

Nationalist ideas in the middle east



Nationality is the desire of a group of people to preserve or obtain common statehood and the ideology stressing loyalty to the nation-state or seeking independence of a national group. Michel Aflaq, Theodor Herzl, and the Palestinian National Charter have fundamentally different ideas on establishing nationalism, however each movement and charter wishes to establish a national identity as well as a state due to their experiences of oppression and dispersion.

Michel Aflaq describes his ideas on Arab nationalism through the Arab Baath party, which entails the establishment of an Arab state and the right to govern themselves, as well as a revivification of old Arab thought and ideology. Theodor Herzl depicts the Zionist nationalist movement, which includes mass immigration of Jews to Palestine as well as getting Jews to rally behind their cause. The Palestinian National Charter lists what the Palestinians deem as their declaration of independence, which calls for having Palestine as their homeland, where they feel a sense of identity, and thereby reviving Palestinian nationalism within the state.

These movements reflect the ideals and desires of three distinct Middle Eastern groups, however they do in fact share many common themes. Michel Aflaq writes "Purifying the National Ideal: Baath Ideology", in which he speaks of establishing a national identity through the Arab Ba' th party for Arabs who have been dispersed and fragmented through oppression. Aflaq describes the Arab Ba' th movement as "reflecting the soul of the nation and her various needs." The basic concept of what the Ba' th party stands for is Nationalism of Arabs.

Aflaq states that the need for the Baath party is due to the dispersion of Arabs throughout the world, and therefore a loss of their identity, which needs to be brought back to establish an Arab state. The Baath party's intended goal is not to create a place where all Arabs will live together, but to come to power in Syria where they will begin to be recognized as a state, and to establish a sense of national Arab identity and "lead the Arabs, individually and collectively, toward this healthy state of thought and mind. 1

This will be revived by recognizing the original Arab thought, which Aflaq describes as an "aptitude for seeing things directly, freely, without artifice or imitation." 1 Ba' th socialism is suggested as a means to create the Arab state and spread Arab nationalism, while Communism and Marxism are regarded as limited and difficult to achieve "[Ba' th] socialism will be achieved when Arabs take charge of their own destiny and free themselves from imperialism and feudalism. 1

The nationalist idea of Ba' th socialism entails that the injustices Arabs have experienced are removed and that the Arabs are recognized as a state "when the Arab people are freed, and when the impediments that oppose the success of socialism, such as imperialism, feudalism, and the geographical frontiers created by politics are removed". Although the Ba' th party is willing to use force to achieve their goals, the ideology of Ba' th socialism agrees to work with other nations, and does not want total domination, the main aim is to be recognized as a state, and nationalism will follow.

The Zionist movement differs from the Ba' th movement in that it does not enact a political ideology such as Ba' th socialism, but it calls for rallying of

the Jews and mass immigration in order to secure specifically Palestine as the Jewish state. The Nationalist ideals of each differ considering when the Ba' th party is about the nationalization of the Arabs through the revival of Arab thought, while much of the Zionism nationalist ideal is that of establishing a homeland and fleeing anti-Semitism.

Both nationalist ideals are similar in that they find nationalism through their history. " Nationalism, in truth, is the spiritual and historical bond between members of a nation, whom history has stamped in a special manner and has not isolated from the rest of humanity. " 2 " Zionism: the Vision of an Eventual Jewish State" written by Theodor Herzl calls for creating the Jewish state in Palestine through immigration, infrastructure, and agriculture while being recognized as a state by other world powers.

Herzl's idea of Zionist nationalism calls for Jews to rally for the creation of Palestine as the Jewish state " let all who are willing to join us, fall in behind our banner and fight for our cause with voice and pen and deed. " Through rallying the Jews to create a state, they will be acknowledged as a State-creating power by other nations and governments and therefore recognized as a Government, which will initially create the state.

The preliminary goal for creating the Jewish state consists of the mass immigration of Jews into the land, starting with the poorest, who will farm the land and cultivate the soil, then more Jews will immigrate and create infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Herzl explains that through cultivation of the land and establishing infrastructure, Jews will continue to immigrate to the state, " Their labor will create trade, trade will create

markets and markets will attract new settlers, for everyman will go voluntarily at his own expense and his own risk.

The labor expended on the land will enhance its value and the Jews will soon perceive that a new and permanent sphere of operation is opening here of that spirit of enterprise. ” 2 Choosing Palestine as the Jewish state also ensures nationalism since Jews will recognize it as their “ ever-memorable historic home. ” 3 The Zionist movement and the Palestinian National Charter stand apart in that the Jews want Palestine as their homeland, while the Palestinians already claim it as their homeland and want it back.

Palestine also represents the larger Arab nation to the Palestinians while the Jews find Palestine as a religious homeland, and an escape from the anti-Semitic persecution of many years. The Palestinian National Charter describes the reasons why Palestinians rightfully deserve to live in Palestine and declare it as the Palestinian State. The charter explains how the Palestinian nationality cannot exist without Palestine as their State, Article 1- Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian people.

It is an inseparable part of the bigger Arab nation, and its people are an integral part of the Arab people... Article 4- The Palestinian identity is a permanent and enduring trait that passes from father to son. The Israeli occupation, and the dispersion of the Palestinian people, resulting from the ill fortunes that befell them, cannot deprive the Palestinian people of its Palestinian personality and identity The charter also states that Arab unity is dependent on Palestine as a Palestinian state, and that the fate of the Arab nation depends on the fate of Palestine.

Within this statement, the charter is not only advocating for Palestinian nationality but also that of the Arab nation. These movements and charter are all in part secular in that they are primarily political movements to establish identity and culture. The Ba' th party is the foundation of a political socialist party to create Arab nationalism disregarding different religions. The Palestinian National Charter is a political declaration of the Palestinian ownership of Palestine where they identify themselves as a people.

The Zionist movement is also secular because the movement started as the Jews fleeing oppression and needing a place to escape suffering, however the choice of Palestine as their safe haven led to a religious movement in that the Jews view Palestine as the Jewish homeland. Herzl acknowledges, “The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvelous potency.”³ Here Herzl alludes to the notion of a biblical connection to the development of Jewish nationalism. The Palestinian charter also contains a few religious aspects that it is essential “To acquaint him with his native land-spiritually and materially.”⁴

This is an expression of religious importance to Palestinian nationalism, however the majority of each movement is political, making each in most part, secular. The socialist Ba' th movement, the Zionist movement, and the Palestinian National Charter all aim at uniting a group of people through their common heritage, culture, and political ideals. The history of oppression that all three share has led to a strong, undying drive to establish a haven for security and identity in a world where they would each be accepted as a state of their own, with the final goal of future self-determination.