Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by Yigal Amir exemplifies the idea that governments based on religion are susceptible to terrorism from citizens who share the same faith. Although Sadat's assassination was carried out by Egyptians and tied to religion, religious governments are more prone to terrorism because they are viewed by the public as representatives of their faith. Egypt's more secular government, though viewed with disdain by some religious groups, is less at threat from its own citizens because its secularism prevents many Egyptians from viewing it as a reflection of their own faith. Israel's government, although in no way condoning violence in any form, is still viewed by many Israelis as a Jewish government made for the Jewish people; its actions are seen as reflecting this faith. The issue of Israel's role in representing the Jewish faith is brought to attention in Tabory's article when he writes:

An underlying implication of the dilemma regarding Jewish-Israeli identity that is less often analyzed, and is the primary focus of this article, relates to the question of whether Israel should focus only on the internal needs of its own citizens, or whether it should view itself as the representative of the Jewish people throughout the world (Tabory).

Tabory admits that Israel reflects the faith of the Israeli people. When the government tries to become more secular and break away from its religious ties, it receives a backlash from the religious community. The same situation faced the Egyptian government when it began to westernize itself, but it was not as deeply tied to religious faith as Israel is now.

The connection between the land, government, and faith is responsible for creating the sense of religious nationalism found in Israel. J.H. Hayes writes, "Man's religious sense is exemplified not only in the great surviving religions...but also in contemporary communism and especially in modern nationalism" (Snyder 182). Judaism is inextricably tied with Israeli nationalism. Egypt's long and deep national history and identity allows Egyptians to bond with one another over cultural connections other than religion, but Israelis use Judaism as their primary source of cohesion. Because religion plays such a prevalent role in Israel, Jewish fundamentalists are able to find a larger community of supporters than in countries leaning more towards secularism.

Even as Israel tries to make its way into the more secular world of politics, Judaism continues to remain connected to the state. One more reason fundamentalism seems to develop more readily in nations with religious nationalism is due to the fact that fundamentalist groups attach themselves to the

state and become part of the political scene. Such was the case with Gush Emunim group. Armstrong writes that, "Gush was pragmatic, clever, and resourceful. It appealed to atheists and secularists, but for its Orthodox members it was an essentially religious movement" (283). Because nationalism in Israel is linked with Judaism, fundamentalists are able to attract members such as atheists and secularists. Atheist or secularist individuals who have national pride, though no religious motivation, are irrevocably linked with Judaism through the religion's connection with the state.

The political arena cannot save Israel from its connection with Judaism. Hope for Israel lies in the hands of the younger generations. Snyder writes about the role of Judaism in politics that, "political conflicts the religious parties never polled more than 15 percent in a general election [but] By careful maneuvering they managed to maintain a disproportionately large share of political control" (212). Though the continued move toward secularism has helped Israel begin its move away from a religion based nation, secularism alone will not be enough. Snyder continues: "On the other hand, many Israelis, particularly the younger generation, contended that orthodoxy was unable to cope with the complexities of the modern state" (212). Though many terrorists are young males, the vast majority of youths in Israel strive for peace and although fundamentalists and terrorists are more at home in countries with religious nationalism, the number of these individuals will decrease if the younger generations of Israel are able to continue to strive for peace.

Conclusion

Nationalism remains a powerful force in contemporary society, but along with the power it can grant a nation, nationalism can also have unforeseen social effects. The comparison of nationalism in both Egypt and Israel reveals that nationalism styled after the western world tends to promote less fundamentalism and terrorism than religious nationalism. The national history and culture of Egypt have aided in turning the country into a model of a westernized nation, while Israel's shorter national history and conflict with surrounding Arab nations has led its sense of nationalism in a more religious direction. Although both countries suffer from terrorism, both are trying to improve their situation in one way or another. Separating religion from the state seems to have worked better for Egypt, and Israel's continued drive towards a more secular state, aided by its younger generations, may also prove the key in the fight against terrorism.

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