ARAB IDENTITY CRISIS: POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH

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**Arab Identity Crisis: Political Psychology Approach**   
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In order to verify, classify and document the diverse characteristics of individual and group identity (physical, cultural, psychological, and spiritual) evidenced by members of the human race, one has to link the present with the far back history. The concept of identity at present more than ever is increasingly one of crucial interest and concern for scholars interested in political stability. By way of making things simple, the Oxford Universal Dictionary emphasizes personality and individuality and stresses the quality of inseparable association between the two as a central element in the definition of identity. However, to indulge in the utility of identity for better understanding of politics, political psychologists assert that identity, most often, is a reaction to inner and outer-self forces and an array of insecurities.

Aspects of identity are attended by social psychologists dealing mostly with plural and conflicting societies.1However; the overall research on this subject did not highlight the linkage between the psychosocial aspect of individual identity and that of political affiliation. It is well known that the concept of political identity is hard to define and difficult to assess and measure. It has been claimed that this concept is as indispensable in political and social analysis as it is in its enormity unclear. Despite its complexity and relative ambiguity, the concept of political identity has a significant explanatory value that could not be substituted in the study of inter-group relations, social and political conflict, stability, and predicament of political systems.

In process, this article assumes that it is important to incorporate to the study of political identity the dichotomy between the I and the Me in defining the self, and the neo- Freudian distinction of self and ego. This dichotomy is employed to contemplate more on the monolithic individuals especially in how they passively respond to external (outside their self) contingencies.

In identifying themselves as Arabs, most individuals in the Arab regions take pride in highlighting their unique self and the immediate group they feel they belong or affiliated to. Ironically, identity among Arabs is not exclusively a self-definition. Reasonably, it is a feedback to external imposition. Identity, accordingly, is a reproduce or label utilized by one Arab unto another in order to perceive, categorize, treat, cooperate or mistreat one-another. While no comprehensive study has emerged to bridge this duality between the adherents of self-perceived as contrasted with externally-imposed identity, it has become clear from recent events in the Arab world, domestic and regional, that regardless of the identity's true substance, an individual or a group are witty of sudden and drastic renovation of their political identities.2

One of the central problems of current political analysis in the Arab world is the challenge that the individual and group identities pose to conceptions of citizenship and attempts at state and/or nation building. The role of the newly emerging social, ideological and religious groups in politics is at once a question about political identity and about instability. Although it is fashionable for the Arab nationalists, communists, and Islamists to implicate support to their political tendencies through the harmony of identity politics, some of their recent writings have focused on the lack of homogeneous identity among Arabs. This approach is derived from political thinkers who formulated understandings of identity that stress its multifaceted, flowing, and romantic character in opposition to a notion of identity as reducible to separable sociological and cultural categories.3 However, the writers who articulate this more complex understanding of identity in the Arab world have not translated this into clear explicatory implications of the recent political transformation.

During most of the second half of the twentieth century, others viewed Arabs regardless of their locality, as belonging to one Arab nation. They were secondly identified in terms of their religion, ethnicity, or their state. The repeated regional conflicts that led to population dislocation, devastation and distrust in the Arab political systems, made Arabs less certain of their proclaimed political identity. Several are no longer clear as to whether they constitute more than a mere minority, and/or exploited and abused ethnic or religious groups. In this sense, all Arabs now are experiencing crisis of political identity.

By crisis of political identity we mean a potential threat of drastic change in the panorama of Arab entities, that is to say, a structural disruption of the equilibrium required for all national, communal and individual's well-being. The turbulence created by such dilemma could produce severe repercussions for the socio-economical environment, for the psychological console of both domestic and regional Arab communities, as well as for regional unity. The consequences, adversely affect the political firmness of practically all of the standing socio-political institutions, be they parties, clan, tribe, religious, state or the nation.

The Arab world is currently witnessing a unique and dramatic confusion in the meaning and role of personal and political identity. Traditional institutions that have played major roles in the shaping of their previous identity are on the decline. They are frequently being replaced by less tolerant, less benevolent and more militant modalities. Major criteria, symbols and classes of identity are in a process of change. Both individuals and communities are undergoing painful changes with regard to the definition and consistency of their identities. The results have consisted of increased distress, anxiety and instability within most customary social institutions and their memberships.

 The escalating tensions rising from this crisis of identity feeds the flames of the ongoing fear from authority (familial, religious and political). They account also for the widespread violence and strife, unproductiveness and chaos, the decline of politeness and the emergence of spontaneous alarm throughout. Among the important tasks facing the Arab world that we must investigate, is the exploration and testing of the mounting fear in as much as it explains the rise and decline of the cohesive role of identity. From these assessments we must seek to determine whether the changes that are taking place are thwart, detested or adaptable. Again whether the diverse group-will and determined social and political policies are capable of having a significant impact upon additional new developments that are the products of activist socio-economic and religious forces.

Traditionally, studies of Arab identity were accompanied by an elaborate derivation detailing the major assemblage of human identity. These consisted of families, languages, territories, and cultural heritage. These four categories of identity have long remained the core of Arab identity studies. Before the Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis, Arab nationalism was a subject of strong elitist as well as popular interest. With modern Arab mass migrations, population dislocations, and concentration in urban areas, established studies on the Arabs barely satisfy simple curiosities of bridging the new reality to social, economic and psychological roots. In the same token, the study of linguistics has similarly lacked not only to unravel the historical mysteries of Arab peoples and civilizations but also to aid with the still deficient aptitude of Arab communications. A new awareness by Arabs of geography, and of how peoples live in Western societies manifests an aspect of the new reality in the Arab world. Increasing overseas travel among Arabs have made the meaning of lands more understandable, yet produced also a growing awareness of how brutally Arab authorities treat Arab visitors and how harsh the divisions of the Arab world through politically or militarily imposed boundaries can be.

The studies of the family, language, country and nationality, as accepted components of human identity, are significant to supply a rich background from which one could seek a broader understanding of the composition of identity. However, it is with political psychology that we understand Arab dramas of alienation, multiple identities, and the identity crisis of being non-entity. It is trough political psychology that scholarship could determine whether predicament's impact on identity is likely to be productive mostly of conflict and strife, or whether it may contribute, instead, to a resentful societal mosaic. Most importantly, projected social and political studies if associated with psychology could formulate an insight that could help understand the peculiarity of the diverse communities and individuals of the Arab world.

From psychological perspective, identity originates from fear. Neurobiologists' findings lead to the assumption that people are born with no sense of identity. Claiming an identity is one way to avoid many inceptions of fears among which; is the fear of being nonentity. It is fear of being nonentity that drives people to desire an identity. Neurobiologists have asserted in their histological and embryological studies, that human beings are born with a very undeveloped brain, and with undeveloped neurons lacking the most important mental functions. The baby is unable to perform organized movements, to talk, or to understand language and other sensory inputs. In the absence of sensory inputs, the neurons will not develop and remain in the infantile stage.4

Children first develop by learning how to overcome their fears. Fear is intrinsic but not evident nor clear to the child. Children negate their fear by association, and normally with their parents. They generate confidence by imitating those that are closer to them, thus identifying with their actions, their speech and responses to various situations. This means that the pattern of growing does not reflect an act of the child's individual logic, but is an imprinting of complex rational-free behavior in the brain through habituation. Thus, the human self and human identity, in the first few stages of development are both intrinsically a product of fear than of genetic makeup.

It is well asserted that the infant brain lacks, not only the essential mechanisms for survival, moreover it lacks the capacity to choose sensory information that shapes its own development. Then, it is logical to assume that the impact on personal growth rests on the memory and experience collected from the surrounding group in how to overcome fear and generate security.5 In most stable societies, success is determined by the ability of the group in relaxing the conditions that causes the duress of fear. In traditional psychoanalytic theory, fear is as basic as the life promoting drives and does not presuppose an environmental contextual cause.6

On the other hand, it is an artifact of the mysteries of life and survival that fear, in normal individual behavior, is presumed to be a reaction elicited by the hardship of the environment. Dynamically speaking, there is a direct causal linkage between being hurt and the outgrowth of fear. Thus, we are being accustomed to react with fear when threatened. Threats drive us to develop defense mechanism through identifying with groups.

In Arab culture, it is socially expected that an individual distressed with fear should become aggressive towards the causes of his fear. When this individual does not respond with hostility, it is speculated by his group that lack of courage is brought to stand against the natural response that is expected from this individual. In other words, the individual is a coward and deserves to be inferior. Being rejected as a non-aggressive, some individuals react with absurd violence. Such formulation is consistent with the psychological orientation of drive theory7, which sees fear as a natural phenomenon and not one that must necessarily be provoked by threats from without. In the case of provocation, surely, threats can be expected as a driving force. Dynamically, however, threats merely facilitate natural preexisting tendencies of fear, rather than representing the cause of the fear reaction, and socially it becomes a criterion for individual refinement and stratification.

Cooper8 outlines the major controversy in fear-response theory concerning the coming together of the fear and response. Originally presented as an intra-psychic phenomenon oriented at impulse (or drive) derivatives, the construct has been elaborated by object's relation theory to include defenses against fears derived from object loss, environmental failure, and poor self-concept. Brenner9, moreover, postulates that any process may be classified as fear-response if it diminishes anxiety. In drive theory, however, fear-responses are oriented primarily at avoiding recognition of anxiety and psychic pain. Self-restraint against the open expression of fear is positively valued in most societies, especially in the Middle East, and precludes negative personal repercussions. The anticipation of negative consequences is often cited popularly as eliciting self-control for the sake of self-protection. Such a formulation does not meet the definitive criteria of fear-reaction within drive theory. It does, however, meet the broader object's relation criteria where defense mechanisms may serve to maintain or preserve a view of the self or the object that, without it, would signify overriding anxiety.10

In Orientalism11, Edward Said refers to the fear of being inferior and elaborates on the alternatives of counter-identity, exodus or escape from identity, and of national or local particularism. In fact, Arab societies have reacted with kinds of departures in eloquent and nearly passionate language, to the point of almost abandoning the aspect of political counterattack. What is it that motivates these trends, at least in part, is the depressing political performance of almost all Arab countries, and especially the rise of opinionated type of cultural and religious fundamentalism in many parts of the Middle East and elsewhere. Said is selective in denouncing this depressing record. Almost everywhere in the non-Western world, he writes, the effort to homogenize and isolate populations in the name of nationalism (not liberation) has led to colossal sacrifices and failures. The rise of nationalism and fundamentalism has led to the upsurge of identity politics of a narrow and intolerant kind. In the Middle East, as some assert, more energy is spent bolstering the idea that to be Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian, or Saudi is a sufficient end, rather than in thinking critically, even fearlessly, about the Arab national program itself. Hence, Identity, always identity has been over and above a process of coming to know about others. In the broader setting, the insistence on local identity or counter-identity is only the reverse side of the other identity; both are expressions of essentialization, to be an entity, and thus two sides of the same coin.

From their identity platform, and from within their own threatened localities, Islamists and Arab nationalists (mainly the progressive), attack the West, or Americanization, or imperialism, with little more attention to detail. They provide no critical differentiation, discrimination, and distinction to what has been bountiful on them by the West. Edward Said finds that this is a short sight, that the process of de-colonization and national liberation, has widely given way to petty provincialism. Plainly speaking, Said is explaining that counter-identity that is based on fear-reaction in the Arab world, appeals to pure or authentic Islam, or Arabism. And he continue to say that, all had a strong response, without sufficient consciousness that those ethnicities and spiritual essences would come back to demanding a very high price from their successful adherents.

Yet again, and without negating the identity derived from a grand socio-political movement like decolonization, the problem lies in a national consciousness emanating from all kinds of fear and anxieties, much the same, could be said about the insecurities of a rising religious consciousness. The price is the destabilization of national security and a rise in separatist identities.

It is a well-known fact, especially to psychologists, that individuals respond to stimulus in their environment as they construe it and not to intellectually assumed reality as such. There exist no absolute reality. They respond to the images in their minds that they have drawn to typify reality. It should be noted, however, that the social actor is an individual who's understanding of political reality is his/her point of view. Logically, it is in the actor's own mind that lies the decision on what to do and how to empathize the nature and sources of his/her action.

People live in social constraints that condition their image of themselves and the ways they think and act, without determining them in any complete sense. Recent development in the on-going revolution of technologies especially in the different domains of communications, transportation and education facilitate greater individuation of selves leading to more self-psychic fears and anxieties. The impact of that is evident in urban Arab areas more than in rural ones. The Arab world, though thus far is downgrading the institutionalization of the individual, is at the same time making individualism optional.

Individualism has a multiple impact on political identity. One of which is the possible encouragement for personality and character formation ranging from radicalism, to deliberate subordination, and to strong collective orientations. Somewhat paradoxically, this context of identity and value pluralism makes all positions appear more or less as individual and thus somewhat arbitrary choices, even when they are in fact presented as, for example, natural, traditional, or beyond human disposition.

Although driven by personal fears, it is safe to assert that what human beings are, what they see and judge themselves to be, and what they do are in contemplative measures shaped by the influences of their living conditions. However the socio-cultural context is not, of course, the only factor; though it does condition and it is a prime conjuncture for the possibility of human consciousness, orientations, and behavior. The other factor that could be proclaimed and with considerable evidence as a result of individualism is that the human psyche is embedded in a cognitive structure, commonly known as individual's perspective or mental ability to perceive. If the individual is individualistic, then this tendency sets the parameters of identity and personality and which is defied with difficulty. Individuals are not merely the toil of their surroundings, but if they alienate themselves from the mandates of their surroundings, they risk being negated as human being.

In this context modern Arab characters are different from those of 50 years ago. They are changing now under the impact of affluence and new technologies. While I stress the role of individualism as a factor, the anticipated changes and impacts are the result of a confluence of factors, no one of which is fully determinative. Ensuing Freud, it can be comparatively argued that the essential differences between the traditional (old) and the new individualistic psyche stem from the development of a powerful superego (conscience).12 To a group oriented individual, power lies outside the self, although the boundaries of self and non-self are not clear. One seeks power by following rules set by the gods, through the charismatic leader or tightly knit community structures. The problem is that, unless the gods continually speak, their message dims. Social organization of any kind, therefore, requires rigid and continuous community controls. Communities adapt to their environment, and they rarely attempt to master it beyond that which is necessary for survival. The stranger and the different are suspect. Forbidden impulses are projected upon them. The superego of a group-oriented Arab is largely located outside himself, in the form of spiritualists or gods whom he tries to please. He has little sense of himself as an individualist who can exercise power over his environment in a consistent manner so as to serve his needs.

The individualistic Arab has proven to be different. While psychoanalysis tends to emphasize the punitive qualities of the superego, it is not without positive aspects.13 By providing an inner mechanism of control; the superego permits the individualistic Arab to develop a stronger sense of self. The group-oriented Arab believes that God helps individuals who obey God's command. Individualistic Arabs attempt to overcome obstacles by living up to their inner ideals. The source of power is within and not external. Furthermore, the sublimated energy derived from the individualistic Arab's internal control, of both erotic and aggressive drives foster the development of the ego. This enables him/her to examine and to manipulate nature, to adapt to new circumstances, and to bring creative energies to bear upon them. It also enables the individualistic Arab to recognize fear of the unknown, and fear of other groups, as he develops rational ideals for understanding nature. In these ways the development of superego and ego strength permit the emergence of the flexible Arab individual to become at liberty to decide on an identity.

Max Weber demonstrates that the unintended consequences of Christianity, and more specifically Calvinist doctrines, included the emergence of the modern world in the form of liberal capitalism,14 i.e. a capitalist economic system associated with individualism and gradual, if imperfect, political identification. Weber emphasizes the capitalist side of the equation, but the contribution of this cultural complex to political identification, although is well documented15 yet it does not provide a comprehensive assessment fit for all societies.

Perceptibly, none of the assessments drawn is complete in the evaluation of Arabs. Some individualization occurs in all societies. It is also clear that every great historical civilization has been accompanied by a heightening of superego development, usually based on the emergence of a new, more universalistic religious system. It is possible, moreover, that in some of Arab civilizations superego development was comparable to that of the West. In line with Weber's argument, however, cultural developments in the Arab world were unusual from the outset. First, the emergence of a prophetic religion gave a peculiar intensity to the superego. Second, the emphasis in Islam rather than in Arab societies was on an individual rather than a communal relationship with God. Third, religious-cultural imperatives stressed general, universal, and moral rules. Finally, great emphasis was placed upon limiting the unresponsiveness in the service of worldly harshness, i.e., fulfilling one's obligations through contribution to his religious society. Islamic identity, whatever its limitations, historically has encouraged rationality, emotional complexity, growth, and the capacity for a unique political identity.

Historically and comparatively, it is undoubtedly true that Islam as it absorbed and merged with many civilizations, strongly emphasized control of the passions, producing a similar end result in the Arab world via a fear-shame culture. Indeed Arabs created great and long lasting pre-modern empire. The Islamic Empire was Europe's superior in wealth and practical technical achievement until the 17th century. However, the Ottoman Islamic view of nature did not encourage a breakthrough to a modern scientific world-view. They exercised the element of fear to contain the Arabs. This practice surrounded Arabs with a network of kin and other social obligations inhibiting the growth of that individualism which played so important a role in the break with tradition in Europe. It also encouraged, or at least did not discourage, magical solutions to problems among the general populace.

Again, in demonstrating a reallocation in the general approach of Weber, individualism as a concept has become sufficiently pervasive today that using it carries a certain risk of being misunderstood. The most everyday meaning refers, but not in a precise way, to recent developments in urban finance, individual accounts in banks, individual trade, and the actions of business corporations in reshaping society along an individual division of labor. Other senses focus on the spread and influence of civil and criminal law that essentially deals with the individual as its basic party. In dealing with political identity in the so-called modernizing Arab states, my use of the term individualism seeks to include these meanings while not restricting itself to them.

Systemically, Arab individualism is developing by the creation and spread of several differentiated but interdependent societal structures, the main organizing principles of these structures center on function, technique, or instrumentality. Important examples of these structures are a capitalist individualistic economic structure, individualistically state-centered political structure, an individualistic scientific-technological structure, a structure for mass information media directed to individuals, a medicinal health structure, a school centered education structure that deals with the individual as its basic component, and, I would even argue, an individually-centered religious structure. Each of these individualisms has its typical cultural dimension on political identity.

The development of service structures in the Arab world, are not easy to summarized. The question of how Arabs have responded to and fitted the spread of the initially Western technical structures, could be answered, is that there has been a great deal of variation, much of it centered on precisely the identity and character issues under discussion here. Essentially, as the Western powers spread their influence during the early modern and modern centuries, their greatest success was in extending the reach of the service structures, in particular the capitalist economic, the scientific-technological, the academic-educational, and the political in the form of the territorially bordered and sovereign states. The development is most striking in the case of the political system where various nationalist movements have eventuated in the formation of an array of nationally identified states, comparable to those forming and already formed in the West. As a transporter of these developing individualistic service structures, the West is still in the process of perpetuating the spread all around the Arab world, not in any sense evenly, but certainly for the most part effectively.16

The capitalist economic system that essentially promotes individualism is now and has for some time been an accepted tendency in the Arab world even in the proclaimed socialist Arab states. It is these service structures associated with the capitalist system, I would argue, that actually promoted change in the political identity tracks in the Arab world. In a capitalist system anything could, in principle, become an individual economic commodity even people could become commodities. The personal or group identities of the producers and consumers become secondary in the sense that what is important is the economic capacity to offer for sale or to buy, not as such one's family, one's level of education, one's religious behavior, and so forth. In this sense it has become in principle accepted, not necessarily practiced, that political qualification generally does not depend on ascribed or achieved statuses. Though wealthy individuals have advantage, nonetheless, educational attainment is in principle, and very often in fact, open to all willing individuals. Laws are developed on the assumption that all individuals are equal, and scientific or artistic achievement depend on the quality of the individual producing the science and art, not on the social background and group affiliation of the artist or scientist. This means that the prospects of sublimation of intrinsic fears are assuming new individualistic dimensions.

It is worth asserting, for the sake of prospects in political identity deviation, that some individuals are more capitalist oriented in the Arab world than others, thus, have more of the characteristics of individualism. Rich Arabs can send their children to urban and highly qualified schools and in many cases these children develop economic independence from their parents. Educated Arabs can manage for better access to the legal system and have greater influence over what gets produced in the media. We can make similar observations about specific Arab sub-groups within regions where most people lack good access to the systems; and about regions where the majority is relatively well off. There are privileged Arab individuals; and there are privileged Arab groups in underprivileged regions as well as privileged ones. Yet these advantages accrue because these people and groups have given leverage to participate significantly in their systems, not because they are better people.17

In looking at the power centers in the Arab world we realize a strong strive for individual independence, and the service structures are concerned only with those aspects of a person which are functionally relevant: ability to pay, academic learning capacity, state of health, willingness to be an audience, and so forth. Service structures, therefore, undermines the strong tendency in a fair number of personally and socially relevant matters, including the formation of personal and group identities, and thus much about the reaction of personal and group fear. Moreover, and what amounts to the same, the total effect on identity and character of all the service structures does not exhaust such determinations, although it obviously, in most cases, will play a significant role. Arabs in urban areas have become predominantly occupied with a lower-scale identify reflecting themselves as professional identities such as manager, professor, doctor, politician, artist, and many others. In all these cases, the service structures elude Arabs from their time-honored political identity to spend more energy on their professional identity.

Individualism is not completely a new innovation in the Arab world; it has had its origin in Islamic religion. Just like in Christianity, Islam preached that the individual believer was fundamentally on his/her own in a direct relation to God. The ultimate judgment of God is going to be on the individual and not his/her group. Again here, if we are to focus on the development of individualism in children, at least in principle, what is so called modern schools in their mere system of education develop the individualistic aspects in the personality of the student all the way to the university level. Students get their individual grades and are held solely responsible for their conducts, that is, the social location of that child is irrelevant. All these developments, although from one perspective constituting not only the rise of the individual but of individualism, were also manifestations of the exceedingly complex process of the increasing dominance of the newly introduced service structures in the Arab world.

The shaping up of Western individuation in the Arab world as a consequence of the rise to dominance of service structures in urban areas did not just bring individualist and rationalist attitudes in its wake; it has marginalized the old structures. Counter-structural tendencies were always also part of the picture, not simply as deviance and thus with moral condemnation, but as positively valued and integral aspects of the overall Arab development. Thus, alongside or perhaps in vibration with the emphasis of many Arab thinkers on individualism, we see the search for the more rooted and communal but still from an individualistic perspective. In an attempt to rationalize their standards, individuals who claim Arab identity or any other regional identities in the Arab world referred to tradition, but in a highly selective way, taking only those stories, traits, heroes, territories, and other elements suitable for their ideals; leaving other possibilities out and adding new innovative characteristics where necessary. These were imaginary traditions, not in the sense of pure fabrications, but in the sense of discoveries that responded to the requirements of the day.18

Arab identity and concomitantly Arab nationalism, however, would not have had a great impact if they had not echoed the development of the modern system of sovereign state that is based on the equality among all individuals. In terms of identity and character, the Arab culture has certainly been important source of both. The promoters of Arab identity and Arab nationalism typically include in their self-descriptions ideal national individual identities, above all, the patriot. Nonetheless, the other systemic sources of identity and character remain, as does the incompleteness of such determinations.

We might therefore talk of at least three competing sources of personal identity and character in the present Arab societies. There is the imagined community, most notably the nation, but not just the nation, because different ethnic identities without nationalist aspirations also fall under this heading. There are the technical structures, including the political, the economic, the mass media, sports, education, and the religious. And there are the fears and idiosyncrasy of self itself. Identity questions in the Arab world have played a significant role in the overall spread of the modern Arab state systems, and thus contributed to the formation of individualistic societies at least in the urban areas. I focus again on the idea of nation. Without doubt, the greatest impetus for the formation of Arab nationalist identity over the last century has been the spread of the service structures themselves. When we examine such movements within the Arab world; the prime motive force has been anti-colonial. That is, the different urban individuals, not necessarily by origin, most often led by newly arisen elites in local major cities, have sought to take local control of the levers of modern power as derived from economic, political, educational, artistic, media, and so forth from its imperial carriers. Or alternatively, they have sought to increase local power and influence to match that of the local colonizer. In doing so Arab nationalism was undermined to give rise to regional and state nationalism.19

Regional and state identities were promoted in the name of the Arab nation at large, and for the supposed benefit of the people deemed indigenous to the region. In other words, the collectivity of the nation or its equivalent served as the justification for the efforts to appropriate the techniques of service structure power. Identity, far from being a game of idle introspection, was and is today still a strategy for control and for power competition.

Then again, from the perspective of group-oriented individuals, the Arab world is not simply a capitalist economic system from which we would conclude that it favors the individualistic and rationalistic entrepreneur as the paragon of virtue and character. Nonetheless, the Arab world is by no way fundamentally Western in a broad cultural sense unless one insists that anyone who masters the levers of service structures is thereby already Western. Individualism and what we deem to be Western cultural styles are indeed possible in the Arab world. But the rugged individual who depends on his/her own resources is not the only such possibility. What are sometimes called Arab values, referring somewhat imprecisely to a more group centered orientation with a greater tinge of community is also possible and just as modern. Individualism does not necessarily mean isolationism; rather it means a plurality of different and justifiable conduct of liability both in identity and integrity.

Arab societies depend on a balance between communitarian and individualistic orientations.20 Current trends of analysis assert that Arab values, seems to have at its root the assumption that Arabs are more collective whereas Westerners are more individualistic. Although the comparison is undoubtedly to some extent acknowledgeable, it does point indirectly to the possibility of conceiving difference in terms of individual's and group's memory of perceptive identity and its corresponding influences on the political reality of Arabs. The assumption here is that, one basic dimension of identity is derived from anxiety. Some fears are derived from individual's memory that plays a primary role in psychological continuity accounts of personal identity.

However, in claiming that memory is constitutive of personal identity, one faces the objection that since the concept of memory presupposes personal identity, it ought not be used in the analysis of that concept. Parfit21 responded to this obstacle by devising a new criterion of personal identity. He considered that memory connections are replaced with quasi-memory connections. The phenomenon of quasi-memory is best explained by the following: When an older member of a group speaks in a family-like gathering about a stressful experience and tells a story of significance in his life, the younger listeners register the events of the talk in their minds and it becomes part of their memories. Subsequently, the minds of these young listeners alter the actors in the story by substituting the older member by their self. Later on in their lives what they seem to remember, it turns out, are not their own experiences, but experiences that were part of the life of some other person. Involuntarily, they have been subject of an exposition in which memory traces from an older member of their group have been copied into their brains.

When it comes to the psychology of memory continuity accounts, in claiming that an Arab individual remembers a past episode, does not mean that this person experienced this episode; though someone must have experienced it. Thus, the question of personal identity is related to the question of what makes part of a person's memory the same as others' part memories. Imprinted memories at an early age are mechanical in the sense that the brain acquires them unreservedly and they do not need to be fed through indoctrination or conscious personal effort. For example, we imitate our parents' practices to the best of our ability without even knowing that different other practices exist. In doing this we are adopting a mixture of other individuals, our parents experiences and memories to be become our own.22 Pursuing other practices and adopting a new system of action in life at a later age, though it is plausible, nonetheless, requires a great deal of will and strain.

The rational processes of abstraction usually begin to develop after age seven. Normally, this process is characterized by appreciation and conformity to the existing patterns of one's culture. At this stage of mind-development one begins to demarcate one's own self-identity and one's culture. The assertion here is that, it is the time framework of specific social environment and not personal preference that determines the ideological framework of the individual mind. We are not born free: we must learn freedom, replacing automatisms and instinctive responses with intelligent choice based on learning rational behavior. Cultural conditioning, ideological indoctrination, and education in general are transformed into differential characteristics. To put it in pure scientific terms, these differential characteristics modify the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of neurons; thus, the experience of each individual leaves material traces stored in intracerebral memory.23

Psychologists assert with no doubt that memory criterion is adjoined to personal identity. People project their personal identities through the reflections generated from experiences of doing things, witnessing certain events, and so on. People do seem to remember doing things that they did not do. As a friend once expressed to me that he seems to remember being involved in an armed clash against a militia trying to liquidate his family, even though he did no such thing, and someone else, his uncle did, he seems to be deluded to remember doing something that was done by someone else.

In this regard attention should be given to examining the possible relationship between personal identification, i.e., the extent to which he/she retains the memory generated within his/her ethnic or social group with all its manifestation of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors as his or her own, and the level of psychological distress, fear and anxiety experienced as a consequence of that. The possible impact of psychological distress on personal identity, here I must state, have had little attention in the available literature.

However, there exists parallel literature to this dimension of identity, the Social Identity Theory and the Self-Categorization Theory.24 Literature that sprang out from these theories, have emphasized that personal identity is only possible when it stems out of social identity. The relevance is suitable for studying Arab individuals. It is observable that Arabs realize their personal identities in identifying with particular social group. It is through interaction of the Arab individual with others in a group that this individual comes to realize his personal identity. The significance of this is apparent in generating stress and anxiety when an Arab changes the group through which he/she has developed his/her personal identity. The individual's inputs in the new group and reflections on him/her become confusing. This urges the individual to reshape his personal identity and produce a different one. It is common among Arabs that changing personal identity will show the way to a change in political identity

Changing political identity for Arabs is a very stressful and painful experience. In most cases individuals would lose proper levels of self-esteem and respect among both their old and new group. The impact of this is negative on their inter and intra-group cognitions, attitudes, and behavior.25 Social scientists articulate the phenomenon of changing one's personal identity as acculturation processes. The central idea here is that when Arabs realize that their political identity is not appropriate to a changing reality, they painfully face the following alternatives: (a) stubbornly maintain or (b) disqualifying their current political identity, and (c) adopt or (d) reject the new reality. The nature of the individual's psychical mentality plays a major role in the pursuing of strategy to adopt. The specific Arab factors of fear and anxiety are strong influences in all cases. The degree of fear is always a variable. It is this variable that concludes the level of conformity and admiration derived from belonging to one's exclusive group through a make-belief in proclaimed group protection accomplishments. This may carry over to feelings of efficacy, contentment, and good standing to face new dangers and threats in society and environment. On the other hand if the degree of fear is high, then, that ultimately becomes compelling on the individual to adopt a new political socialization strategy. Options are integration, assimilation, separation, segregation, or marginalization.

In mapping social and political groups in the Arab world, on realizes that within the same Arab society groups have managed to establish socio-cultural and ideological islands for themselves refusing to carry-on with the rapid changes and development around them. They maintained their old social and political identity. Yet, for practical purposes they cannot detach themselves completely from their wider environment. In this respect the importance of social and political identity is that it provides isolated people with strength and inner resources that enable them to cope with the stresses and demands of a new political atmosphere around them and hence minimizes psychological distress.

However, although social and political identity has been shown to be positively associated with self-esteem, recent research suggests that self-esteem might provide a crucially important linkage between social-political identity and psychological distress. In short, researchers have demonstrated a causal effect of a change in the political environment with special concomitants on the self-perception of individuals who are secondary to these changes.26

In the same token, conceptual analyses of responses to self-esteem items suggest that at least two semiautonomous processes operate in judgments about the self; that is, despite some overlap, the individual facing new political reality pushes himself through a process of self-evaluation of worth and efficacy at the same time his other side of mental process reflect self-derogation and negative feelings about oneself.

Such prevailing situation in the Arab world is producing multiple personality disorder (multiples) and a dilemma of moral personhood. This is better known as problems of personality and identity coherence. Indirectly it reflects political socialization incoherence. Stability in society is linked to the coherence condition in the political identity of its individuals.27 The reason is that citizen is a term not restricted to the metaphysical; it is a moral or normative and political term, as well, in the modern state systems. Persons are not only self-conscious intelligent beings; they are supposed to be moral and political agents whose actions influence society and polity, which in turn accords with certain rights. So, what I am interested in is what the lack of psychological coherence, lack of political coherence and lack of identity coherence could tell us about stability in the different states of the Arab world.

Multiple Personality Disorder among Arabs is very much associated with the phenomenon of quasi-memory. It is common among Arab individuals in societies in the Arab world witnessing rapid environmental and political change. Socially it is understood as a dissociative disorder in which a person appears to possess, as the name suggests, more than one distinct personality, and sometimes very many.28 Typically there will be a core personality and a number of co-personalities called alter personalities, or just alters.

It is important to indicate, and before I proceed further with this analysis that multiple personality disorder is a condition that varies drastically from being extremely mild condition to extremely sever condition. It is only those who suffer from extreme condition of multiple personality disorder are labeled as sick. In the latter case when a switch occurs, a personality other than the one previously in control will manifest itself. It is mild personality disorder that I am bringing into play where the core personality is always aware of the alter personalities in the individual. The personalities of a multiple may differ from one another in their behavioral characteristics and even in their social and political responses.

In the same token, it is asserted that most individuals do suffer from multiple identity incoherence. Socially and politically it is understood as a dissolute derangement in which a person appears to possess, as the name suggests, more than one particular identity, and sometimes very many. Commonly there will be a center identity and a number of other identities called convenient convert identities. It is consequential in the context of this analysis to restate that multiple identity disorder is similar to multiple personality disorder and very much associated together. When a switch occurs, an identity other than the central one will manifest itself socially and politically. The central identity conceals in a dormant stage but will stay very much alive.

As already expressed, in mild multiple identity disorder (the use of the term disorder is questionable), the different identities of a multiple are aware of one another existence. Yet they cannot exclude one another because the individual's center identity needs the other identities to protect it in difficult situations, or to meet certain needs. In a society of multi-cultural groups bound to exist together and in societies witnessing rapid socio-political changes, the tendency is high for most individuals to develop multiple identity disorder.29

Multiple identities have become a common place among Arab individuals and are obviously an important phenomenon to explore. What is relevant for this study is how the notion of coherence informs a moral, or normative concept of the person. An orderly way of exploring this phenomenon is to consider what happens during unification therapy for multiples, and compares that to the role of governments and the media in trying to unify personality and identity disorder in individuals or in citizens.

In rationalizing for what caused the identity fragmentation one has to look at the total and the particular of the environment within which the individual lives. How does an individual deal with bizarre and extreme political and social oppression? And how does an individual carry on social relations outside his own immediate group, attune to the norms and social life of others? Fragmentation of identity may be an unconscious survival mechanism in response to fear. A system of multiple identities may develop to deal with an environment changing from one of extreme hostility and terror, to one that is apparently normal, familiar and unthreatening. Equilibrium in the manifestations of different identities is essential for psychological sanity. Such equilibrium does involve the trauma of internal revelation through side by side, but the equilibrium sought aims at some form of coherence between the individual and his/her alter personalities. It is in this way that Schechtman's30 coherence condition may be viewed. The latter explicate that it is a necessary part of psychological continuity, which accounts for personal and political identity.

On the state level the government through its institutions and media propaganda ought to convince all citizens-individuals that they have no reason to fear one another because the state protects all, by and that eliminating motivation for one to hide behind different personality for protection. If the state accomplishes that, rarely the case in Arab countries, a comfort march towards unification of personalities and political-social identities become easier. In retrospect, the institutions of the state in the Arab world are by themselves a source of threat, fear and oppression on the Arabs. In theory and reality it is very difficult to see governments in the Arab world capable of reconciling fears because of the political and ideological structures that they sustain to protect continuity of the political status –quo.

It should be noted here because of its significance for the present research that positive self-esteem partly reflects self-worth, and this is directly related to political identity i.e., pride in cultural group membership or state membership. What is notable here is that negative self-esteem, being partly driven by self-derogation and negative feelings about the self, might be directly related to psychological distress and violence. That is, feeling positive in a group membership identity and negative in self-esteem in a political system and social environment leads to violence. Group or collective individuals rebellion and violence is usually the result of the group's sense of self-mastery or self-efficacy in relation to its sense of trust in other groups and the general community.

Complementing individuals, in the form of coping their resources with trust in the others in a social setting is an extension to calming fears. This starts in the inner circle of individuals' social settings. The more that individuals identify with their distinguished group, the more they would believe that they have recourse to external sources of coping.31These external coping resources might include, for example, the belief that others are bound to respect him/her because of the power that he/she derives from belonging to a solid group. Reliance of the individual on his own group allows him/her to solicit advice or counsel, i.e., appraisal support. In being able to fit in his/ her own group the individual generates confidence that he/she will be successful in fitting in society. If all of these feelings go well, the result on the individual has an effect of increased personal and external coping resources and thus a decrease in the likelihood of psychological distress and potential violence.32

Identification of individuals with their own cultural group is significantly related to individual's sense of positive self-esteem. This means that the primary motive for identifying with a particular social group is the enhancement of self-esteem. Indeed, unless the individual's social self-esteem is enhanced, then he/she will not continue to identify with a particular social group.

In the process of development in Arab societies and knowing that societies do not develop unless they change, concomitants have come about in the form of industrialization and urbanization. This led to the relocations of Arabs outside their immediate group to another assemblage of different nature. Relocating to a new social setting is a necessity for most Arabs to obtain a better quality of life or better job opportunities. It is a major and potentially stressful change;33 they leave their favorite group to become part of a new ambiguous social setting. On these grounds, it is plausible that although they might be understandably proud of their cultural heritage, it would also be important for them to be accepted as members in the new location. As part of this process, they would also begin to try to adopt within the new cultural setting and in their new environment.

Middle eastern states have been for the last fifty years going through an alarming change in their social structure and witnessing a drastic demographical changes. The size of cities and urban areas has grown to absorb between 60% and 70% of the total population of the different Arab countries. Although the relationships between the different groups that came to the urban areas remain to be fully assessed, social psychologists has reported that regardless of the level of contact between the new comers to urban areas, some evidenced a more positive mood, less anxiety, and less irritation, hostility, and aggression toward each others, yet, there are significant instances where the case was completely the opposite.34 An example on that are the thousands of Egyptians who were killed by Iraqis when they settled as new comers to Iraq.

The implication here is that the dislocated Arab individuals and sometimes groups, who share considerable cultural similarity with the dominant cultural group in the new urban place of abode, might be anticipated to be accepted more than groups whose cultures differ markedly from the dominant group. Furthermore, it might be expected that such groups would have a higher relationship between socio-political identification and self-esteem than would be those with distant cultural orientation.

In sum, the preceding implications indicate that the dislocated socio-political identification exerted a major impact on migrant psychological distress. The effect was mediated by the migrant's level of self-esteem. If we correlate between psychological distress and violence then we can understand why the urban people in the Middle East have the readiness to rebel and undermine their regimes.

Dislocation stress partially stems from memory and quasi-memory. The parent children relationship with regard to this is very much linked to the apparent memories that one might have in quasi-remembering the experience of others in similar circumstances. In this sense, Quasi-memories can take their place in a criterion of sustaining or defusing socio-political and personal identity. The condition, roughly speaking, is that the content of the psychological states crucial to all forms of identity must include some element of self-reference. Schechtman35thinks that if someone fails to recognize in her memories (or q-memories) experiences that he/she seems to have had, those states ought to be thought irrelevant to personal identity. Should psychological coherence be regarded as essential to exploration of a person's identity, or merely something central and important to it? As a way of inquiring about such questions it is essential to explore more the sights on multiple personality disorder. The point I have in mind here is allegiance to leaders (father image) in the old socio-political setting and allegiance to the leaders of the new socio-political reality.

From the perspective of identity, the question is how an Arab individual living among diverse minority groups in a state oriented political environment can identity with leadership at a time when traditional Arab societies accomplish that through non-rational means like tribal rituals and stories. On the one hand Arab nationalists have been critical of the masks and agendas of religious and tribal societies, and the nature by which Arabs rally around the traditional leader yet on the other hand they have failed to provide an adequate process for leadership away from the tradition into modern statehood.

The essential premise of selecting, accepting, and maintaining a leader among Arabs is related to identity. The latter has to be accomplished with pride and culturally speaking, one cannot enjoy pride without having a known legitimate father. In the Arab culture, illegitimate children (unknown father) face traumatic chain of painful experience and events. This explains the association of father-leader veracity of defense mechanism that the individual construct so that intra-psychic maneuvers are devised by the ego to avoid the negative psychological effects of the anxiety of having no father. From an analytic perspective, identity is a virtual redress to an event that elicited the anxiety response. Regret or remorse do not modify or ameliorate the anxiety/memory constellation that resulted from psychological injury. In this respect identity for Arabs is not a matter of option, it is a matter of being or existing, whether we look at it from a religious or cultural dictates.

Phenomenologically, identity is related to events that took place in the past, or are taking place in the present. By the nature of things, events become inaccessible in the sense that they cannot be modified as soon as they become known; all that is left is the memory of the event and its repercussions whether fantasized or actual. The only tool available to the Arab individual ego in coping with past events and its emotional casualties is through the defensive function, since the only residue of the event is the experienced pain that is alive and current.

The precipitating factor of the defensive maneuver is usually a disturbing emotion but it does not imply a substitute especially for Arabs in terms of perceiving themselves not under the shield of a father or a leader. Typically, the dynamic agent is fear, shame, or some other related threat to the ego. It can therefore be expected that defensive mechanisms be concentrated in the affective domain as well. As a rule, defenses that are associated with normal functioning do involve the modification, distortion, or predication of emotions.

Defense is important in its role and function because it minimizes the effects of a threatening experience by shifting information from the conscious to the unconscious and visa versa. Oppressive actions by a father or a leader lead the individual not only to mobilize his/her defense but also to relegate oppression to the unconscious, but the very mechanism involves a process that is unconscious as well. Repression as a form of defense is dynamic in as much as it corresponds uniquely to the development of the individual's goals, objectives and process of implementations. Colloquially referred to as "forgetting," repression typically focuses on affect or memories that have the potential to disturb the individual. The unconscious is a storage-like memory that individuals could recall things from it when similar occasions flare out.

Stability in such disturbing political conditions in the Arab world and the continuation of rule of the oppressive ruling elite are related to two well-known mechanisms that are in turn associated with psychological repression, denial, and suppression. Literature of psychology generally depicts denial as an unconscious mechanism whereas suppression is described as being conscious or semiconscious.36 Differentiating among these constructs is crucial to the conceptualization of defense and thus explaining the identification with leaders in the Arab world.

Freud37 originally formulated denial, as a concept, in describing the scenario where the little boy sees a little girl in the nude but denies her lack of a penis. Psychologists often use denial as a synonym for repression. Subsequent theorists, however, circumscribed the term to refer only to the distortion of actual (perceptual) reality, in contrast to memory distortion. As such, denial is a primitive response often associated with early childhood. While denial may be seen as adaptive, suppression is a mechanism that blocks memories and perceptual reality. However, it differs from repression significantly in that threatening material is not repressed; it is simply denied attention. In this sense leaders are not confronted, especially if they could not be replaced, they are simply denied inwardly attention. Cognitive psychology refers to this as preconscious vs. conscious. While the preconscious refers to the domain that can become conscious merely by having attention directed onto it. Suppression can be conceptualized as interfering with the attention that would bring threatening preconscious material into the conscious.

In that formulation, an Arab frustrated by an aggressive leader whom he/she identify with, expresses his/her hostility in an aggressive drive naturally and without defensive distortion elsewhere such as in displacement or blaming the self, or finding an other to blame, preferably a perceived enemy.

Displacement is a basic defense mechanism where the ego substitutes a new object instead of a threatening object.38 The hallmark of displacement is the non-distortion of the original impulse with the defensive strategy oriented solely at object substitution. In altering the direction of hostility, the defense is derived from a movement away from the original object rather than a movement toward the substituted object. Indeed, the substitution is apt to engender secondary problems, as the role of the aggressive object is reproductive. In a threatening situation, acting out can serve as a defense by shifting conscious focus from affect to activity. Acting out is often featured in the literature as a form of resistance to analytic treatment. In a less analytic and more pragmatic approach, some social theorists differentiate between situations where the target of hostility is the objective cause of the problem and those where it is not. From one point of view, the overt expression of aggression toward another might be considered to indicate the absence of defense. However, Hilgard39 pointed out that the direct expression of hostility is defensive when the object of hostility is considerably removed from the object of original conflict.40 In similar line of investigation, acting out has been operationalized as turning against the object,41 which operates by transforming the experience of being threatened into an experience of making the threat.42 Is turning against the object limited to aggression?

Anna Freud43 conceptualized the defense mechanism of identification with the aggressor to elucidate the phenomenon where one joins with his/her persecutors in attacking him/herself. An example is the typical resolution of the Oedipal conflict, where the boy identifies with father in an attempt to counter his own instinctual expression. While introjection is the mechanism of the identification process, this style utilizes intra-punitiveness as dynamic. Moreover, the process of attacking oneself also brings relief from threat utilizing dynamics that are congruent with those of acting out, since the activity of self-attack precludes the emotional experience of persecution. Some theoreticians have therefore classified identification with the aggressor as a subset of acting out.44

Tracing the defensive evolution of identification with the aggressor in the Arab world elucidates further its differential classification. Given that experiencing aggression from an oppressive source that cannot be dealt with functionally precipitates the response, the question nevertheless remains: What is the affect that is being defended against here? Assuming that it is the anxiety resulting from the aggression, which is the primary object of defense, then identification with the aggressor can be conceptualized as combining the dynamics of fear, anxiety and protection.

Researchers that deal with responses of persecuted ethnic minorities, however, stress that the most threatening feeling in such circumstances, which precipitates defense is the hostility toward the oppressor, rather than the aggression coming from him/her.45 This was most clearly evident in the civil war in Lebanon when most of the minority groups under sever stress manifested a violent act of turning against themselves, since the victim defensively becomes the object of one's own hostility as a substitution for the oppressor against whom aggression is impossible.

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**أزمة الهوية العربية: مقاربة في علم النفس السياسي**

أصبح مفهوم الهوية حالياً أكثر من أي وقت مضى وبشكل متزايد يلقى اهتماماً كبيراً ومصدر قلق  العلماء المهتمين بالاستقرار السياسي. وبغية تبسيط الأمور، يشدد قاموس أكسفورد الجامعي على الشخصية والفردية ويركز على نوعية الترابط المتلازم بين الاثنين كعنصر مركزي في تحديد الهوية.

وينكب علماء النفس الاجتماعيين، الذين يعالجون في المقام الأول مشاكل المجتمعات المتعددة الهويات والمتعارضة، على أوجه الهوية.

ويفترض هذا المقال أنه من الضروري ضم دراسة الهوية السياسية إلى الانقسام بين "الأنا" و "الأنا" في تحديد الذات كما يتطرق المقال إلى التمييز الذي أوجدته النظرية الفرويدية المحدثة بين الأنا والذات.

يُستخدم هذا الانقسام للتأمل أكثر في الأفراد المنليثيين وخاصة في كيفية تجاوبهم بشكل سلبي مع الحوادث الطارئة الخارجية.

عبر تحديد أنفسهم كعرب، يفتخر معظم الأفراد في المناطق العربية في التأكيد على فرادتهم والإضاءة على المجموعات التي يشعرون أنهم ينتمون إليها أو التي ينتسبون إليها. المثير للسخرية هو أن الهوية بين العرب لا تحدد الذات. بشكل منطقي، إنه تجاوب مع الضغوط الخارجية.

إحدى المشاكل المركزية في التحليل السياسي العصري في العالم العربي هي التحدي الذي يشكله الفرد والمجموعات أمام مفاهيم المواطنية ومحاولات بناء الدولة أو الأمة.

وبالتحدث عن أزمة الهوية السياسية نقصد التحدث عن تهديد محتمل بحصول تغيير جذري في بانوراما الكيانات العربية أي بمعنى آخر حصول اختلال هيكلي في التوازن الضروري والمطلوب لكل رفاهة وطنية وفردية ومجتمعية.

يشهد العالم العربي حالياً ارتباكاً مأسوياً وفريداً في ما يتعلق بدور الهوية الشخصية والسياسية.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/arab-identity-crisis-political-psychology-approach#sthash.0RjSM82I.dpuf