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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

edited by

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Narrative, Gender, and Cultural Representation in the Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East

Fatma Müge Göçek

"The story of nationalism is necessarily a story of betrayal," Partha Chatterjee tells us, since nationalism "confers freedom only by imposing new controls, defines a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold, and grants the dignity of citizenship to some because others could not be allowed to speak for themselves."[1] This contradictory essence runs through most of the literature on nationalism as scholars debate its definition, differential impact, and disparate transformation. The chapters in this volume step back from these debates to focus instead on the social construction of nationalism. They emphasize the process through which nationalism is constituted through the constant negotiation of its boundaries by including some groups, meanings, and practices and excluding others. The chapters cluster specifically around three sites of boundary negotiation in the construction of nationalism in the Middle East: narrative, gender, and cultural representation. These sites especially help illuminate both the silences nationalism rests upon and the new voices it creates.

NATIONALISM AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

An examination of the current debates on nationalism, ranging from its specific origins to the nature of its present manifestations reveals a fun-

damental dichotomy between the political and cultural. While some scholars emphasize the political dimension of nationalism in terms of its legitimation of the bureaucratic state organization,[2] others stress the cultural dimension in terms of it emotional, ethnic, quasi-religious aspects.[3] The epistemological roots of this political/cultural dichotomy are traced to Kant and to Herder's alternate conceptions of the nation:[4] Kant depicts the nation as a political community comprising individuals signifying their will in determining the form of government, whereas Herder perceives the nation as a natural solidarity comprising unique cultural characteristics. The debate on the specific historical location of the origin of the nation builds upon this dichotomy: scholars such as Ernest Gellner[5] emphasize the political dimension trace the emergence of the nation to the seventeenth-century conceptions of statehood, while others such as Anthony Smith,[6] stressing the cultural dimension, trace back the idea of nation and national loyalty to antiquity.

The shift from theory to praxis whereby scholars attempt to identify and categorize national constructions replicates the political/cultural dichotomy. The focus on the nature of political institutions leads Michael Mann[7] to identify two factors accounting for the different forms nations take: the lack of fit between the boundaries of a nation and the existing state, and the forms of popular mobilization from the top down or the reverse. The disparate political forms of nationalism between France and England on the one side and the rest of Europe on the other leads John Hall[8] to bring forward another factor lodged in history: as nationalism is disseminated by design by French armies during the Napoleonic era, it gets transformed as the Prussian state adopts it defensively "as a revolution from above" in order to survive its impact, as the Czechs mobilize from below to develop "risorgimento nationalism," and later as the German national socialists produce "integral nationalism" in their attempts to unite a new society at the expense of the minorities. Leah Greenfeld[9] draws upon the political framework as she categorizes nationalisms into three types as individualist/civic (as in England), collectivistic/civic (as in France) and collectivistic/ethnic (as in Russia and Germany). In contrast to the emphasis of the political perspective on structures and forms of mass mobilization, the cultural perspective emphasizes the emergence of different visions of nationalism. Miroslav Hroch[10] emphasizes the significance of ideas in the development of nationalism among smaller European nations; the initial phase comprises the scholarly activity of a small group of intellectuals developing the idea of the nation, which leads to conscious national agitation for emancipation by a growing number of patriots, which in turn generates mass nationalist activity. The delineation of the difference between France and England on the one side and the rest of Europe on the other also emerges in the cultural perspective: Hans Kohn[11] argues that the French nationalism set the parameters of nationalism with its cosmopolitan outlook, universalism, and acceptance of civilization along the standards of the Enlightenment—German nationalism "deviated" from this positive model by assuming an ethnic and cultural character with an anti-Enlightenment and romantic stand.

The cultural/political dichotomy disappears as both camps move away from France and England toward Germany, Russia and the rest of the world. Both view these emergent nationalisms as "deviations" that often hegemonize and terrorize people, thus introducing a new dichotomy between the "Western" model and its "non-Western" imitations. Eli Kedourie[12] identifies colonialism and the Western education of indigenous intellectuals as the two predominant factors determining the contours of Third-World nationalism. New states in Latin America, John Hall[13] argues, are created on an entirely different conception of nationalism based on "desire and fear blessed by opportunity." The transformation of the political\cultural dichotomy into a Western\non-Western one become complete when Partha Chatterjee[14] argues that the anti-colonial nationalism in the non-Western world divides the world of institutions and social practices into two domains, the material domain of the "outside," of a West-dominated science and technology, and the "inner" spiritual domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity where the modern conception of nation is forged. The inconsistency produced by this divide leads non-Western nationalism to failure:[15] the nationalist project cannot maintain its distinctive identity and also adjust it to the requirements of progress.

How does one surmount the political/cultural and Western/non-Western dichotomies in the analysis of nationalism? Bruce Kapferer[16] suggests that each nationalism be treated as a distinct case without being compared to others: such an approach would alleviate the problem of the evaluation and interpretation of one nationalism by the norms and practices of another. Another more practical suggestion is to seek analytically for frameworks that overcome the dichotomies. Ron Suny[17] recommends, for instance, that political process and meaning creation be analyzed simultaneously since "the generation of shared meanings, feelings and perceived interests cannot be derived directly from social processes or structures . . . but is mediated and comprehended through the discourses of nationalism as they reach intellectuals, activists and ordinary people." This approach also follows upon the work of Benedict Anderson,[18] who focuses on the imagined and constructed nature of nationalism as contemporary political processes interact with technological and cultural developments to produce new visions of political community. The essays in this edited volume build upon this last

approach as they focus on the process through which Middle Eastern nationalism is constructed. This focus on the process of construction introduces a fluidity to the analysis that does indeed largely succeed in escaping existing divides.

A NEW FOCUS ON THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONALISM

This volume delves into the social construction of nationalism in the Middle East by arguing that the boundaries of nationalism take shape through a practice of constant negotiation that includes some groups, meanings, and practices and excludes others. The essays in the volume identify narrative, gender, and cultural representation as the three sites around which boundary negotiation becomes significant.

The work of Max Weber[19] on social closure and its subsequent interpretations by Frank Parkin[20] and others forms the theoretical foundation of this constructionist approach. Max Weber first alerts scholars to the falsely assumed cultural and ethnic homogeneity in the conceptualizations of the modern nation-state and then proceeds to unravel this false assumption of homogeneity by pointing out internal cleavages based on religion, ethnicity, or linguistic, racial, and cultural differentiation. These internal cleavages become obscured through the process of social closure whereby dominant groups exclude some and usurp others to erase signs of difference. Frank Parkin[21] studies this process of exclusion and usurpation in more detail, arguing that the process occurs simultaneously since the exclusion process inadvertently reveals the criteria of inclusion and usurpation. In addition to production relations, public and private property and education emerge as the two most significant exclusionary devices in contemporary society through which dominant groups exclude others. We argue here that nationalism is constructed through a similar process of social closure whereby a social group assumes the cloak of the "nation" to contest, negotiate, and determine which groups, meanings, and practices ought to define the imagined community of the nation. As this group identifies certain shared characteristics of what comprises a nation, as it creates common myths, employs specific cultural symbols, passes particular laws, it concomitantly starts to form social boundaries around the imagined community that include some elements and exclude others.

In the context of the Middle East, narrative, gender, and cultural representation emerge as the three significant sites where the boundaries of nationalism are negotiated through a process of inclusion and exclusion. The site of narrative discloses the experiences that unite

social groups into political communities—the stories of the past and the present are told and retold to include the historical memories of certain social groups, to privilege certain symbols and myths, and to overlook others. The site of gender similarly reveals that nationalist projects consistently favor the standpoint of men and privilege the masculine and that they do so with the firm support of the state. The site of cultural representation explores the venues of fiction, theater, film, and television through which nationalism generates and reproduces meaning, favoring some interpretations over others. In all these sites, the emerging boundaries are continuously tested and contested by all members of society both within and outside the imagined communities. This process of contestation both reproduces existing conceptions of nationalism and, at the same time, creates ambiguities that could potentially challenge them.

The edited volume also takes a methodological position. Unlike the works on nationalism that often present in-depth case analyses or bring together nationalisms of specific geographical regions, it focuses on themes that crosscut existing boundaries. In doing so, it follows the example of Rashid Khalidi's edited volume *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (1992), which brings together analyses on Arab nationalism in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and the Hejaz. Our edited volume similarly focuses on themes that connect Arab, Turkish, Persian, and other nationalisms. Our contributors also crosscut academic divides as they come from a multiplicity of disciplines, ranging from literature, history, anthropology, and political science to sociology. Their essays employ a wide range of sources from official correspondence, theater, literary narratives, demonstrations, films, and television programs.

OUTLINE OF THE VOLUME

A more detailed discussion of the themes and essays in comprising the volume demonstrates these points in more detail.[22]

Part 1: Narrative

"The narration of the nation," Homi Bhabha argues,[23] contains "thresholds of meanings that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production." Indeed, the ambiguity of the boundaries of the nation becomes apparent in narration as social groups continually contest and renegotiate their interpretations of the past, present, and future. The nationalist narrative often emerges as a simple, strong story painted in wide, bold brush strokes, one that frequently suppresses alternative sequences and erases sites of resistance. "Dissenting and marginal

voices," Partha Chatterjee[24] tells us, "are appropriated with varying degrees of risk and success."

Narrative is significant in constructing a shared experience around which social groups build solidarity. As events of the past are recited, as leaders and heroes are identified, as certain values and norms are emphasized at the expense of others, certain ethnic, religious, and racial groups emerge triumphant over others to define the boundaries of nationalism. The essays in part 1 all focus on constructions of narratives that privilege the experiences of certain social groups over others. While Fatma Müge Göçek studies the emergence of narratives of nationalism by Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Arabs in the Ottoman Empire, Şükrü Hanioğlu focuses on the historical events that enabled Young Turks to form Turkish nationalism at the expense of Ottomanism. James L. Gelvin's essay illuminates how the separate demonstrations of the elite and masses in Syria created disparate narratives and thus multiple Arab nationalisms.

According to Göçek, three elements interacted to from the narrative of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arab nationalisms: structures of war, commerce, and reforms; visions of history, literature, and education; and organization of philanthropic associations, secret societies, and political parties. While all four nationalisms shared these elements, their diverse locations within the Ottoman social structure accounted for the disparate political outcomes: the Greeks and Turks formed their own nation-states, the Armenians failed to sustain theirs within the empire, and the Arabs fractured into many political units.

Hanioğlu focuses on the transition form Ottomanism to Turkish nationalism; he argues that the failure of appeals to groups to join Ottomanism, the inability of the Ottoman state to socialize its subjects into citizens, and outrage against the policy of Great Powers and subsequent Ottoman defeats enabled Turkish nationalists to create a narrative that promised a new vision. The Japanese victory against the Russians, which demonstrated to the Ottomans the possibility of success of non-European races over European ones, was especially significant in the emergence of this racially based new vision.

Gelvin analyzes one form of collective ceremony, the demonstration, under British rule and the Faysal administration in Syria to illustrate how different types of demonstrations demarcated the boundaries of different imagined communities. The government-planned demonstrations fronted by the elites emphasized vertical relations of patronage, contained short speeches in French and English, and briefly utilized popular participation as a backdrop. Mass demonstrations, however, emphasized a political community with horizontal relations of power, highlighted popular participation, contained impassioned

long impromptu speeches, and thus concretized the will of the nation. The different narratives produced by these two disparate experiences thus produced multiple Arab nationalisms.

Part 2: Gender

Even though women are very prominent in nationalist imagery, not only has nationalism never granted women and men equal access to resources of the nation-state, but it also continuously favored a distinctly homosocial form of bonding. The nation-state remains "a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege."[25] The image of the nation as woman frames women as chaste, dutiful, daughterly, or maternal, thereby symbolically both limiting and absorbing women into the body politic.[26] Even though nationalism acknowledges women's reproductive role, the cultural reproduction of the national spirit still remains a male act, as men imbue eternal life upon the nation through "culture, heroic deeds and qualities of the spirit."[27] Women become further eroticized and exoticized in colonial discourse to justify imperial domination in the name of a civilization where the European male springs to action to protect the oppressed indigenous female.[28] The anticolonial nationalist discourse that emerges in opposition to this portrayal reacts in turn by withdrawing women into the private sphere; nationalism situates "the women's question in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state."[29] In nationalist struggles, the discourse is thus about women but often not by them; the location of women in the inner domain precludes any possibility of effective reform in altering their political exclusion.

The site of gender thus becomes significant in identifying a fundamental boundary around which the imagined communities exclude women as social actors. Even though women actively participate in all stages of nationalist endeavors, their contribution is often decontextualized and idealized in the narratives and their participation often curbed or demobilized in the ensuing public institutions. The essays in part 2 all problematize gender within the context of nationalism to explode this patriarchal interpretation; in order to uncover women's agency, the first essay explores women's literary narratives, and the latter two deconstruct the role of the state. Miriam Cooke studies women's literary narratives in Lebanon to develop a humanistic nationalism where women develop outside the boundaries of the state as social agents. In focusing on the intersection between gender and the state in the context of nationalism, Julie M. Peteet examines the Palestinian resistance movement to illustrate the gradual emergence of the state control of gender and sexuality, while Suad Joseph demonstrates how in Lebanon gender

and patriarchy weave through the public/private and state/civil society distinctions to render them meaningless.

Cooke's focus on women's literary constructions as a response to the failure of nationalist projects and state nationalism leads her to an alternate formulation of women-centered imagined communities and political selfhood. It is in this context that Cooke discovers the form of humanist nationalism generated by women, one rooted in an individual, nurturing relationship with Lebanon that is dynamic, reciprocal, and quasimaternal—one that induces self-generation rather than destruction. After exploring new sources of knowledge on nationalism to reveal and challenge the boundaries of state nationalism that exclude women, Cooke constructs instead an inclusionary humanistic nationalism.

Peteet's analysis focuses on the process through which the gendering of political practice takes place in Palestinian nationalism. Based on her ethnographic research, she argues that political structures control sexuality and gender identity through two processes; while the militarization of society and the concomitant gender ambiguity facilitate control over definitions of legitimate sexualities, the replacement of the family by the committees enables the hierarchization of forms of gender identity and participation in political struggle. As a consequence, political structures start to determine who is to be included in the movement at what level, given their sexual proclivities and gender identity. Suad Joseph argues that local gender systems, especially patriarchy, operate as central threads in the cloth of cultures that weave through all social and structural divides in Lebanon. She uses gender as the main agent of boundary formation as opposed to the existing one premised on the state/civil society divide. This formulation leads Joseph, like Cooke, to advocate for a democracy based on the elimination of gendered forms of domination.

Part 3: Cultural Representation

"Every nation," Hegel states in *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*,[30] "has its own imagery, its gods, angels, devils or saints who live in the nation's traditions . . . [and whose] history, recollection of . . . deeds is linked with public festivals, national games, with many of the state's domestic institutions or foreign affairs, with well-known houses and districts with public memorials and temples." Even though Hegel then continues to predict the demise of these cultural symbols with the world-historical progress of nations, they nevertheless form a site in creating meaning structures for the nation-state. Indeed, in nineteenth-century Europe, rites and festivals, myths and symbols draw people into active participation in the national mystique, and national monuments

in stone and mortar anchor them in national consciousness.[31] These cultural processes become especially significant in the Third World as the only sites that escape the material domination of the West in science and technology "to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core, the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture."[32] Nation-states in the Middle East seek similar reassurances as they delve into the historical past to create public events that culturally reaffirm their existence.[33] For instance, the Turkish republic excavates pre-Islamic Hittite sites in its attempt to extend the Turkish presence in Anatolia to antiquity while Syria reconstructs a second-century Roman theater to instigate its rule as the extension of ancient civilizations; Iran seeks for roots in pre-Islamic Akhaemenian Persia, and Egypt's pharaonic past becomes a source of national self-assertion. These sites of cultural representation also become globally transportable with the current developments in communication; citizens living abroad recreate their imagined nation and its imagined past through broadcasts.

The site of cultural representation is significant in displaying a multitude of media such as theater, film, television, posters, or novels that become contested sites of meaning for constructions of nationalism; the state and civil society vie for control of these sites to affirm the legitimacy of the social groups controlling them. The essays in part 3 all focus on how cultural representations set the boundaries of the imagined communities by selectively giving meaning to the experiences and interpretations of certain social groups. Shiva Balaghi focuses on the creation of a new form of theater in Iran that fostered the emergence of a specific nationalist vision; Walter Armbrust's comparison of films by a popular producer in Egypt with state-sponsored posters conveys two different interpretations of the modernist ideology underlying the Egyptian nationalist project. Mandana E. Limbert similarly compares two disparate visions of the Iranian nation presented in the Persian-language television programs in the United States as proroyalist/secular images clash with those of the Islamic Republic.

Balaghi analyzes how the new cultural medium of the theater identified Iran's internal woes, generated new visions of Iran and Europe on stage, and gradually set a national agenda to remedy the perceived weaknesses. The Iranian theater also revealed European political ambitions in that it provided a new window for the Orientalists through which they could identify Iranian disorder and justify European intervention to remedy it. Armbrust focuses on another more recent cultural medium, the film, in the context of Egypt; he illustrates two disparate visions of the Egyptian nationalist project by comparing the popular films of 'Adil Imam with to the Ministry of Culture's official poster of Egypt's hundred years of enlightenment. While the poster projects an

imagined sense of historical continuity where Egyptians successfully accomplish the modernist vision embedded in the nationalist project, the films of 'Adil Imam criticize such a pristine and positive image of Egyptian modernity—the protagonists of all the films believe in the system at first but are then either corrupted, imprisoned, or ostracized by it.

Mandana Limbert identifies another site of such contestation as she analyzes Persian-language television programs produced in the United States by the proroyalists who support the return of the Pahlavis, the secularists who espouse a Western-style democracy, and the government organizations of the Islamic Republic of Iran who are currently in power in Iran. Even though all three claim to be the legitimate representatives of the Iranian national identity, the political priorities, lifestyles, and moral principles they advocate for their imagined communities vastly differ from one another.

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NOTES

1. Chatterjee 1993, p. 154.
2. See, for instance, Breuilly 1993; Gellner 1983; Giddens 1985; and Hobsbawm 1990.
3. See, for instance, Anderson 1983; Seton-Watson 1977; Smith 1986; and Tivey 1981.
4. Refer to Kedourie 1966 for an extensive discussion.
5. See especially Ernest Gellner 1983.
6. Refer especially to Smith 1986.
7. See, for instance Mann 1995, p. 46.
8. Refer, for instance, to Hall 1993.
9. See, in particular, Greenfeld 1992, p. 11.
10. See, for instance, Hroch 1985.
11. See, in particular, Kohn 1967.
12. See Kedourie 1971.
13. See, in particular, Hall 1993, p. 9.
14. Refer to Chatterjee 1993, in particular.
15. Refer to Chatterjee 1986, in particular.
16. See Kapferer 1988.
17. See in particular Suny 1993, p. 17.
18. See Anderson 1983 in particular.
19. Refer to Weber 1967 for an extensive discussion of his conceptualization.
20. See, in particular, Parkin 1979.
21. See ibid., p. 45.
22. Please note that the Arabic transcriptions vary across the essays. The particular transcription employed in each essay reflects the preference of the author of the essay.
23. Bhabha 1990, p. 4.
24. Chatterjee 1993, p. 156.
25. McClintock 1991, p. 122.
26. See in particular Mosse 1985, p. 67.
27. Verdery 1994, p. 242.
28. See, in particular, Enloe 1989, p. 44.
29. Chatterjee 1993, p. 117.
30. Refer to the citation in Balakrishnan 1995, p. 59.
31. See, for instance, Mosse 1975, p. 2.
32. Chatterjee 1993, pp. 120–21.
33. See Baram 1990.

PART I

Narrative