

The Ideology of Arabism versus Islamism (A Brief Comparison Essay)



Michel Aflaq



Hafez Al Assad



Gamal Abdel Nasser



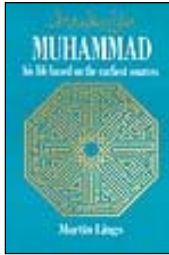
President of Najjadeh Party Dr. Anis Al Saghir (to the left) with Mr. Adnan Hakim (to the right) in the Moslem scout “Al Gara’ah” Congress in downtown Beirut in the 50’s (By permission from Najjadeh Party Photos Archive).



Hassan El-Saghir, P.E.; M.Eng. (Env.)

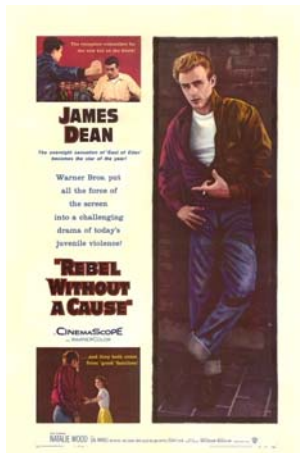
On Arabism vs. Islamism

You ask me what is the difference between *Arabism* and *Islamism* since both rose from the same area of the world and both motivated the same people of the Middle East?



I tell you the difference is huge since *Islamism* as a method of ruling always existed whether the Arabs were at their summit or at their decline. The same is not true with *Arabism* since this concept starting with the *Prophet Mohammad*, culminated at the *Abbasid* and latter *Andalusia* age, almost disappeared during the *Mongolian* and latter *Ottoman* ruling while *Islamism* resisted the extinction. Therefore, *Islam* is the necessary condition in the prevailing of *Arabism* whereas *Christianity* and *Judaism* are sufficient ones. However, when *Islamism* becomes very strong then this unbalanced condition cause the weakness of *Arabism* if not it's almost extinction. It is at the end of his life that the Arab philosopher *Michel Aflaq* realized the importance of *Islam* in the Arab countries hence his conversion from *Christianity* to *Islam*.

Therefore, we deduce that the control of the *Arabism* i.e. *Al Ouroubah (Uruba)* of the Middle Eastern people or ruling them through the weakening of their *Arabism* always resulted in the ability to govern them and hence take control of their wealth and resources. This happened when the Arab countries where under the dominance of *Mongolians*, *Ottomans* and latter on the *French* or *British Imperialism*. Hence, when the Arabs where ruled by non Arabs of different religions and even by Moslems, their *Arabism* was robbed from them resulting in their fallout and weakening. Consequently, this *Arabism* or *Al Ouroubah (Uruba)* was and will stay the the main sensitive and critical factor affecting the daily life of Millions of Arabs in the Middle East contrary to *Islamism* that is always unaffected by who and whom is in control of the Arab countries. By *Islamism* I understand it to be extremism in *Islam* or political *Islam* that can become *Moslem Fundamentalism* and possibly take the aspect of fanatic *Islam* i.e. terrorism. Consequently, the remedy to the prevention of the control of *Arabism* and hence the



Arabs by an outside force alien to the Middle East and Arab countries is to let *Arabism* acquire a rebellion attitude and consequently to follow the thinking of *Michel Aflaq* in his the *Five volumes book* entitled "*Fi Sabil Al Ba'ath*":

One primordial aspect of Baathism is its revolutionary nature that appears in its tendency towards promoting political revolutionary coups in order to amend a deteriorating situation because of corruption or disloyalty to the Nation. In addition, Aflaq's Baathism encourage the Youth to have a rebellion attitude in their life.

While my approach to liberty and hence to revolution stands on the fact that Arabic people must be allowed to have a rebellion attitude i.e. to have one form of democratic behavior in term of freedom of expression and thinking with respect

of human rights to defend their Arabism, Aflaq's theory stems from the original foundations of Ba'athism which are Liberty, Socialism, and Unity. His approach to Liberty is to free through Revolution the Arab people from any form of Colonialism to make them equal under Socialism as a step towards future Arab Unity which is the most difficult to achieve. Actually, most of the Arabic unity trials failed, examples were Egypt unity to Syria in the late 50's, Syria to Iraq in the 60's and last, Syria to Lebanon that lasted the most and ended catastrophically in 2005 following the assassination of the late *Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (God bless his soul)*.



The principle problem of Arab political doctrines is its stagnant nature with a rare form of upgrading of its content whether it's philosophy or principles. This phenomenon occurred even in Ba'athism since it's rare that we hear of any modernization in the philosophy or doctrine of the Ba'ath party. However, we see an evolution in the methods of operations of the party from liberalizations to a change of maneuvers towards the Western world.

While *Arabism* is the main motor behind the motivation of the people of the Middle Eastern Arabic countries, *Islamism* is the main motor motivating those Moslem countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and others in addition to most Arabic countries.

Consequently, those Political parties of the Middle East having one of their main foundations *Arabism* such as the *Ba'ath*, *Nasserites* and others secular Arabic parties where and will remain the target of political plots from Western and Eastern political powers contrary to political parties having their principal foundation *Islam or Christian religion* in the Middle East.

Hence we ask this simple and common question: What is *Al Ouroubah (Uruba) or Arabism*?

When the *Prophet Mohammad (God Preyed on Him and Blessed Him)* was asked what is *Arabism i.e. Al Uruba*? He answered that it is the language of the tongue.

This answer was at the birth of Islam and still up till now! A conclusive evidence was the main recommendation of the *League of Arabic Countries* at its last summit in *Damascus* which is to enhance the use of the Arabic language every where and mainly among the Arab youth.



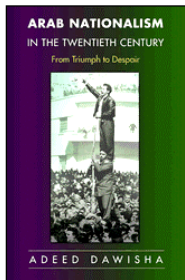
When it comes to me, then I give you additional answers from my private research and intuition.

First, Arabism or Uruba i.e. *Al Ouroubah* is not strictly a matter of the Arabic language that we talk as Arab and Middle Eastern people or among ourselves.

There is non Arab knowing it as for example, Israelis, Russians or Americans not from Arab origins hence; does it mean they are Arab? Not at all!

Second, Arabism is simply a name or qualification that can be expressed in few phrases and pages to some people and in thousands and hundred thousands of pages to others. *Al Ouroubah or the Arabism* is like a Mirror, it has the ability to express whom we are depending on how we look upon our self in this mirror. It is a main characteristic of us, the people of this huge Arabic world. If we are strong, we appear strong in the mirror and if weak, we appear as weak in this same mirror! It is an inborn gene character of our soul, whether Moslem or Christian. It is our *Arab Psychology, Sociology, Geography, History, Philosophy and Anthropology* and many other artistic traits of us as human beings. *It is our weak and strong point. Weak point*, if motivated by external powers, those sources can rule us before ruining us. *Strong point* if independent from them and sovereign, as Arabs are ruling ourselves and expressing fully our desires. It is not the same with *Islamism* since contrary to *Arabism* it cannot be stolen from us but just misinterpreted by some sources whether *Arabic, Eastern, Western, Moslem, or Christian*.

Hence, *Islamism* is not our weak point but rather *Arabism* that we should watch and consequently Arabic Nationalistic political parties that are more in jeopardy rather than Moslem fundamentalist parties.



While my commentaries on the concept of *Arabism in Arab Nationalism* are original and updated, many ordinary Arabs and authors perceive this philosophy as obsolete and outdated that failed in many instances to correct the Arab economic and social situation therefore, the necessity of replacing it by another political system which is either Moslem Fundamentalism with sharia's ruling or a form of modern democracy with secular ruling similar to that in Turkey. The above shown book on *Arab Nationalism* by *Adeed Dawisha* marginalizes such a political concept to being just a mere social anti government manifestation in Egypt during the 40's, 50's and 60's!

Arabism or Al Ouroubah (Uruba) is our ability to innovate, develop and progress while safe guarding our history and Arabic culture. Arabism is our ability to modernize and prove to be strong on the international political scene. It is our ability to live in peace with other neighbors on this planet at this critical time of human history under the menace of Environmental and Global changes that can ruin the existence of the human species.

Islamism is understood to be the socio-political Islam which exhibits itself among the Moslem-Arabic population in different strength that enables these people to behave in different manners.

I classify it for simplification in three discrete classes:

Class A: People with weak Islamism that observe partly the Moslem religion requirements in its five required duties. Such class constitutes about 25% of the Arab population.

Class B: People with average Islamism that observe fully the five duty requirements of Islam. Such class constitutes 50% of the Arab population.

Class C: People with strong Islamism that observe fully the five duties of Islam in addition to willing to go into the sixth duty which is the *Jihad*. Such class constitutes the remainder 25% of the Moslem Arabs.

The above fractions fluctuate over the history of the Arab populations depending on factors as economic development, peace or war, external interferences from outside of the Arab world, type of Arabic government, etc...

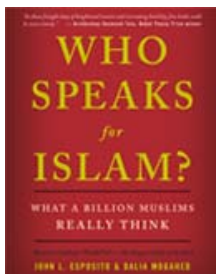
Class A appears strongly in Arab Nationalist regimes and was much higher during the 50's and mid 60's then started to diminish following the Arab defeat in 1967 against Israel.

Class B which is more common among middle classes Arabs is the one that fluctuates between the upper class A and lower class C. This class rarely presents a danger on other religions or social groups.

Class C encompasses people that only practice religion and study the Holy Qu'ran and its commentaries. In addition, these people have prejudice against other religions in addition to be narrow minded and of strictly Oriental style. These people originate from poor classes as well as wealthy ones and have a closed psychology and sociology and a lot of frustration in addition to absence of intelligence. A fraction of this class can be easily manipulated by foreign forces and is willing to cause instabilities in their countries as well as in countries foreign to them.

The war lunched by Al Qaeda primarily on the Americans and Zionists is aimed secondly against Arabic regimes whether Monarchies or Secular Republics. It is the war of Extreme Fanatic Islamism against Arabism i.e. in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon and Moderate Pro-Occidental Islamism i.e. in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. While the Al Qaeda and its allies were described by President Bush as *thugs i.e. stupid* that is in French *balouf*, I understood it also as a *malignant act of terror* and in French, an act *Mechant de terreur!*

Previously, I commented on that matter in the *Morepist Press* while discussing by chance the *Metn* elections in Lebanon. I had no prejudice against any one but just exposed my opinion! I mentioned that the term *malice i.e. mechancete* has many philosophical meanings among them its occurrence in the *Book of Job* which is the most difficult book of the Bible to explain. Therefore, as the name implies: *find who is the employer of Ben Laden then you will find where he is hiding!*



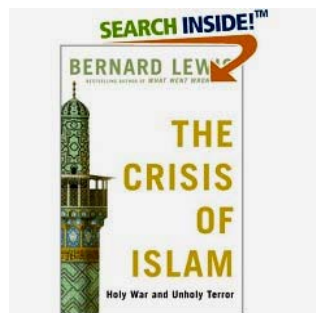
Consider this latest book on Islam published in 2008: *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* By John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed. This book is centered on commentaries of a Gallup's survey carried in some Arab and Moslem countries. *John Esposito* is a professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies at

Georgetown University. He is also the director of *Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal* center for Muslim-Christian understanding at *Georgetown University*.

An important result that I derived from this book is some divergences in thinking between some Arabic and Moslem people of the Middle East and other strictly Moslem one's of Asia. In addition, most Moslems questioned adhere to Islam and mainly to praying that bring them close to *God*. In addition, most have a lot of love in their life and all prefer to implement the Moslem Sharia'a in their life.

An important point raised in the same book is that nowadays, 46% of the American prefers that the Bible be part of their daily life. This is not the case with Europe which is still secular. We remark therefore the diminishing of secularism in the Western world and specifically the U.S.A. The same book explains that the 9/11 high jackers do not come from poor and uneducated Arab classes. On the contrary, they originate from wealthy families and most of them are university graduates and follow a modern style of living. The same author come to the deduction that there is something of dangerous in the *Religion of Islam* itself that insist the people to have a violent attitude towards other religions and ultimately to perform an act of terror.

In addition, the people questioned in these Moslem and Arab countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon agree that there is a huge misunderstanding of Islam by the West in general and also a lake of respect to this religion and its people. Most of the people questioned favor a Moslem style of Democracy but different from the west since they disagree with the social system in these countries and its lack of family ties.



Since I am approaching the problem of *Arabism versus Islamism* in this paper I like to add that here in Quebec and particularly Montreal, we are confronting the problems of sudden rise of Islamism versus an Antagonist rise in Anti-Semitism among the French Canadians following the *Bouchard-Taylor* report. The report wants to forbid certain forms of religious parades such as the wear of the veil by Moslem women or the turban and dagger by members of the

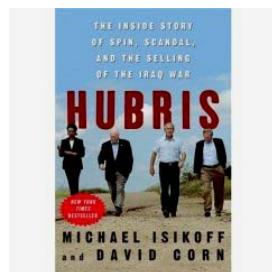
Sikh community.

Actually, there is a book holding the title the *Crisis of Islam* that I have not consulted.

There should be possibly something wrong up in the Holy around God!

Who and what? I am not there and hence don't know!

To end with this dissertation on *Islamism* i.e. Political Islam, Us the citizens of the Arab world have not have experimented in this modern time of our history any extreme Fundamentalist Sunni Islam official ruling, except a fraction of that in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is the site of birth and practice of Islam. However, the actual ruling



Saudi Dynasty while maintaining original Arab and Moslem traditions, was able to develop this country and its citizens to enable them to live in Peace with other civilizations and neighbors.

Therefore, in the Middle Eastern Arab countries we have not experienced to date any form of strictly official fundamentalist rulings aside from extremist terrors in *Iraq* and before that in *Algeria* compared to other Moslem and non Arab ones. These countries are mostly Monarchies or Republics with one form of dictatorship in some of them while liberal government in others.

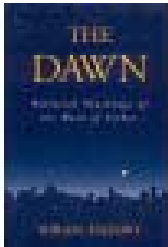
All in all, the friction between Arabism and Islamism on one side, and the confrontation between Islam and Christianity on the other, has led to the unfortunate occurrence of the war in Iraq with its catastrophic consequences on that country and its neighbors in addition to the distorted picture of American politics in the Middle East that can be on the long term irreparable. The book *Hubris* shown above is the best example of the reason behind the Iraq war in addition to another book called *Cobra II!*

Iran situation is quite different and this country has experienced a form of *Theocracy of Shia'a Islam* given that in traditional shia'a ruling, the governing authority should come from among the *Shia'a Ulama* i.e. clerics since *Imam Ali* who was the son in law and legitimate successor to the *Prophet Mohammad* had to be the true successor of the Prophet in ruling over Arabs and Moslems.

The Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, his wife Fatima Al Zahra' a (Daughter of the Prophet Mohammad) and his sons Hassan and Hussein and their sister Zeinab were called "Ahlu Al Beit" i.e. People of the House.

Another point to be raised since I opened the discussion on Iranian theocracy in ruling is that, do the Iranian secular and clerics rulers still adhere to their Persian glorious values as history, traditions and culture and consequently are willing to drive lessons from it or otherwise, they consider themselves just the continuation of the shia'a people of the house i.e. "*Ahlu Al Beit*" as mentioned above?

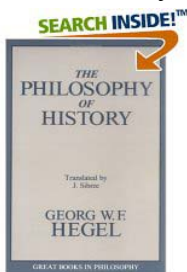
If yes then, does the Iranian consider their history just to start with the Prophet



Mohammad then Imam Ali and his successors and consequently former ancient Persian history to become obsolete!

Otherwise, it is worth to consider the Persian ancient history that experienced the *Book of Esther in the Bible* as perceived by Yoram Hazony in his book "*The Dawn: political Teachings of the book of Esther*", as a book on political intrigues inside the Palace of the king of Persia. I myself have not consulted that book but speculate on

that. In summary, the Book of Esther is about a young woman of Jewish ancestry exiled in Babylon who is being married to the King of Persia by her father Mordakhi. The King was unaware of the Jewish origins of his wife in the beginning and latter, when he knew the whole story following many intrigues plotted by his court peoples against him, he



sent the Prophets Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem to reconstruct the first Temple that was demolished by the Babylonians. Of course, the above two Prophets were poor and hence were supported with wealth and trophies from the Persian King.

Therefore, the Persians in their history were favorable to other religions and in this example to *Israel*.

Another important comment on their history is illustrated in the book of the philosopher *Georges Hegel* of the 18th century, *The*

Philosophy of History, whereby he claims that in the ancient Oriental world, the Persians

While ruling the nations were tolerant to other religions and civilizations and consequently, had preserved the traditions and identities of the people whom they used to govern.

In addition, the Persians were against idolatry and have consequently abolished all Greek pageantry symbolized by statues in old Athens, Sparta, Etc...

At last, a comparable situation occurred in our Arab history during the long *Abbasid Dynasty* ruling in Baghdad. I remember from my history courses while attending the *International College (French Section)* during the years 1961-71, that contrary to the former *Umayyad Dynasty* in Syria, the Abbasids had about 400 years of ruling constituting four Eras of influence: *Persian, Turkish, Persian then Turkish* that ended with the *Mongolians Herds* invasions of Baghdad and the burning of the *House of Wisdom* i.e. *Beit Al Heikmah* which is a huge library and a schooling site. Subsequently, the whole Arab Empire went into obscurity and decline while continuing to flourish in Egypt under the *Fatimi Dynasty* then in *Andalusia* which is nowadays *Spain*, that produced the most famous Arab and Moslem Philosopher *Aver roes i.e. Ibn Rushed*.

It was mostly during the Abbasid Arab ruling that Persia produced its most known and influential Philosophers, Theologists, Mathematicians and Medical Doctors. In my previous publication about "*Quantification of the Philosophers Minds*" which was also published on the *Morepist Press* web site, I have quantified the minds of some Arab and Persians Philosophers as *Al Kindi, Ibn Sina, Al Farabi, Ghazali and Ibn Rushed* and mentioned also *Ibn Khaldoun and Al Khawarzmi* and many others.

Since Persia which is nowadays Iran contributed mostly to the flourishing of the Arabic and Moslem Empire, then there was a form of beneficial *Synergic Relationship* between the Arabs and the Persians that in Biology we call *Symbiosis*, contrary to *Parasites*, which is beneficial to one side while detrimental to the other in which one partner is the predator while the other is the prey!

After setting these three cases of history in Persia and Babylon, is Iran and specially Hezbollah willing to live in Peace with other Religions and Communities in Lebanon and the Middle East or otherwise this is not the case! We have to wait for time to prove this and in the meanwhile, consider intelligent precautions.

In addition, the philosophic lesson teachings from history if we want to follow Hegel and Avicenna paths would be that: ***Any non intelligent Western adventure on Iran will be catastrophic not only to this country, but also to its adjacent Arab countries, hence, this will be considered by me as the Phase II of the Demolishment of the Arab and Persian Civilizations consequent to the first one which was, Iraq.***

In *Sunni Islam* traditional ruling it was the opposite to *Shia'a Islam* and Moslem rulers were most of the time non clerics. Therefore, if Iran is nowadays behind the support of Sunni fundamentalism in many parts of the world, then this is a tricky, abnormal and embarrassing situation with unknown consequences!

If we take a look on the history of these Arab countries, we deduce that the progress and economic development was carried by these Arab regimes in an acceptable manner although not united and with different wealth. The reason behind this is *Arabism* that unites them from the *Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean*.

I have to mention that *Arabism* is considered by me in this paper as one of the four foundations of *Arab Nationalism* as it appeared previously in two papers, one on *Systemic approach to Politics in the Middle East* and the other *Peace agreements in the Middle East*, both previously published by the *Morepist Press*.

Therefore, I conclude that *Islamism* was not able to accomplish in term of development what *Arabism* was able to fulfill to the Arabic people as was stated in the above paragraph.

Then you ask me my friend that question: From all of the past events and our experience with Arabic regimes, we conclude that *Arabism* is more of an ideal achievement than a practice and as such, this name doesn't have any ground application in our daily life where as *Islam* as a religion, known as "*Din Wa Dunia*" i.e. "*Islam as a Faith and Life*" is more practical now a days if we want to modernize to face Western challenges.

My answer is that my view of *Arabism or Al Ouroubah (Uruba)* is not the Arabism of the rich i.e. *Arabism of the Petrol Dollars*, since people and countries with such a



characteristic have an ultimate goal in life which is to increase the value of their Dollar Arabism to become more and more wealthier and stronger and consequently, influential in order to have a prominent place among the rich powerful Western countries. In addition, my Arabism is not that of the poor Arab people or countries since their *Dream* is to become wealthier in order to join

the side of the rich Arab countries and hence be part of them.

My *Arabism* is denuded of *Richness or Povertiness* and as the Arab Philosopher and Politician *Michel Aflaq* once stated in his book *Fi Sabil Al Ba'ath*:

We seek people to come to us with their soul nude of every thing, since we seek their Truth in their deep inside stripped of unnecessary shells when they wish to join us. Those are the great people!

Such souls when freed from their unnecessary shells become truthful souls which was always the aim of most *Philosophers of Ethics* who seeked the "*Truth*" in their lifetime. From the whole present analysis I raise two paths that human beings can follow.

The first one is the path of the pacific philosophers of enlightenment or the "*Koningsberg Path of Immanuel Kant*", the 18th century German philosopher. Kant used to walk along the same path daily while going to teach philosophy at the university, so that people in the street when seeing him passing by, used to adjust their watches so much he was punctual!

The second path is the path of the non pacific conquerors from the greatest in history as *Alexander the Great of Greece, Xerxes of Persia, Julius Caesar of Rome, Khaled Ibn Al Walid of Arabia, Napoleon Bonaparte of France* to mean conquerors like *Adolph Hitler of Germany, Genghis Khan and Houlagou Khan of Mongolia* and last, *Osama Ben Laden from Afghanistan*.

Now tell me, which of the above two paths is more convenient now a days in humanity?

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