

T.C.
MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI
ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER BİLİM DALI

**CONSTRUCTIONS OF NATIONALISM IN SYRIA
FROM HISTORICAL ROOTS TO THE
SYRIAN UPRISING**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

ADNAN BAGHAJATI

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Öz

TARİHSEL KÖKENLERİNDEN SURİYE AYAKLANMALARINA KADAR SURİYE'DE MİLLİYETÇİLİK İNŞALARI

Bu çalışma, Suriye Milleti düşüncesinin nasıl geliştiği ve bu düşüncenin destekçileri için ne anlama geldiği ile ilgili tarihsel kökenlerden yola çıkarak, Suriye ayaklanmalarının başladığı döneme kadar, Suriye'deki milliyetçi teorilerin gelişimini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın hareket noktasını Suriye'deki milliyetçilik olgusunu geniş ve karşılaştırmalı perspektiften ele alan, Suriye'deki milliyetçiliğin farklı dallarını inceleyen ve bunların birbirleriyle olan ilişkilerini ve uyumsuzluklarını analiz eden literatürde gözlemlenen boşluk oluşturmaktadır. Tez iki ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlkinde, Suriye'de milliyetçiliğin tarihsel inşası analiz edilmektedir. Bu bölümde şu sorulara cevap aranmıştır: Suriye kimliği nasıl inşa edildi; Suriye Milliyetçiliği hangi işlevleri yerine getirdi; ve Suriye Milliyetçiliği diğer ideolojiler ve milliyetçiliklerle hangi bağlantılar içinde oldu? Tezin ikinci bölümünde ise, Suriye'deki modern milliyetçilik biçimleri ele alınmış; tarihsel kavramlarla olan devamlılığı incelenmiş ve ana uyumsuzluk noktaları belirlenmiştir. Teorik açıdan, bu çalışma, Ernst Gellner, John Breuilly ve Montserrat Guibernau'nun eserleri dahil olmak üzere, modernleşmeci Milliyetçilik okulu ve ulusların sosyal inşalar olduğu ana bulgusu üzerine yaslanmaktadır. Metodolojik açıdan, Butrus Al Bustani ve Jurji Yazdan gibi erken milliyetçi düşünürlerin eserleri incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, modern dönemlerdeki Milliyetçilik inşalarının analizi için, Suriye'deki aktörlerin siyasal programlarının içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma, Suriye'deki milliyetçi kimliklerin, Arap milliyetçiliği ve siyasal İslam gibi diğer ideolojilere ve etnisitelerle karşılıklı bağlantılarını daha derinden anlamamıza katkıda bulunmaktadır. Anahtar bulgulardan biri, Suriye ulusal ve siyasal varlığının uyumu anlamında dışlayıcı Suriye Milletçiliğinin kısa süre yaşamış bir olgu olduğu ve Suriye milliyetçilik inşasının, bunun diğer farklı etnik, dinsel ve politik kavramlardan yola çıkan kimliklendirmeler arasında yalnızca bir etmen olarak yer aldığı karma ideolojilerle yer değiştirmesidir.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTIONS OF NATIONALISM IN SYRIA FROM HISTORICAL ROOTS TO THE SYRIAN UPRISING

This study traces the development of nationalist thought within Syria, from its historical roots in the mid of the 19th century - looking at how the idea of a Syrian Nation developed and what it meant for its proponents - to the wake of the 2011 Syrian uprising. What motivated this research was the gap found in the existing literature about the phenomenon of nationalism in Syria from a broader and comparative perspective, including the different branches of nationalism that exist within Syria as well as their interrelationships and confrontations. In the first part, this thesis traces the historic constructions of nationalism in Syria beginning from Butrus Al Bustani's ideas on the Syrian national identity in the middle of the 19th century. How was the Syrian national identity constructed, what functions did Syrian Nationalism fulfill and how did Syrian Nationalisms relate to other ideologies and nationalisms in the region? In the second part of the thesis, modern forms of nationalism in Syria are scrutinized, the continuity to historical concepts such as Islamic and Arab Nationalism is explored and main points of conflict between the different nationalisms are identified. Theoretically this works builds on the modernist literature on Nationalism, including the works of Ernest Gellner, John Breuilly and Montserrat Guibernau, and its main finding that nations are imagined and social constructs. Underpinning the thesis is an in-depth analysis of the works of key Syrian nationalists such as Butrus Al Bustani and Jurji Yazdan. Furthermore, this thesis draws from critical content analysis of political programmes of the key actors of current nationalisms in Syria. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of nationalist identities in Syria and their interconnectedness to other ideologies and ethnicities, like Arab Nationalism and political Islam. Among the key findings is that exclusivist Syrian Nationalism, in the meaning of one congruent Syrian national and political entity, was a short-lived phenomenon and replaced by mixed ideologies in which Syrian nationalist constructions are just one factor among other identifications with ethnic, religious and political concepts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In current analyses of the Syrian civil war, it is very common to point out the artificiality of the Syrian nation, based on the argument that Syria is actually a “colonial construct”. It is often emphasized that there was never something like a Syrian nation throughout history: “In Syria there has never been a uniquely Syrian territorial identity nor a Syrian entity as such” (Salameh, nationalinterest.org, 17.11.2016). But if there are nations that are artificial constructs, there must be, on the other hand, also authentic nations – an argument which builds on the primordial assumption that nations are ancient and natural phenomena (Özkırımlı 2000: 65-74). However, with the modernist school of nationalism, the primordialist argument of the naturalness of the nation is strongly contested. According to this school of thought, nations are the products of the new social context that developed with modernity and were constructed to serve political and economic ends. This way of thinking and hence new paradigm about the nation found one of its strongest expressions in Benedict Anderson’s (1990) work. According to Anderson, nations are mere “imagined communities”, as the citizens of the nation never really are in contact with all the other citizens, but still feel as part of a community (Anderson 1990: 6). So, on the basis of the modernist school of nationalism, and especially Anderson’s theory of the nation as “imagined community”, the argument of the “artificiality” of the Syrian nation is very weak as all the nations are constructs, and therefore artificial in one way or another. Furthermore, it is too simplistic to state that it was only French colonialism that created Syria. Of course, the influence of France on the development of the Syrian nation cannot be denied, as it ruled Syria and Lebanon from 1923 to 1946 through a mandate system (Rabinovich 1979: 695-703). However, to argue that the people who lived in Syria themselves had no impact at all on the construction of the Syrian nation, and thus claiming that they were only passive subordinates, falls in line with the Orientalist paradigm that denies non-Europeans any kind of agency (Said 1978). Analyzing the history of Syria from the second half of the 19th century until today we can see very clearly that people who lived in Syria actively participated in forming the idea of Syria as a nation and also acted in many different ways to materialize these ideas.

Hence, to go beyond the arguments on the impossibility of Syria as a nation, based on primordialist and orientalist assumptions, it is necessary to ask how the Syrian nation was,

and also is constructed by the people who lived and live in Syria themselves. Especially today, where Syria is in a deep conflictual and chaotic situation, the question how the people and political leaders of different movements are depicting Syria is of critical importance, as these constructions can tell us a lot about the different images of Syria among the Syrian people and also can shed light into some of the main lines of this conflict. For the purpose of understanding how the Syrian nation is being imagined today in the wake of the Syrian Civil war among the different opposition forces and also the Syrian regime, it is necessary to analyze the historical development of ideas around Syrian nationalism, as they build the foundation and the framework of modern constructions of the Syrian nation.

The first part of this thesis traces the origins of the idea of Syrian nationalism by analyzing historic writings, like the one of Butrus Al Bustani and Rashid Rida and identifies the various branches of Syrian Nationalism. While Syrian nationalism was mainly associated in scholarly literature with the nationalist ideology of Antun Saadeh, this work shows that there are various paradigms of nationalism in Syria that developed over the decades since the mid-19th century until today. Historically we can differentiate between four paradigms of Syrian Nationalism: Syrian-Arab, Exclusivist Syrian, Arab-Syrian Islamic and Baathist Nationalism.

The second part sheds light on current depictions of the Syrian nation through the analysis of the political programs of some major political actors in Syria. The analysis of present forms of Syrian Nationalism identifies three major constructions of nationalism in Syria, Islamic-Arab, Kurdish-Syrian and Arab Nationalism.

This study tries to fill a gap in the literature, by looking at how nationalist constructions developed in Syria comprehensively, the different branches that evolved, and how they interact, built on and oppose each other. One of the major results of this work is that we cannot speak of one Syrian nationalism, rather it is a variety of nationalist ideas that formed in Syria and developed through history. While a range of mixed nationalisms appeared in Syria, no civic form of Syrian nationalism evolved, which had the power to give a vision of a united Syria that included all citizens, regardless of their ethnic and religious belonging.

Another result is that while Baathist nationalism constituted the prevailing and forced national ideology for decades – claiming the unity of the Arab nation as ideal – the Syrian uprising showed the weakness of Baathism in actually creating national consciousness among the Syrian people.

1.1. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Most of the literature on Syrian nationalism approaches the topic historically by focusing on the contributions of thinkers and political leaders to the idea of Syria. The main work and most important scholarly contribution to the subject of Syrian Nationalism is the anthology “The origins of Syrian nationhood: histories, pioneers and identity”, edited by Adel Beshara (Beshara 2011). The work gives a very good overview of the different historic manifestations of Syrian Nationalism from the late Ottoman period, till the later period of the French colonization and Antun Saadeh’s Syrian nationalist ideas that developed during that time. Drawing from rich primary sources, the authors of this compilation, give deep insights into the thoughts of the early Syrian nationalist thinkers, while simultaneously regarding the historical context and also reflecting on the motives of Syrian nationalism. This makes it a very valuable source for the research of this Master Thesis, especially when examining the historic forms of Syrian Nationalism. For example, in “Antun Saadeh. Architect of Syrian Nationalism” Beshara gives a detailed account on the nationalist ideology of Antun Saadeh, who was especially influential in the end of the French colonization period in the 30s and 40s, and also in the early years of Syrian independence.

However, almost every author of the anthology chose to focus on only one personality, such as for example Butrus Al-Bustani or Antun Saadeh, which made the work sometimes give the impression of being a mere accumulation of biographies. Since it is made up by independent contributions the links between the Syrian nationalist thinkers, their different contributions and how their ideas were interconnected and related is often under-examined.

In order to fill that missing links, additional literature was analysed during the research. A number of scholarly articles and books deal with specific time periods, such as “Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French Mandate” (Khoury 1981), which analyses the different political ideologies and strategies of Syrian nationalists during the colonization period. Another work that needs to be pointed out is “The Making of a Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth Century Beirut” (Zachs 2004) by Zachs. By analysing mainly primary sources like newspapers, Zachs shows how the economic and intellectual elite, businessmen, scholars, teacher and publishers shared a common interest in the development of a Syrian national identity in

the 19th century and worked together on its realization, reminding of Gellner's theory of "nationalism as a function".

Regarding modern Syria after its independence, works dealing with Syrian nationalism are rarer to be found, since the main scholarly efforts go into the analysis of Baathism and Arab nationalism, reflecting the social and political realities of the time. However, there are a few articles that analyse the Baathist form of Syrian nationalism. In "Writing Syrian History While Propagating Arab Nationalism: Textbooks about Modern Arab History under Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad" (Bolliger 2011) Bolliger shows through a comparison of Syrian school books from different times how the representation of purely Syrian nationalist symbols beside the common Arab nationalist Baathist principles become increasingly important over time, reflecting the need of the Syrian regime to provide a legitimizing framework for its rule. Also in "Who's afraid of Syrian nationalism? National and state identity in Syria." (Zisser 2006) Zisser shows how Bashar Al-Assad uses Syrian nationalist discourse, such as evidenced in his emphasis on Syria as a homeland of ancient civilizations before even the Arabs came to it, in order to strengthen the legitimacy of his claim as ruler of Syria.

The literature review shows that there is a clear lack of literature looking at the issue from a wider perspective and trying to analyse Syrian Nationalism in its manifold branches both in the modern times and in the wake of the Syrian uprising. One of the main reasons for this inadequate engagement with the topic of Syrian Nationalism is that in the academic discourse it is mainly identified with the ideology of Antun Saadeh, the founder of the Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party. However, Syrian Nationalism manifested and continues to manifest itself in much wider forms than in the exclusivist version of Antun Saadeh.

This study shows that Syrian nationalism can be found and is expressed in manifold mixed ways, together with Islamic, Arab and even Kurdish Nationalism. Therefore, an unorthodox approach that does not look at nationalism as being bound to just one ethnicity, like it is the case with most of the European nationalisms, has to be employed to grasp the full meaning of Syrian Nationalism. To understand the particularities of Syrian Nationalism, I chose to look first at its historical roots and follow its development through the decades, eventually analysing its newest forms that can be seen in the current

conflict. The historical perspective will also enable me to trace the evolution of Syrian Nationalism and study the various factors that shaped it.

1.2. FRAMEWORK OF THE THESIS

Theoretically this thesis is based on the modernist school of Nationalism, which includes the theories of Ernest Gellner, John Breuilly, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Montserrat Guibernau. The main assumption and principle of this school of thought applies throughout the analysis of Syrian Nationalism, which is that nationalism creates the nation and not the other way around. Therefore, nationalism is not only considered as a patriotic sentiment, expressed by a nation, but rather as an essential element of its construction. This point is crucially important, as it shifts the focus of analysis from the nation state and its material conditions to ideas that have actively contributed to its formation, from its roots to the present day.

Furthermore, all these theories and thinkers have provided a lot of concepts, used in this thesis, which help to understand and examine all kind of different forms of nationalism that have developed within Syria. These include the concept of nationalism as political principle (Gellner 2006), nationalism as political movement in all its different forms (reform, separatist and unifying nationalism), the nation as imagined community (Anderson 1990) and the concepts of national identification (the five dimensions of national identity) (Guibernau 2004). In the chapter laying out the theoretical underpinning of this thesis, the different theoretical approaches are explained in depth.

Regarding the time frame, this study attempts to trace the evolvement of the different ideas on Syrian Nationalism from its very beginning in the end of the 19th century to the present day. The question whether such a long time-span is not too much for the framework of a Master Thesis is legitimate and must be answered. My research around Syrian Nationalism has shown that there are no studies which try to show the evolvement of Syrian Nationalism from its historical roots to the present day. Instead, thinkers were selected and their ideas scrutinized for specific time periods, for example the post-world war period or the Baathist period. However, a full understanding of all the manifold facets of Syrian nationalism requires an approach that includes the historical as well as

the present dimensions and shows the interconnections between them to understand the bigger picture. The present forms of Nationalism cannot be very well understood without having examined the historical forms.

The choice of such a large time span meant necessarily that deductions in other parts of the thesis had to be made. One limitation of this thesis is that it mainly considers the various nationalist conceptualizations by thinkers and political parties without examining their real social impact among the Syrian populace or considering popular forms of nationalism among the Syrian people. Therefore, the critique of Hobsbawm (1990) that nationalism studies look mainly at the ideas of the “great men of history” (1990: 34-136) without regarding the ideas and nationalist convictions that developed among the “normal” people applies also to this study. To understand the historical evolution of Syrian nationalism, Syrian nationalist thinkers and their writings, as well as secondary literature about them was scrutinized and interpreted. These included the works of Butrus Al-Bustani, Rashid Rida and Antun Saadeh. For the analysis of nationalism in the present day, political programs of some of the main political actors in Syria were analysed. Unfortunately, the framework of this thesis was too limited to take the nationalist imaginations of Syrians in the present time (through surveys, empirical research etc.) into consideration. Also, the historical research did not include the analysis of documents that could have shown nationalist ideas and identifications of Syrian people, for example through the analysis of old newspapers. Therefore, the results of this thesis must be read with care when it comes to their potential representativeness and reflection of the ideas of the Syrian people in general.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The thesis focuses on the following research questions to analyse the historical and current dimensions of Syrian nationalism:

1. Historical Dimension

How was Syrian identity constructed historically?

What were the main paradigms of Syrian nationalism and how did they relate to and differ from each other?

What were the various functions that Syrian Nationalism fulfilled for the different political actors?

What was the historical context in which Syrian nationalism emerged and how did it historically evolve?

How did Syrian Nationalism relate to other nationalisms and ideologies like Arabism and political Islam?

2. In the wake of the Syrian uprising

What are the images of the Syrian nation in the wake of the Syrian uprising among the different opposition groups and the Syrian regime?

How do they differ from each other and what are the main points of conflict?

Are there influences of historical forms of Syrian nationalism that can be observed in its current versions?

Is there a relation between the different forms of Syrian Nationalisms of the present time and the current conflict in Syria?

1.4. METHODOLOGY

For the historical part of this study, primary sources from early thinkers and political leaders of Syrian nationalism, as well as secondary sources, were examined thoroughly. For the study of Syrian Nationalism in modern times, the political manifestos of the main actors were analyzed by using content analysis and a hermeneutical approach (Neuendorf 2016). The manifestos are scrutinized for their hidden meanings and concepts. To guarantee a scientific approach that minimises the subjective opinion of the researcher in the best possible way, the following approach has been chosen. Key theoretical main concepts were used for the interpretation as codes, such as the concept of national identification, and systematically examined in all the political texts from the various actors. Completing the deductive perspective on the political manifestos, an

inductive approach was chosen by coding the text according to the concepts, metaphors, and ideas that were found in the texts. Therefore, the interpretation of the political manifestos were conducted based on this double coding – from a deductive and inductive perspective.

1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In the first chapter, the thesis topic is introduced and the primary research interest outlined. Furthermore, the literature around the theme of Syrian nationalism is critically discussed both from the suggested theoretical and historical perspective. In the second part, theories of nationalism are discussed and a definition of nationalism formulated. Furthermore, the geographic and etymologic meaning of Syria is examined to better understand the framework and references in which the various Syrian nationalist thinkers navigate and develop their ideas. The third chapter analyses constructions of Syrian nationalism from a historical perspective. In this chapter, the beginnings of Syrian nationalism are discussed by analyzing the historical context in which it emerged and its development in the following decades during the colonial times and early independence. The fourth chapter is dedicated to Syrian nationalism in the wake of the Syrian uprising. In this part, various political manifestos are analysed through a content analysis, through which hidden meanings and concepts are discovered. Lastly, in the conclusion, the main findings and results of this study are presented. Furthermore, the limitations of this thesis are discussed and an outlook for future research is provided.

2. THEORIES OF NATIONALISM AND ETYMOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY OF SYRIA

In this chapter the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this thesis are discussed. In the first part the theoretical aspects of the modernist school of nationalism and its various definitions, approaches and conceptualizations are examined. As a conclusion a working definition is presented. In the second part the etymology and geography of Syria throughout history is inspected. This is especially important for understanding the framework in which the various nationalist thinkers developed their ideologies and nationalist constructions.

2.1. DEFINITION OF NATIONALISM

With rightist movements gaining strengths all over the world, Europe and the USA for example (harvardpolitics.com, 11.12.2017), the first association with nationalism is that it is primarily an emotional sentiment that stresses the superiority and the primacy of the nation and its citizens over all the ‘others’. Looking at the definitions provided by the Oxford dictionary we can see that this come very close to this first association: “Patriotic feeling, principles, or efforts”, “an extreme form of patriotism marked by a feeling of superiority over other countries” and “advocacy of political independence for a particular country” (Oxford Dictionary 2017). These definitions of nationalism as patriotic sentiments and actions reflect the common view on nations as natural phenomena, for which people develop a sense of belonging and identification. Following this perspective, first, there is the nation and then, as a reflection of the sense of belonging and identification to this nation, nationalism unfolds.

This definition of nationalism as patriotic sentiment might be fitting in the face of today’s rightist movements and the emotions they undoubtedly evoke. However, it obscures the essential role of nationalism in the social construction of nations. In the words of Gellner, one of the pioneering writers of the modernist school of nationalism, it is the nationalism that creates the nations and not the other way round. In his book entitled *Thought and Change* (1965), he broke with earlier conceptions of nationalism as an aspect of national history – e.g. as sentiment expressed by nations - and argued

that in the opposite, nationalism itself creates nations. Gellner defines the nation as a “political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 2006: 1). He comes to this definition by examining the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society. In pre-industrial, face to face and also in large-scale agrarian societies, polity and culture do not match, which makes the development of nationalism and nations impossible. Empires, like the Ottoman and French, did not seek to penetrate far into the lives of different communities, and as a consequence, social groups developed distinct cultures and identities. Additionally, there was little intergroup interaction, which also hindered the development of common cultures (Breuilly 2006: 20-24). As such, the roles of people mattered - in Gellner’s words “the structure” -not the culture- constituted identity. On the other hand, in large-scale industrial societies, the roles people played were more flexible; positions were characterized by change and flexibility. Furthermore, people moved beyond their small social groups, so they did not have only enduring relationships, but also encountered with one another on a regular basis. Hence, there were no fixed structures and positions (like peasant, priest, guild...) that served as identity providers (Breuilly 2006: 24). The new industries demanded a high level of universal literacy and also numerical and technical skills to control the machines. Additionally, members of industrial society had to be mobile and ready to shift in between the needs the new industries demanded. All those new demands also meant that people had to be able to communicate with each other in one shared language, precisely in the same shared and standardized linguistic medium and script. As a consequence, mass education was established and through mass education and industrial activity, a mass culture was promoted (Gellner 2006: 34-36). Therefore, Gellner sees nationalism as a function of modernity. Through large-scale industries and its aforementioned demands, distinct small-scale social communities with their different cultural entities were transformed into one larger community – as a result, the nation was born. Therefore, according to Gellner, nationalism is not only a sentiment that belongs to the nation but a force of modernity through which the nation was created (Gellner 2006: 37-40).

Likewise for Breuilly (2006), nationalism came with modernity. However, while Gellner describes nationalism as a function of modernism and industrialization, Breuilly characterizes nationalism as political movement and doctrine. For him, modernization

is not the cause of nationalism, but rather the context of nationalism as a political movement to emerge (Breuilly 2001: 49-51). Using a historical comparative approach he describes three forms of nationalism as a political movement: reform nationalism, unification nationalism and separatist nationalism. They all share the same political doctrine of nationalism, which states that there exists a nation with an explicit character, that the interests and values of this nation have priority over all other interests and values and that the nation must be independent, ergo sovereign (Özkırımlı 2000: 105). In France, reform nationalism constituted a political movement against the legitimacy of the state in its absolutist form. *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* by the French National Assembly in 1789 stated that the Nation is the source of all sovereignty and that no individual can be entitled to any authority, which is not derived from it (avalon.law.yale.edu, 11.12.2017). Therefore, the state had to express not the will of individuals but of the people. The question was how this could be established in practice. The answer lay in the “nation” – a cultural collective that bound the citizens together. But nationalism also took other forms. Germany and Italy experienced unification nationalism in the middle of the 19th century. Fragmented in several little states by 1800, in 1871 they were united by political nationalist movements. Separatist nationalism is the third form of nationalism, which developed in multi-ethnic states with culturally dominant groups in its regions such as in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire (Breuilly 2001: 39-41). Breuilly’s classification of nationalism as political movements seems complete when regarded from a historical perspective. However, it leaves out one form of political nationalism that is widely prevalent today: the nationalism employed by the nation-state in order to secure and foster the loyalty of the people who are citizens of this nation. We can call it nation states affirming nationalism. This form of “state nationalism” can take many forms. Guibernau (2004) summarizes them in five points: the dissemination of a national image, mostly based on the dominant ethnic group living in the nation and its culture; the creation of a set of common symbols; citizenship and through it the separation in the people who are included and excluded from the belonging to the nation; the construction of enemies and the spreading of national education and media (Guibernau 2003: 140).

Hobsbawm engages in the analysis of nationalism further back than Breuilly, as evidenced in his work *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Before nationalism as

political movement emerges, in some cases there exist already rudimentary nationalist concepts, which he terms “popular proto-nationalism” (Hobsbawm 1990: 50). Popular proto-nationalism is characterized by inciting in large segments of the population a feeling of common belonging that finds expression in popular culture, for example, heroic songs, tales etc. without necessarily establishing the link between polity and nation. Therefore, they have the potential to be used by nationalist movements for generalization, extension and popularization. In the discussion what exactly constitutes proto-nationalism, Hobsbawm finds that it is very difficult to establish a clear set of criteria in which proto-nationalism shows itself. In an excursion through the various candidates that may have offered themselves as crucial elements for proto-nationalism, from language to ethnicity and religion, he comes to the conclusion that while all of them can build a part of proto-nationalism, none of them is essentially important for its development (Hobsbawm 1990: 47-60). Rather it is the common history or the consciousness of belonging to a historic nation, like for example the people who lived in Russia felt for the “Holy Russia” or the Serbs for the “Serbian” kingdom and the Greeks for their Greek ancient nation that forms proto-nationalism. Furthermore, it is important to see that while it can serve the nationalist purpose very well since it offers the project of nationalism something to build upon, it is not absolutely necessary for nationalism to emerge -as the example of the United States of America and Australia show- in which no form of proto-nationalism existed, and nationalism was formed only after the establishment of the state (Hobsbawm 1990: 61-79).

After analyzing the phenomenon of proto-nationalism, Hobsbawm like Breuille stresses the role of political transformation in nationalism. He sees three stages in the evolution of nationalism as a political movement. The first was from the French revolution to 1918, when nationalism was born and expanded rapidly. In this period we can differentiate between two sorts of nationalism, the democratic nationalism, which originated in the French revolution and had its great impact on the map of Europe from 1830 to 1870 and, second, the reactionary nationalism of nations within the big empires, like the Ottoman Empire from 1870 onwards. The second stage evolved from 1918 to 1950 and is characterized by the main political ideologies of the time, fascism and communism, taking up nationalism to serve their political purpose. During this time the first anti-imperial forms of nationalism developing in the third world, like for example

in India, can be observed. However, according to Hobsbawm, these nationalisms differed from the ones that developed in Europe, insofar as there were proto-national identifications, ethnic, religious or otherwise, among the common people, they were, as yet, obstacles rather than contributions to national consciousness.

In Hobsbawm's work, we cannot only see parallels to Breuilly but also to Gellner. For his analysis of nationalism, Hobsbawm adopts the definition of Gellner that nationalism is a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent. Furthermore, he agrees with Gellner in the notion of nationalism as nation-building force. He argues that "nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way round" (Hobsbawm 1990: 10). However, he criticizes Gellner for his perspective of modernization from above. For Hobsbawm, the view from below, not from governments and nationalist movements but from ordinary persons, is also crucially important for understanding the phenomenon of nationalism. He argues that official ideologies of states and movements do not explain what is in the mind of the citizens and even supporters. Furthermore, the national identification of people constitutes only one among a lot of other possible social identifications. We cannot assume that the national identification excludes or is superior to other forms of identifications. And third, national identification is nothing static and can shift easily in time (Hobsbawm 1990: 10-11). In this manner, Hobsbawm understands nationalisms and nations as dual phenomena, "which are constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below" (Hobsbawm 1990: 10). This perspective from below has been neglected in prior research. According to Hobsbawm the investigation of the history of ideas, opinions and feelings at sub-literary level is crucial for a developed understanding of nationalism and nations.

Like the above-discussed authors, Benedict Anderson can also be seen as belonging to the school of modernism since he argues that nationalism emerged towards the end of the 18th century as a result of historical forces. However, he sets a different focus, because for him it is not enough to explain historically nationalism, but to find out why nationalism has the ability to arouse deep emotional attachments. Why, for example, are people willing to die in the name of a nation? (Özkırımlı 2000: 143-144). According to Anderson, it is crucial for this task to analyze the cultural roots out of which, as well as against which, nationalism appeared. He comes to the conclusion that the decline of

great religiously imagined communities, as well as the one of the dynastic realm, gave space to a new kind of imagined community – the nation. Furthermore, the expansion of common languages, enforced through the increasing book market, enhanced the nationalist consciousness by providing a common base of communication and by that also a common basis for identification (Özkırımlı 2000: 147-150). Although Anderson does not provide a clear definition of nationalism, his definition of the nation can shed more light on what he understands exactly under nationalism: “it is an imagined community – and imagined both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1990: 6). He describes it as imagined because members of the nation will never know most of their fellow members, yet in the mind of the members the idea of their union exists. Furthermore, the nation is a community because it is understood as horizontal comradeship. This explains also why millions of people were ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their nations (Anderson 1990: 6-7).

Taking all these theories into account, we can conclude that nationalism has developed from being primarily a function of modernity and a political movement to affecting individuals and their identity. This leads to another important concept that has to be regarded - the one of national identity. For Smith (1991: 14), national identity is multidimensional, including a common sense of belonging to a historic territory or homeland, common myths and shared memories, a common mass public culture, common rights and duties for all members as well as a common economy, in which members can move freely. National identity has external and internal functions since it draws the political, territorial and economic borders to the “Other” and at the same time socializes the individuals belonging to the nation-state into their status as “nationals” (Smith 1991: 17). Although agreeing with Smith that national identity constitutes a feeling of common belonging based on the belief in a common culture, history, destiny etc., Guibernau criticizes his definition of national identity as too modern nation-state oriented, therefore not recognizing the fact that national identities developed already before mass public culture and also that there are national identities, which are not bound to a state, like the Catalan one. For Guibernau national identity comprises five dimensions: psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political. The psychological dimension of national identity can be seen in the group consciousness of people, who view themselves as being part of one nation. Through this group

consciousness a feeling of emotional bond and ancestral relationship is created, that promotes loyalty and social coherence among the people sharing one national identity. This sentimental feeling of belonging to one nation is very powerful, pushing individuals to extreme actions and sacrifices, as through national identification the individuals feel as if they transcend their own being and contribute to a higher aim. The cultural dimension refers to the set of values, beliefs, customs and conventions that comes with the national identity. The historical dimension of national identity is clearly evident in nationalist constructions that usually refer to a great and glorious ancient past of the nation. This serves several purposes: First of all, the legitimization of the national identity since historicity implies continuity and therefore reassures the collective self. Second, the historical past serves as a source of pride and belief in the nation's exceptional strength and capabilities. The achievements of the past are proudly remembered with the feeling that also the present and future will bring similar victories for the nation. The territorial dimension points to the phenomenon that through national identity people see their homeland as including more than only the territory in which they have their life center. Rather, they even view territory, in which they never set foot in, as belonging to their nation and their identity, what Smith conceptualizes as spatial communities that trace their roots to specific ancestral landscapes. This explains also why people are more affected by events taking place in their homeland, like for example, catastrophes, and are rather untouched when it happens on foreign territory. Eventually the political dimension of national identity can be detected on the one hand in the efforts of the nation-state to foster one cohesive and loyal citizenry through several strategies, like the creation of a national image and symbols, advancement of citizenship, a clear distinction between the ones who are included through citizenship and the "other" excluded ones and the construction of common enemies. On the other hand, the political dimension can be also seen in national identities without states, materializing in their efforts to gain more political rights, or even independence and an own nation-state. (Guibernau 2003: 134-141)

Another scholar, whose contributions directly relate to the topic of this thesis, is Rogers Brubaker. Especially his analysis of nationalism and religion is fruitful for the parts of the thesis, in which the relation between Syrian nationalism and Islam is studied. In "Religion and Nationalism – Four Approaches", Brubaker delineates the different ways

of researching the phenomenon of religion and nationalism. The fourth approach treats religious nationalism as a distinctive kind of nationalism, claiming that the joining of state, territory and culture can also be done through religion (Brubaker 2012: 16-19). Also, Friedland sees in religion a constitutive force to the nation, and therefore a potential form of nationalism, as it provides “models of authority” and “imaginings of an ordering power” (Friedland 2002: 390). As religion has the potential of being a totalizing order that regulates every aspect of life, it can similarly to modern nationalisms, create social constructions of belonging to an imagined community that is defined not through ethnicity or culture primarily, but through religion (Friedland 2002: 390-391). Brubaker concludes eventually in contrast to Friedland that treating religious nationalism as distinct nationalism would overstretch the term, based on the argument that religions though working through the nation state at times (e. g. in the case of Hamas), they are not “nation” oriented. Referring to political Islamist movements Brubaker claims:

“There is no compelling reason to speak of ‘nationalism’ unless the imagined community of the nation is widely understood as a primary focus of value, source of legitimacy, object of loyalty, and basis of identity. But the nation is not understood in this way by most Islamist movements” (Brubaker 2012: 17).

What is lost in the analysis of Brubaker and Friedland is that there might be also another form of religious nationalism, which mixes with the ethnicity and culture oriented nationalism, reflecting the reality of the modern nation-state structure of the time. The analysis of nationalism in Syria will show that clearly we can speak of a form of Islamic nationalism, as we see exactly the characteristics given which are for Brubaker necessary to be able to speak of nationalism - the construction of the nation as primary focus of value and basis of identity - however on an Islamic basis that pragmatically realizes the actuality of the modern nation state and leans and operates through it.

Another concept of Brubaker, which is especially valuable in the discussion of Kurdish-Syrian nationalism, is the one of homeland nationalism in opposition to the nationalizing nationalism. While nationalizing nationalism makes the claim of an ethnically/culturally defined core nation that is distinguished from the general citizenry and which has the right to be affirmed and defining the nation state as whole, homeland

nationalism asserts the obligation and responsibility of states to protect the rights of their ethnonational kin in other states, which mostly constitute ethnic minorities, in other words protect their “homeland”, which transcends the legal boundaries of the modern nation state (Brubaker 1996: 4-5).

Caught between these two forms of antagonistic nationalisms that stand in direct opposition to each other, are the national minorities. For them the homeland is not identified with the nation state they live in - a tension which creates an own form of nationalist construction. “National minority” for Brubaker implies a political stance, as these minorities’ self-understanding is not only ethnic but clearly national, thereby including political demands for state recognition of their distinct ethno-cultural nationality and the granting of certain collective political and cultural rights (Brubaker 1996: 6-7).

It can be argued that the definitions above do not exclude each other, rather they can be seen as complementary. Also, the definition of nationalism in this thesis has at its basis the notion introduced by Gellner and affirmed by the other thinkers of the modernist school of nationalism - that nationalism creates the nation and not the other way around. Therefore, in this thesis the analyses on Syria departs from the main assumption that the Syrian nationalism is a social construct and not a natural phenomenon, as claimed by primordialism. As Breuilly (Breuilly 2001: 49-51) argued, nationalism is also a political movement, an insight that is very valuable when analyzing constructions of Syrian nationalism. Especially his categories of nationalism -reform nationalism, unification nationalism and separatist nationalism- should be taken into consideration, as all these three forms played and also play a part in nationalist constructions of Syria. Eventually, Anderson’s “imagined community” approach helps us to understand how nationalism in Syria is able to evoke such radical emotions and actions in people and creates an “inside” and “outside” depending on the respective nationalist construction with literally lethal consequences for all the involved parties.

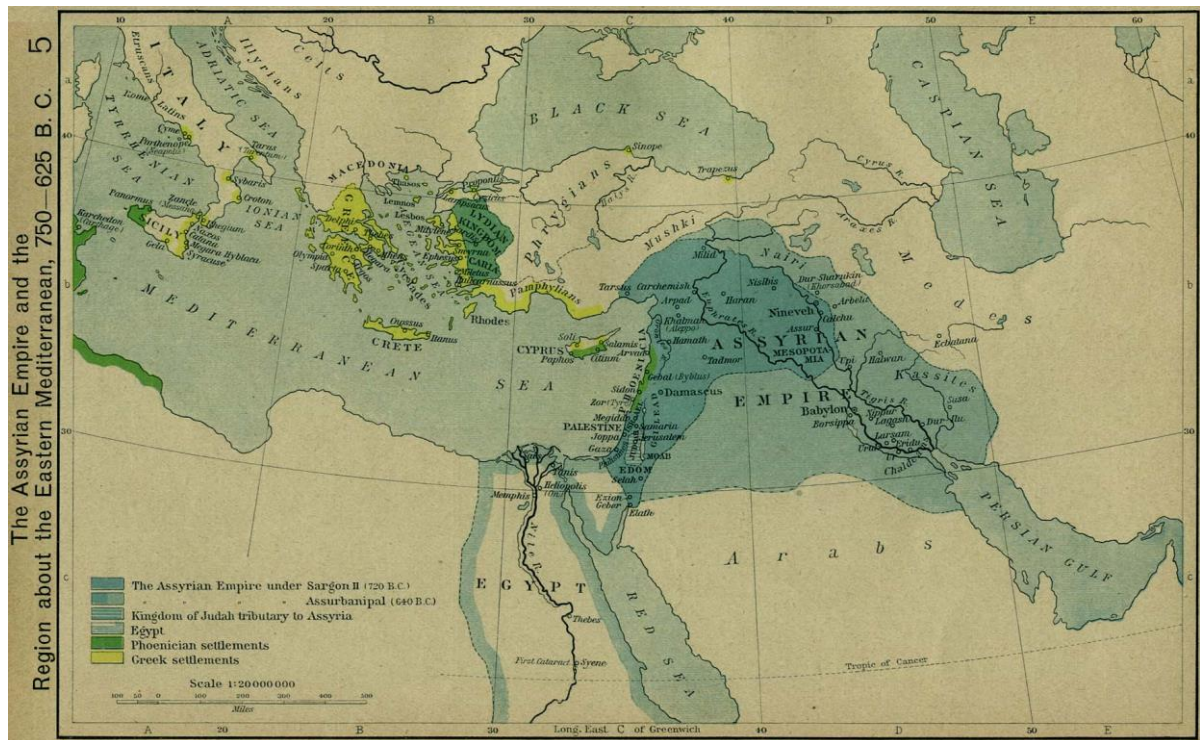
Taking all the above-mentioned theories into consideration, the following definition of nationalism is developed for the purposes of this thesis:

Nationalism is the social construction of the nation and finds mainly expression in political movements, that can be reformist, separatist, unifying or nation-state affirming,

creating an imagined community, that evokes the feeling of loyalty, which can form the basis for emotions and actions that value the own community while disdaining the others.

2.2. ETYMOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY OF SYRIA

Syrian nationalism, like all nationalist constructions, tries to legitimize itself by referring to a great and ancient history with a distinct narrative and identity. Therefore, it is important to understand the historic and geographic reference points, the framework of history and etymology of Syria, which nationalist thinkers use to conceptualize their “authentic” Syrian nationalism. Of course, it has to be noted that there is nothing like Syria as such, a self-evident territory that can be clearly distinguished from neighbouring nations. Rather, as this excursion into the historical meaning of Syria will show, it was always contested and constructed in many different ways. The name Syria was created by the Greeks, as a shortened form of Assyria, as we can see in Herodotus’ historical writings: “They are called by the Greeks Syrians, but the foreigners called them Assyrians” (Herodotus 2013: 376). Hence, Herodotus and other Greek writers used the term Syria synonymously with Assyria, which means that it stretched from nowadays the middle of Turkey to Egypt, even including Iraq, as the following map shows:



(Shephard 1926: 5)

However, the term Syria was also used by the Persians to refer to Aram, which later became Ebernari (meaning beyond the river Euphrates) under the Persian rule and was much smaller in size than Assyria, stretching from Lebanon to the Euphrates without including Egypt. The name Syria was referring to different geopolitical entities and had various meanings for various civilizations, like the Greek and the Persians. With the Roman conquest of Pompey 64 BC, the Province of Syria was founded, which lasted until 194 AD and stretched from Egypt to the Euphrates. But still, it was more united on the paper than reality, as it was not under one uniform and regular administration (Shehadeh 1994: 289- 295). With the beginning of the Byzantine era, the name Syria was limited to the Northern part of the province with Antioch as the metropolis, while the region around Damascus was named Phoenicia.

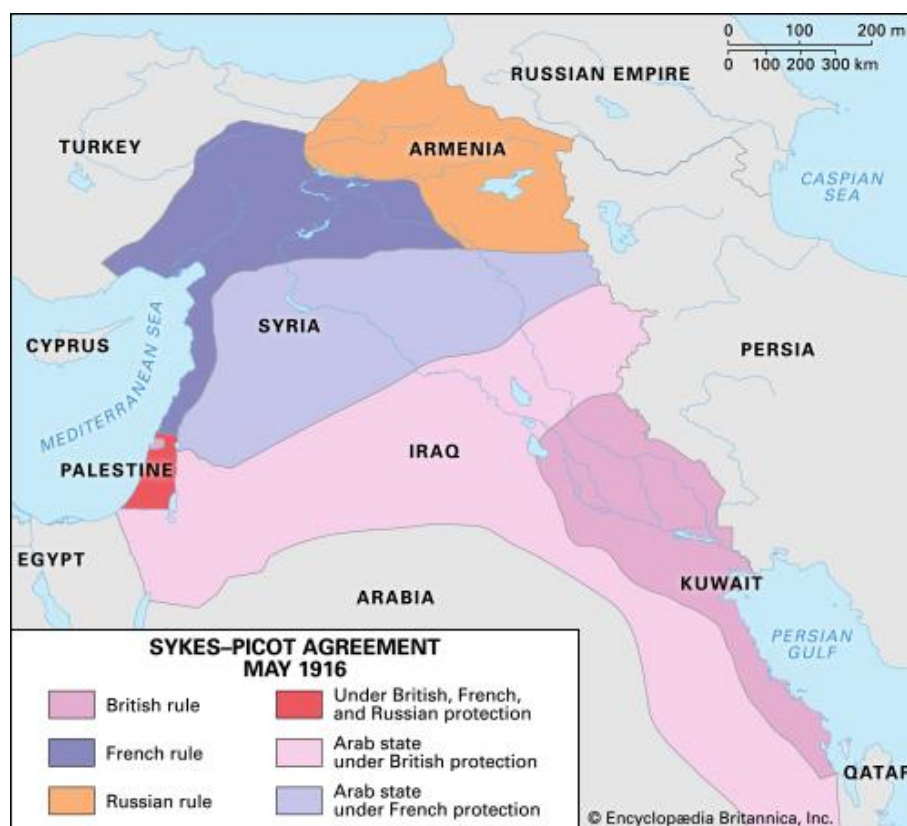
The Islamic conquest of lands that were in Byzantine power brought the next change into the etymological and territorial history of Syria. The name Syria was not used anymore and got replaced by “Bilad al-Sham”, which means “the lands to the north” or literally “lands on the left-hand” (Bosworth 1997: 261). Like the Persians, who called Syria Ebernari (beyond the river Euphrates), the Arabs named Syria based on their own geographical perspective. Bilad Al-Sham included vast land, from the Taurus Mountains

in today's Southern Turkey, to the Sinai Desert in the South. Throughout Islamic history and the different dynasties that ruled Bilad Al-Sham, from the Umayyads, the Fatimids and the Mamluks to later on the Ottomans, the geographical image of Bilad Al-Sham remained constant, although different empires divided Bilad Al-Sham into various provinces through the centuries, following pragmatic and organizational reasons. During the Ottoman rule in 1831, Bilad Al-Sham was parted into the wilayahs (provinces) of Aleppo, Adana and Tarsus, Damascus, Sidon and Palestine, Tripoli, Jerusalem and Nablus. However, these divisions were submitted to political changes and were never set in stone. The name Syria was revived again in 1864, as a consequence of administrative reform efforts within the Ottoman Empire. Bilad Al-Sham was now divided into Wilayat Suriya, which included the South and Middle of Bilad-Al-Sham (Damascus, Tripoli, etc.) and Wilayat Aleppo that included the North. In 1888 this division was abolished, and all the former wilayahs were united in Wilayat Suriya that covered from this moment on all of the former Bilad Al-Sham (Shehadeh 1994: 300-305). But how is it possible that the name Syria was reintroduced after having been vanished in the Muslim world for centuries? According to Shehadeh, it was the influence of Western culture through politics and trade, but also missionaries, that moved Syrian intellectuals to use the term Syria instead of Bilad Al-Sham in their writings and thereby promoting and spreading it so that it even reached the Ottoman administration. But as it is observed in the discussion of Syrian nationalism in this thesis, beside the Western influence, it was also the development of the first Syrian nationalist constructions in the middle of the 19th century that account for the name change. The first Syrian nationalists deliberately replaced Bilad Al-Sham with the term Syria to promote national identity and consciousness, as the former name was too heavily connoted with the past under the rule of various empires, which perceived these territories just as another piece of "lands" – literally the meaning of "Bilad".

After the end of the First World War in 1918, which brought about the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, King Faisal I bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi marched ahead of the Arab army into Damascus and planned to announce an independent and unified Syrian nation, including Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon. In his endeavours, he was also supported by Syrian nationalist political parties, like Al Fatat. Eventually, the Arab

kingdom of Syria was proclaimed on March 8, 1920, but lasted only for four months (Tauber 1995).

The plans of a unified and independent Syria failed because of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 between Great Britain and France, in which both states agreed on partitioning “Wilayat Suriya”. According to this agreement, the southern area, which included Palestine and Transjordan was for Great Britain, and the northern area that was composed of Lebanon and roughly nowadays Syria, later renamed into “The states of the Levant” for France.



(www.britannica.com, 05.07.2017)

On the basis of Sykes-Picot, France did not recognize the Arab state proclaimed by King Faisal and defeated the Arab troops in the short Franco-Syrian war and entered Damascus on July 24, 1920, which meant the end of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (Tauber 1995). One of the strategies of France as a colonial power was to divide the country, in order to oppress nationalist sentiments. Therefore, they parted the country according to sectarian lines (Cleveland 2012: 234). This strategy of “Divide et impera” led to the establishment of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the predecessor of today’s

modern Lebanon with around the same geographic borders, followed in 1922 by the foundation of the state of the Alawis around the city of Latakia and also the state of Jebel Druze in the south of today's Syria. In June 1922 the Syrian federation was created, including the states of Damascus, Aleppo and the Alawite state (Shehadeh 1994: 307-309). Eventually, following the independence of Syria in 1946, Syria was territorially defined like we know it today.



(www.lib.utexas.edu, 04.07.2017)

The history of the etymology and geographic definition of Syria shows that it was very volatile, changing according to the political contexts of the empires that were ruling parts of what is known today as Syria. Before the French mandate, Syria was including much more territory for Arabs than it is today, a legacy of the “Bilad Al-Sham” concept and the Ottoman “Wilayat Suriya” that were also stretching over today's Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. For the discussion of the Syrian nationalisms it is important to keep this consciousness of a greater Syria that resembles the ancient Bilad Al-Sham in mind, for example to understand that the main Syrian nationalist thinkers of the

beginning in the middle of the 19th century came from Lebanon. The history of Bilad Al-Sham also explains that the first Syrian nationalists were not differentiating between the Arab and Syrian nationalism, but seeing it rather as synonymous, as Bilad Al-Sham was covering a very big part of the Arab world. Only later, with the increasing French influence, an exclusivist Syrian nationalism developed which reinterpreted the legacy of Bilad Al-Sham as one of foreign rule and suppression, claiming its main heritage and foundation at the pre-Islamic period.



3. PARADIGMS OF NATIONALISM IN SYRIA

The analysis of nationalisms in Syria from a historical perspective shows that there are certain branches of thought that can be seen throughout the decades. This chapter traces the roots of the idea of a Syrian nation and examines how it developed and which purpose it served for the first Syrian nationalists. As a result of this comprehensive look on the development of nationalist ideas in Syria, four paradigms of nationalism in Syria are identified, Syrian-Arab nationalism, Exclusivist Syrian nationalism, Islamic-Arab Syrian nationalism, and finally Baath nationalism.

3.1. SYRIAN-ARAB NATIONALISM

For understanding the beginning of Syrian nationalist thought, we should first examine the historical context in which it developed. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire the population of Bilad Al-Sham, later “Wilayat Suriya”, was organized on basis of the religious confessions. This means that the religious communities had their own internal organizations and were forming separate social and political entities, reflected in the *Millet* system (Millet meaning literally ‘nation’ in Arabic, but in this case used to describe religious minorities). The Millet System guaranteed the freedom of religious minorities in applying their laws and rules to a certain aspect within their communities – for example, Jews could be punished by Rabbis for offending the Jewish law etc., of course, all under the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire (Lewis 2010: 44). Because of this, the society in the former Ottoman Syria was a culturally and religiously very fragmented one - also geographically as the non-Muslim minorities were living mostly in mountain valleys. Therefore, there did not exist anything like a national Ottoman or Syrian consciousness or any form of citizenship. But like in Europe, the new social realities, especially modernization and industrialization, forced on the Ottoman Empire a new way of thinking and linking to its subjects. Thus the *Tanzimat* reforms were introduced from 1839 onwards, most importantly the *Islâhat Hatt-ı Hümayûnu* (Imperial Reform Edict) of 1856, which granted equal civil rights, for example in the fields of education and the administration of justice, for all the citizens of the Empire regardless of their religious identity. The goal of these reforms was to integrate all the population of the

Ottoman Empire into a new national central structure and to create an Ottoman national consciousness, replacing the former communal structure (Hurewitz 1956: 149-153).

Butrus Al-Bustani (1819-1883), a Maronite Christian intellectual living in Beirut, realized that the new reformist policies of the Ottoman Empire offered a way for bringing the Syrian society out of its fragmentariness and improving the position of its minorities. In *Al-Jinan* (The Gardens), one of the first Arabic periodicals published by Al-Bustani to promote the Syrian-Arab nationalist project, he wrote that through the Hatt-ı Hümayûnu the policies of the past that were based on religious community and solidarity were being replaced by patriotic solidarity that included the equality of all citizens and their unity under one national identity (Bustani 1870: 386). In the new evolving Ottomanism he also saw a chance to promote a Syrian-Arab consciousness on the provincial level. It might sound contradictory how the first Syrian nationalist, as Al-Bustani was called by several scholars, could be such a fervent supporter of Ottoman policies, but to understand his stance it should be taken into account the political realities of the mid-19th century in which he lived. It was a time in which the European influence was getting stronger day by day, as Al-Bustani himself experienced since he was a teacher in a school that was founded by Protestant missionaries. He even converted to Protestantism, but later on developed a critical position towards the missions and the growing European influence. Bustani expressed his anger towards the growing European influence in *Al-Jinan*, arguing that the main purpose of the missionary schools is to influence the minds religiously and teach them European languages in order to uproot them from their own origins (Bustani 1876: 594). Therefore, Al-Bustani believed that Syrians would be able to counter the European influence, develop their own institutions and promote their independent Syrian-Arabic identity only within the protection of a strong Ottoman Empire: “If the Armenians, the Greeks, the Syriacs, etc., were to become separated from the Ottoman Empire, they would be states without a center and they would be unable to achieve any political gain or to stand firm in the face of danger” (Bustani 1874: 110). In his point of view, the Ottoman nation should develop into a kind of federation – he compared it with the USA – consisting of many states that enjoyed specific autonomies. Furthermore, various officials of the Ottoman Empire were approaching Al-Bustani’s activities very favourably and supported his periodicals and publications financially, since they also did not see a contradiction in the adherence

to an Ottoman national identity and an Arabic-Syrian one at the same time (Abu Manneh 1980: 293-297). Taking Breuilly's categorization of nationalisms, it can be concluded that the first Syrian nationalism was not at all a separatist one, rather unifying and reformist in nature, as the main goals were the creation of a Syrian-Arab national identity that united all the different religious communities and also led to modernization and the general development of Syria.

What was now Al-Bustani's main nationalist idea? One of the main concepts in his nationalist writings is the replacement of the dominating religious solidarity (*Usba diniya*) by patriotic solidarity (*Usba Wataniya*). Believing in the project of modernity - including equality, liberty and progress - he saw sectarian affiliations and communal identities as the main obstacle for its realization. Although himself a man of religion, he firmly believed in the secular principle of a strict division between religious and political matters. He did not fear to express his thoughts very strongly in *Al-Jinan*, saying that religious solidarity brought disaster and weakness to the society, as there were dozens of sects who all followed only their own interests and clashed with each other on the basis of this "wrong" solidarity that only enhanced the fragmentariness of society. Communalism should be abandoned in favour of patriotic and - very important in Al-Bustani's thought - Arab solidarity (*Usba Arabiyya*). Only this exchange of solidarities would bring progress and modernization to Syria (Al-Bustani 1870: 674-675). But how can the transition from religious to patriotic solidarity work out? The main means in the creation of this patriotic solidarity is seen by Al-Bustani in Arab identity, culture and language: "We should overlook our past racial origin and accept one national identity which was the last to prevail in our country and whose language and customs we have adopted - that is the Arab nationality (*Jinsiya*) to which originally many of us belonged" (Al-Bustani 1870: 673). This statement shows clearly that Bustani is aware of the fact that Syria is home to a lot of ethnicities and religious confessions that are not all Arab, but that they should "overlook" their past origins, as the Arabic identity is the prevailing one and the one many of the Syrians belong to. Furthermore, regardless of the ethnic and religious background all the people in Syria shared the Arabic language - and a common language constituted for Al-Bustani the main condition for the existence of a nation. As with Bustani's adherence to Ottomanism, his talk about the Syrian nation on the one hand and the Arabic on the other can be confusing. Was Al-Bustani now a Syrian

or an Arab nationalist? The answer is that within the historical context in which Al-Bustani lived, a strict separation between the two was impossible to make since Syria covered a very big part of the Arab world. Therefore, he used terms like Syria, Arabistan, Bilad Al-Sham interchangeably as synonymous. So the nationalism of Al-Bustani can be best termed Syrian-Arab nationalism. As he saw the Arabic identity, culture and language as foundational for a united Syrian nation, he dedicated his life to the task of reviving the Arabic language and culture. After he left his job as a teacher at the Protestant missionary school he organized in 1859 a lecture for the revival of the Arabic culture and language. According to Al-Bustani, it was not only necessary to republish Arabic works but also to reform Arabic, so it does not become a dead language like Latin and Ancient Greek (Al-Bustani 1859: 20-22). Only a few months after his lecture, he founded together with intellectuals and businessmen from Beirut from various religious backgrounds, a cultural association for the publishing of books in order to make Arabic literature available to the masses. Beirut developed into a centre of cultural revival, with more and more printing presses being established and newspapers, journals and books published. Besides spreading the Arabic literature, it was Bustani's aim to modernize the Arabic language, and he worked for ten years on an Arabic dictionary named *Qutr Al-Muhit* (The Universal Land) to realize this aim. The goal was to create modern Arabic prose, which was able to express also the most complex concepts of modern thought. Furthermore, he opened "the National school" (*Al-Madrasah Al-Wataniyyah*), which accepted pupils from all ethnic and religious background and allowed them to practice the religion they wanted, not like the missionary schools in which it was obligatory to attend lessons in Christianity and go to church. Also, the National school differed from the missionary ones in putting a focus on Arabic language, history and culture (Abu Manneh 1980: 291-294).

All these ideas and activities of Al-Bustani make him without doubt one of the central figures of early Syrian nationalism. As such, Al-Bustani and his activities can be seen as representative for the zeitgeist, as intellectuals, politicians and merchants in the Syria, especially the bourgeoisie in Beirut, were following the same nationalist path. There are two reasons for that. First, they saw in Syrian nationalism a way out of the sectarian divisions, which explains why most of the Syrian nationalists of the first hours were belonging to the Christian minorities. Second, they recognized in Nationalism the

ideology and philosophy of the modern time, which would enable their society to develop economically. Zachs makes this point in her book titled *The Making of a Syrian identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (2005). Her main argument is that Syrian identity developed on the basis of the endeavours of merchants and intellectuals in Beirut, who recognized the need for the integration of Beirut with all the other Syrian territories mainly out of economic reasons, so they could expand their activities in an easier way and reach out to greater populations (Zachs 2005). These observations of Zachs are also in line with the theories of Gellner and Anderson, who emphasize the factors of industrialization and printing capitalism for the development of nationalist ideas.

Another central figure in the promotion of Syrian-Arab nationalism was Khalil Al-Khouri, a Greek Orthodox intellectual, who like Al Bustani and most of the first nationalists lived in Beirut. After the new freedoms that came with the Islâhat Hatt-ı Hümâyûnu edict in 1856, he established the first Arabic newspaper in Beirut called Hadiqat Al-Akhbar (The Garden of News), which was financed by a rich Christian businessman. Before the newspaper appeared there was a gathering of members of the Syrian bourgeoisie at the house of the financier to discuss the journal's nature and what messages it should convey (Zachs 2011: 90-93). Beside the efforts in the publishing of Arabic books that were enforced together by merchants and intellectuals, this provides a good example for the dense web that existed between merchants and intellectuals in their endeavours in propagating Syrian nationalism, and another proof for the nationalist zeitgeist that existed in Ottoman Syria at the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. More than being the creation of one person, the first newspaper Hadiqat Al-Akhbar can be understood as the voice of a whole political nationalist movement. Without a doubt, it was very influential, as it spread fast over all the provinces of the Ottoman Empire and was even issued in Paris and London (Zachs 2011: 90-95).

In addition to publishing news -economic, political, local and global- and containing book reviews, articles on technology and science, this newspaper was also a medium for the dissemination of Syrian nationalist ideas. As in Al-Bustani's writings, the Arab culture and language built a crucial element in the construction of Syrian nationalism by Al-Khuri. He saw it also as the main binding element between the different ethnic and religious groups in Syria and propagated its modernization and the rediscovery of the

Arab heritage, like the great Arab literature and poetry of the past. One of the important concepts introduced by Khuri in this context is the one of the Al-Ummah Al-Arabiyyah, the Arab nation/community. Usually, the word Ummah is used in the Islamic context to describe the “Islamic Nation/community”. By replacing the religious characterization of the nation with the linguistic one, Khuri deconstructs the common way of seeing society through religious lenses and introduces with the Arabic language the new main factor for the construction of the nation. We also can find in Hadiqat Al-Akhbar a clear territorial definition of what lands Syria actually consists of: “Syria lies between the River Euphrates in the East and the Mediterranean Sea to the West, between the Arabian Peninsula to the south and Anatolia to the North.” To further promote the Syria idea and create the imagined Syrian community, the name Syria was used in all kind of contexts and combinations, like Al-Jumhur Al-Suri (the Syrian public) or Al-Fakhr Al-Suri (The Syrian proudness). And when writing about Syria, Khuri does so in the most patriotic way, praising its best water and air and most beautiful nature and highest culture (Zachs 2011: 98-103).

Beside his newspaper, Khuri also contributed to the first ideas of Syrian nationalism by writing the first historiography of Syria, called Kharabat Suriyyah (Ruins of Syria), in which he replaces the common way of seeing Syria as Bilad Al-Sham – Arab territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire – by a new nationalist perspective that realizes Syria as an independent entity. In Zach's (2011: 101) words, “the region locally and traditionally known as Bilad al-Sham, with its Muslim connotations, became Syria, a Western term pre-dating Islam”. In his historical narration, Khuri put the focus entirely on the pre-Islamic era, so the Greek, Roman and Phoenician past, and the cultural achievements of these civilizations. The title “Ruins of Syria” refers to this glorious past, which was lying now down in ruins – a contrast Khuri wanted to emphasize to motivate his readers to build up this glory again. By defining all the cultural developments and achievements of the various civilizations that inhabited Syria as genuinely Syrian, not for example as Greek or Roman, he constructs a “Syrian” history. Like in all the nationalisms, the development of a historical narrative of the nation is crucial for proving its authenticity and legitimacy. Furthermore, in drawing an ancient and glorious past, Khouri conveys the message that this past has to be rebuilt in the form of the nation (Zachs 2011: 99-102). But why Khuri did not mention the Islamic era in his

historiography? Like with the replacement of the Ummah Islamiyyah with the Ummah Arabiyyah, Khuri's aim was to create a historical consciousness that had the power to unite all the people of Syria, whatever religious or ethnic identity they had. Himself a Christian, like also most of his nationalist compatriots, he had to construct a history that was not dominated by Islam in order to be able to identify with it, and in going back more than 1300 years to the pre-Islamic past he found the best way in doing so.

We can conclude about the first phase of Syrian-Arab nationalism that it was mainly unifying and reformatory, putting a focus on the Arab culture as the binding element between the different religious and ethnic communities, to create a common national consciousness. Since the Arabic culture was seen as the main tool of the nationalist project, the 19th century and also the beginning of the 20th century saw a strong increase in journals and books written in Arabic language, trying to promote the Arabic culture and consciousness. Al-Bustani and Al-Khuri were two of the most important nationalist thinkers, but there were many others and after them a new generation developed and continued working for the "Arab renaissance", all sharing the ideas that were discussed above, like for example in the field of literature Francis Marrash and Khalil Gibran, who will be also discussed in the next chapter. The generation after Bustani and Khuri tried to reach out especially to the masses, for example 1861 born Greek orthodox Jurji Zaydan published first historical novels at the end of the 19th century in which -as already denoted by Al-Khuri in *Kharabat Suriyyah*- the Islamic period is reinterpreted as only one part of the overall glorious Syrian-Arab history that started much earlier and produced great cultural achievements before Islam already (Philipp 2011: 83-88). However, till the break out of the First World War, the Syrian-Arab nationalism was missing one element that usually constituted a crucial part of all the nationalisms – the claim of independence and autonomy. Therefore in the first evolvement of Syrian nationalism, we can see very clearly the first stage described by Hobsbawm in the evolution of nationalism, which he conceptualized as "proto-nationalism". In this first phase, the emphasis is put on the common heritage, culture and values, constructing by that a rudimentary feeling of belonging to one national identity, still without referring to the political meanings and implications of this national identity (Hobsbawm 1990: 47-79). With Guibernau's theorization of national identity, it can be observed that four out of five dimensions of national identity are applied at this stage: the psychological,

cultural, historical and territorial one, while the political dimension is still not part of the construction of the national identity (Guibernau 2003: 134-141).

In addition to theoretical explanations for this relative apoliticism of the first Arab-Syrian nationalism, also the historical context provides us with answers to the question why the first nationalists were not too convinced of the main principle of nationalism, which holds that the national and political unit should be congruent. First, the growing influence of Europe and era of colonization meant also that without the protection of the Ottoman Empire, chances were high to fall a prey to European colonialism, and the first nationalists were very well aware of that, as also the discussion of Al-Bustani and his favourable stance towards the Ottoman Empire showed. Second, the Ottoman Empire existed already for more than 400 years and was deeply engraved into the common consciousness, so it must have been difficult also to think outside of this frame (Philipp 2011: 88). Furthermore, all of these first nationalists were deeply rooted in the Ottoman system, filling official positions within the Ottoman bureaucracy, like for example Al-Khouri, who even worked as a censor.

However, with the beginning of the First World War and its catastrophic results for the people in Ottoman Syria the mood in the public changed, and also intellectuals started questioning if Ottomanism was the right frame for Syrian nationalism. Especially the famine that hit today's Lebanon, which was caused in part by the Ottoman war policies prioritizing food supply of soldiers, led to a big disapproval of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally, there were several other political and economic reasons that led the Arabs doubt their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire (Kayali 1997), which are beyond the scope of this thesis (for more background information, see Kayali 1997). As a consequence, more and more inhabitants of Ottoman Syria started to ally with the European powers, like France and Great Britain. These politically turbulent times, seeing the formation of Arab battalions under the guidance of Great Britain (most important of all, the Arab army of Sherif Hussein), resulted eventually in the army of King Faisal, who was the son of Sherif Hussein, marching towards Damascus on October 3, 1918, where he was welcomed by the majority as the liberator. As it was already explained in the previous chapter, King Faisal failed in realizing his plans of an independent Arab state in Syria due to the French colonial ambitions there.

What did all these historical changes mean for constructions of Syrian nationalism and how did the historical circumstances reflect in the writings of the various Syrian nationalist thinkers? One of the best examples for studying the shift of Syrian-Arab nationalism from the framework of political Ottomanism to political Arabism in this period are the ideas of the Syrian-Arab nationalist thinker Sati Al-Husri. Born into a known Aleppo family, he spent his childhood and youth mostly in Istanbul. This is why he learned also Turkish and French. After receiving his education in Istanbul and at the Royal Academy he filled several high-ranking positions within the Ottoman Empire. He was director of the Teacher's Institute in Istanbul from 1909 on, and worked for the reform of the pedagogical system and also travelled to Europe in order to do research on modern educational methods. From 1914 to 1919, he was the director of education for the province of Syria, and after the Ottoman Empire crumbled and Faisal's rule began, he became education minister in Syria. Although being strongly rooted through all these positions within the Ottoman bureaucracy, Sati Al-Husri became one of the ideological fathers of the new developing Arab nationalism. Like already his predecessors he puts a focus on the shared language and history, arguing that the Arab language had to be reformed so all the people of the Arab lands would be able to communicate with each other and develop the feeling of belonging to one community. However, what made him different from the thinkers before him was that the idea of Syria did not take a prominent role in his thinking and was totally subdued to the idea of Arab nationalism (Charif 2000: 204-210). For example, when writing about identity Al-Husri only mentions the Arab identity, without using the term Syrian: "Every Arab-speaking people is an Arab people. Every individual belonging to one of these Arabic-speaking peoples is an Arab. And if he does not recognize this, and if he is not proud of his Arabism, then we must look for the reasons that have made him take this stand" (translation by Dawisha 2003: 72). Hence, the Arabic culture and language are, for Al-Husri, not only a binding element between the different communities of the Arab lands but more crucial since it defines the identity of all the inhabitants who speak the language, whatever their ethnicity and religion might be. What did it lead to this new approach? It can be argued that again it is the historical context that promoted this shift from Syrian-Arab to pure Arab nationalism. As it was the Arab army of King Faisal that liberated Syria, and the new king of Syria came himself not from Syria, but from the Hijaz region, it was nearby to change the focus from Syrian to Arab nationalism (Allawi 2014: 76-77). But this is only

one part of the story of the evolution of Syrian nationalism. As the 20th century saw the strengthening of Arab identity at the expense of the Syrian one, there developed also ideas that went into the opposite direction, emphasizing Syrian nationalism and arguing against the dissolution of the idea of Syria in a broader Arab framework.

3.2. EXCLUSIVIST SYRIAN NATIONALISM

One of the main proponents and ideologues of an exclusivist non-Arab Syrian nationalism is Henri Lammens, who was born in Belgium and came to Beirut in 1877 at the age of 15 in order to receive a Jesuit education and become a Jesuit priest and missionary. As professor of Syrian history at the Oriental Faculty of the Jesuit University Saint Joseph he influenced a whole generation of pupils. It has to be noted that Lammens was and is considered critically by scholars, for example by German orientalist Carl Heinrich Becker for his strong Christian-French bias, that shows in most of his studies, for example in *Fātima et les filles de Mahomet* in which he draws a very negative picture of the Prophet (Becker 1913: 263-269).

In 1904 he published the book titled *Syria and its Geographic Importance (La Syrie et son importance géographique)*, which can be seen as the foundation of his nationalist thought. In it he defines Syria as geographic independent entity with its own political and social history. For him Syria's boundaries are natural, with the Mediterranean coast to the West, the Taurus Mountains in the North, the Euphrates and the Arab desert to the East and South. Hence, for Lammens it is the geography that defines first the Syrian nation, with the sea, the mountains, the river and the desert functioning as natural borders (Kaufman 2011: 107-110, quoting Lammens 1904: 418-460). Also for Lammens, the history of Syria is shaped by its geography, as he argues that its strategic location between the West and East made it a desired territory for all the big empires through the centuries, which turned it into a battlefield for the regional powers and weakened it politically. Furthermore, it could not unify politically because it was fragmented geographically from the inside, especially into Southern and Northern Syria that were

divided into mountain ranges. This meant also that inside Syria a lot of different ethnic and religious groups developed that differed from each other. However, according to Lammens, there was also a positive side to Syria's geography, as its position between East and West enabled the evolution of a distinct Syrian identity and culture that took from both West and East, occidental and oriental influences without belonging to neither of them (Kaufman 2011: 110-112; quoting Lammens 1904: 418-460).

On basis of this historiography, he argued that Syria was an old nation going back thousands of years that had nothing to do with the Arabs, rather it was invaded by them, but still kept its independent identity. Opposed to the previously discussed Syrian-Arab nationalism he continues to argue that although language is important for the constitution of a nation, as it enables people to communicate with each other, it is neither an essential condition nor a crucial element of the nation. What matters according to Lammens is geographic unity and tradition. In proving this point he draws back on French nationalism, which is based on cultural homogeneity and belonging, rather than biological racial or linguistic factors, as also in the Alsace region they speak German, but see themselves as genuinely French because of their shared history and collective memories (Kaufman 2011: 114-117, quoting Lammens 418-460).

Lammens was not alone in his attitude against Arab nationalism. Especially in the political field there were a lot of thinkers who were not satisfied with Damascus getting the center of Arab nationalism after King Faisal overtook Syria. For example, Mikhail Nuaymah, known as one of the most important Arab authors of the beginning of the 20th century, preferred a French protectorate over Syria than a Syria under Arab rule (later he moved to call for its total independence). In *Al-Saih*, one of the Arab journals that were published by the growing Syrian community in the USA, he wrote in an article: "Those who cheer for the Arabs and dream of restoring the glory of the Arabs in the Peninsula and Syria should leave the Arabs alone to restore their past glory in their own country. As for Syria, it should be left alone to restore its own glory" (Daye 2011: 194; quoting Nuaymah 1919). So in these words, we can detect very clearly a sharp differentiation between "the Arabs" and "the Syrians", every national group with its own nation and own glory. Against the argument prevalent among Arab nationalists, saying that everyone who spoke Arabic must be an Arab, he objects similarly to Lammens, by bringing forward examples for nations who share the language, but are nonetheless

regarded as totally different from each other, like the USA and Great Britain, or France and Belgium. He says: “But have you ever heard a Belgian say that he is French? Belgium is on the borders of France and its people speak French and share many similarities with the French, whereas Syria is a long way from Al-Hijaz, and Iraq, and there are thousands of differences between their peoples” (Daye 2011: 195; quoting Nuaymah 1920).

Gibran Khalil Gibran, who lived in the same milieu as Nuaymah – also being an author, whose Christian family came from nowadays Lebanon and immigrated to New York – differentiated always clearly Syrians from the Arabs in his writings. For example, in a speech in 1909 he criticized the Ottoman Empire for subjugating the Arabs and the Arabic-speaking people – a differentiation that implies that not everybody who speaks Arabic, like the Syrians for example, can be regarded automatically as Arab (Beshara 2011: 145). We can also find in his writings a patriotic sentiment for Syria in a hitherto unreached intensity. Syrian nationalism is, for him, a powerful spirit that leads the nation on a common path regardless of the egoist tendencies of its single members. Furthermore, it is a feeling of love for the land in which one was born, for the people of the country and for the common customs and traditions. For Gibran, it is even such a strong sentiment and genuine feeling that people sacrifice their wealth and life for it (Beshara 2011: 150; quoting Gibran 1919) But for these strong patriotic feelings to evolve it was first necessary to incite the nationalist spirit in Syrians, and the way to do that for Gibran was through reminding the people of their glorious past and history that they all shared and which they could build up together again (Beshara 2011: 151-153).

The first who gave these feelings of a genuine non-Arab Syrian nationalism also a clear ideological framework and developed in books like *The Genesis of Nations* also an elaborated theory of Syrian nationalism was Antun Saadeh, the founder of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party which is also active today. For him the historically centuries-long foreign rule over the Syrian lands has resulted in the people of Syria losing their national consciousness. Especially the Arab conquest of Syria – already the terminology of “conquest” shows that Saadeh emphasized the difference between the Syrians and the Arabs – has led according to Saadeh to a big state of confusion, in which the Syrians were cut off from their original heritage. Also the rule under the Ottoman Empire has brought social and political misery to Syria, as during that time provincial identities, like

religion and ethnicity, were strengthened while the common Syrian identity more and more weakened, even almost irreversibly destroyed. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Syrian national consciousness was in such a bad condition that at its place Arab nationalism gained popularity – according to Saadeh another blow to the Syrian nation as Arab nationalism was based on a wrong consciousness that was influenced by religion and the unjust feudal system of the time. Furthermore, it had no social-political perspective and reflected only the needs of traditional landowning feudalists. Additionally, he criticized that Arab nationalists were willing to work with the colonialists, in order to achieve their personal goals, like for example King Faisal, who acquired the throne of Iraq at the end with the help of the British. (Beshara 2011: 341; quoting Saadeh 1937)

All this meant to Saadeh that it was necessary to develop a new popular nationalist consciousness that realized the independence and authenticity of the Syrian nation in order to move from the fragmented partisan politics -which only reflected the endeavors of specific classes- to truly national politics that served the nation. But, for this consciousness first a Syrian nationalist ideology had to be developed – a task Saadeh dedicated his life to. In *The Genesis of Nations* he argues that it is not like the first Syrian nationalist thinkers have claimed the Arabic language and culture, which defines the Syrian nation. Rather it is – and here he follows Lammens' line of thought – the geography and physical environment of a specific territory and the social interaction between the people on it through many centuries, which lead to the natural development of the nation. Therefore for Saadeh, all the ancient civilizations that settled in Syria, from the people of the Neolithic age to the Canaanites and Assyrians all contributed to the creation of the ancient Syrian nation. This is also why Syria cannot be defined ethnically as it constitutes a melting pot that evolved through many historical stages. All these civilizations as a whole, their interaction and development from one to the other constitute Syria according to Saadeh. In a true primordialist spirit, he argues that the civilizations who settled in Syria were well aware of Syria as a geographic unit and developed a national consciousness. From this perspective – seeing Syria as a nation that existed from antiquity since thousands of years – the Syrian nation and with it the Syrian consciousness existed long before the Arabs conquered the lands and therefore

should not be mingled with any conceptions of an Arab nation (Beshara 2011: 346-350; quoting Saadeh 1938, Chapter 7)

However, Saadeh did not deny the Arab influence in Syria and also had no intentions of breaking away from the Arabic language and culture that, as a matter of fact, dominated in Syria. Beshara (2011: 351-353) analyzes that for Saadeh Syria was an Arab nation without doubt, but not “The Arab nation” or part of a bigger Arab nation. It shared the Arabic language and to some extent also culture, religion and history with other nations of the region. But, this did not mean that it was not an independent national entity by itself anymore, as nations were not defined culturally, but through their ancient socio-geographic historic evolution that was completed before the first Arabs set foot in Syria. He was careful to make the difference between Syrians and Arabs clear, for example, in criticizing the backwardness of the Arabs: “The Arab mind remains in its state of simple nature and is far from grasping compound organizational phenomenon” (Beshara 2011: 350; quoting Saadeh 2001: 132) Also he downplayed the Arab influence by arguing that the Arabs were rapidly “Syrianized” and that even a lot of the Arabs who came, were originally anyway Syrians (Beshara 2011: 351-353).

Furthermore, Saadeh stressed in his construction of Syrian nationalism that Syria is also psychologically Mediterranean: “The Syrian nation is not an Eastern nation nor has an Eastern soul, but a Mediterranean nation that has the soul of modern civilization whose foundations were laid in Syria” (Beshara 2011: 351; quoting Saadeh 2001: 112). So, for Saadeh the Syrian nation provided the birthplace of modern civilization and spread its culture through the Mediterranean to Europe and therefore constitutes an essential part of it. He also liked to compare it to Italy and its city-state system, arguing that as Italy developed into a united nation belatedly in the 19th century, the Syrian nation would unite too. Another innovation in Syrian nationalism comes with the new territorial definition of Syria that Saadeh offers. In the 1930s, in other words, during the first years of his nationalist endeavors he still pictured the borders like most of the scholars since Butrus Al-Bustani did, roughly reflecting the borders of the old Bilad Al-Sham. But in the 1940s, a shift in his thinking occurred and departing from his socio-geographical theory of nationalism that was based on the ancient civilizations which settled the Syrian lands, he included most of the fertile crescent – today’s Iraq and Kuwait – into his conceptualization of the Syrian nation (Beshara 352-353 2011; quoting Saadeh 1975:

75-77) How can we understand this unique territorial definition of Syria, which differed from all the nationalist constructions so far? As Saadeh developed his construction of Syrian nationalism departing from the ancient civilizations, like the Chaldeans, Assyrians and Arameans, he thought of the “ancient Syrian nation” also when drawing the modern map of Syria. Saadeh was aware of the fact that all these ancient civilizations did not see themselves as a nation in the modern sense, and even had wars between each other, but still he believed that they were one social organic unit that was on its evolutionary way to become a unified nation. There was always contact between these groups, for example the Assyrians, whose center of power was lying in today’s Iraq and the Arameans who were settling today’s Syria. Only after the clash between the Byzantine and the Persian Empire in the Fertile Crescent, this unity between its Western and Eastern part was artificially broken -with the West falling into the Byzantine, the East into Persian hands, later becoming Iraq. But as for Saadeh the Syrian nation already has developed centuries ago, its partition did not matter and only meant a phase in history that had to be corrected (Beshara 2011: 254; Saadeh 1975: 74-75). Not only he included ancient Mesopotamia, but also Cyprus into the new map of Syria mainly out of strategic reasons, according to Beshara, since it was so close to Syria that it would constitute a constant threat factor if it was under foreign control. But also Saadeh argued of course from his nationalist perspective that Cyprus was part of the Mediterranean – the “Syrian sea” as Saadeh named it – and therefore “natural” part of Syria, although its culture developed totally differently in modern times (Beshara 2011: 355-356).

Beside a nationalist outlook, Saadeh also developed a program with concrete political actions for a Syrian nation to develop. First, he stressed the importance of secularity - the strict separation of the state from the religion and the banning of religious institutions and their representatives of taking any influence in political matters. Also, part of Saadeh’s secular political philosophy was removing all the barriers that existed between the sects. Second, he promoted a socialist political framework that had as its main goal the abolishment of the feudal system and organization of the economy on a fairer basis, which served the interests of the nation first. Third, he wanted the establishment of a strong army to be able to counter colonial plans and determine the fate of the own nation (Beshara 2011: 357-358). This nationalist and political agenda was translated in 1932 into Al-Hizb Al-Suri Al-Qawmi Al-Ijtimai (the Syrian Social Nationalist Party - SSNP),

which gained popularity fast in Lebanon and Syria and was working also violently for the realization of its goals. However, it was banned under the French mandate and after Lebanon and Syria gained their independence it was persecuted due to its radical political actions. Saadeh himself returned to Lebanon in 1947, but he was sentenced to death and executed after a failed military coup of the SSNP in 1949 (Zisser 2007: 192-196). However, the SSNP remained its strength especially in Lebanon and experienced in the 1990s in Syria even a revival, when the Baath regime overtook some of its concepts and the SSNP withdrew from some of its radical stances (Zisser 2007: 188-195).

We can conclude about Exclusivist Syrian Nationalism that it constitutes the antithesis to Syrian Arab Nationalism in most of its contents. Its historiography focuses completely on the development of Syria under ancient civilizations, like the Assyrians, while interpreting the time Syria spent under the Arab and Ottoman rule as subjugation and foreign rule. On the basis of this narrative a Syrian nation is imagined that came into existence long before the Arabs and Ottomans dominated it. The scholarly work of Lammens and the widely spread sentiments against King Faisal and Arab rule in Syria found eventually an ideological expression in Saadeh's writings and his political work. Here, we find again an important novelty that the 20th century brought to Syrian nationalism. While the 19th century thinkers were primarily concerned exploring what Syria actually constitutes, the 20th century's nationalisms developed also distinct political programs and political parties, like the secular national socialism of Saadeh and the SSNP. Taking the writings of Hobsbawm into consideration, we can analyze that Syrian nationalism after its proto-nationalist stage entered hereby into its second phase, in which its political character becomes clearly visible. This also shows the construction of the national identity, now including also the political dimension beside the psychological, cultural, historic and territorial ones. This development can be also be seen in another branch of Syrian nationalism, which -in strong opposition to Exclusivist Syrian Nationalism- did not see the Arab-Islamic heritage as an obstacle for the nationalist project; rather, it tried to reconcile the Islamic worldview with the needs of modernity.

3.3. ISLAMIC ARAB-SYRIAN NATIONALISM

The 19th century saw not only the strengthening of nationalist ideas in the Arab world but also the rise in reformist Islamic thoughts, that tried to bring the religion and also its social and political implications to terms with modernity and the new social realities of the time. The most important thinkers of this new school of Islamic modernism were Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdu. Their main arguments were that Islam was not contradictory to modernity, in the opposite, the Islamic religion welcomed a rational and critical spirit and therefore technologies and progress should be adopted from the West, and Islam should be not closed to reformist thought. But at the same time, they firmly emphasized the independence of the Islamic world from the West and the importance of resistance against colonialism and the development of fair, just and independent political systems based on the principles of Islam, rather than on authoritarianism and the rule of a conservative and orthodox clergy (Kramer 1996).

The most important disciple of Muhamad Abdu was Rashid Rida, who was born in 1865 in Tripoli, today's Lebanon, and after receiving a reformist Islamic education joined Abdu in the 1890s. Inspired by the reformist Islamic ideas, he started publishing from 1898 the journal *Al-Manar (The Lighthouse)*, in which he promoted the new Islamic philosophy (Zisser 2011: 123-126). Although mostly known for his contributions to the modernization of the interpretation of Islamic sources, he was also politically very active. At the beginning of the 20th century, he supported the idea of emancipation of the Arabic lands within the Ottoman Empire without totally breaking away from it through the Decentralization Party, which he helped to form. However, during the First World War, he started supporting the Arab revolt and Great Britain aiming at the establishment of a unified Arab nation. But as soon as he realized the colonial designs and the readiness of Amir Hussein to submit to the colonial powers just to secure his power over some of the Arab lands, he changed again his political position and worked for realizing at least the political independence of Syria (Zisser 2011: 128-133).

As the president of the Arab-Syrian Congress in 1920, he was one of the main architects of the first independent Syrian constitution. Under immense political pressure, knowing that anytime France could take over Syria following what it agreed on with Great Britain in the Sykes-Picot agreement during the First World War, the Arab-Syrian Congress

tried to win over the international community's support by proving that it was capable to design and agree on a liberal constitution that was carried by democratically elected members of all the strata of Syrian society. Rashid Rida played a highly significant role in mediating between the liberals and conservatives during the process of the development of this constitution. At the end, the Congress could agree on a constitution that included 147 articles, establishing a civilian parliamentary monarchy. Although the Arab-Syrian Congress was convinced that a republic would be ideally the better state system, they still favored the parliamentary monarchy as an interim step towards the foundation of a republic, because they thought the society still not ready for it. However the king's power was limited, he was subject to congressional approval, and legislation and central political matters -like commerce, education and security- were going to be in the hands of Congress. Furthermore, the constitution guaranteed civil liberties, like freedom of speech, association and belief. Also, minorities' rights were considered, for example, one seat in the parliament was going to be reserved for every 40,000 members of minority groups (Thompson 2015: 247-250). What was especially interesting about this constitution was its strong secular character. There was only one reference to the Islamic religion in the whole text – the king had to be a Muslim. But, contrary to most of the constitutions in today's Islamic world, there was no article saying that one of the main legal sources should be the Islamic Sharia. In his journal *Al-Manar*, Rashid Rida gave accounts on how he was mediating between the conservative fractions, representing local chiefs and religious authorities and the liberal factions. Also, his main concern was to push for a secular constitution that could convince the international players, like the USA, France and Great Britain that the Syrian people could rule themselves and that also the main argument of France for taking over Syria – the immaturity of Syria and the danger for minorities – had no grounds in reality. Therefore, the constitution of 1920 is a proof for how pragmatic the Islamic modernists of that period saw politics and how they had no problem to adapt and promote a secular agenda (Thompson 2015: 251-253).

However Rida's thoughts changed after he saw that all the efforts were deemed to failure and how France was following only its own interest in making out of Syria a French mandate under its rule and how the League of Nations was acting against its own principles in not accepting the sovereignty of Syria and not hindering France from

occupying it. In 1922, Rida wrote *Al-Khilafa aw il Imama Al Uzma (The Caliphate or the Supreme Imamate)*, in which he sketched out the political principles of a model Islamic Nation and which is considered as his most important work (Haddad 1997: 253). Although he propagated in this writing also a separation between religious and political matters, it marked a departure from a total adaption of the liberal idea of secularism towards the establishment of an independent political philosophy that is founded on Islamic principles and in which religion plays a bigger role. In the treatise, Rida, first, emphasizes the importance of the caliphate out of religious and theological arguments, citing sayings of the prophet, like the one which says that whoever dies without giving his oath to the caliph will die in the period of ignorance. Also, he regarded the caliphate as necessary from a political point of view, as a guarantee for a united Muslim nation under political independence and self-rule. Furthermore, he argued that the Caliph had to be an Arab since it was the Arabs that carried and promoted the Islamic religion in its most glorious days. (Haddad 1997: 273; qupting Rida 19-20) Although he did not see any inequality between non-Arabs and Arabs, for Rida it was a fact that non-Arab Muslims followed Arab Muslims in the most important historical period of Islam that had to be revived in modern times. In this stance of Rida and his clear preference of the Arabs against non-Arabs, Rida's Arab nationalism becomes clearly visible. As for his political theory of the Caliphate, he blamed the Omayyads, especially the first Omayyad Caliph Muawiyah for replacing the democratic procedure of choosing the caliph by the "Shura" (council) by a hereditary one, in which simply the son of the Caliph automatically became his successor. Since that time, the caliphate became mostly a caliphate of tyranny – also under Ottoman period. Reinterpreting the theological Islamic principle of "Shura" (consultation), Rida suggested the foundation of a civil and democratic government that reflects all strata of modern society and not only the ulema (Islamic scholars). This democratically elected government should be the source of all legislation, for which there was no clear regulation in the Quran or authentic Sunnah (Haddad 1997: 274; quoting Rida 1923: 21-22). This means that the legislative principles and framework was provided by the Islamic religion and theology and that the government had to act within the borders of the Islamic regulations. However, Rida emphasized that clear political regulations in the religious writings were very limited so that the political field in which the government could act was very wide. This means also that the main political power was to be allocated to the democratically elected

government. Although the Caliph also had a political role – Rida foresaw a kind of check and balance system between Caliph and government – his main function was religious and spiritual. In Rida's conceptualization, not unlike the Pope, the Caliph was the highest religious authority that had to be followed by all the Muslims in social religious matters, like the allocation of the obligatory taxes for the poor and all what falls into the realm of religious regulations for society life that the Quran and Sunnah provide (Haddad 1997: 274-276; quoting Rida 1923: 35-58). However, Rida is criticized by some scholars for being inconsistent in his views about the Caliph's political competences and how far they go, for example, he also stated that the Caliph has to be obliged absolutely, without specifying if this counts for the political or the theological realm. Haddad argues that this theoretical inconsistency just reflects Rida's pragmatism on the subject. For example during the Hamidian rule, when the Caliph was also clearly holding political power, Rida pragmatically said that the Caliph also should hold temporal power; but later, he changed his position when the caliph lost all his power, arguing that he should play a religious role only (Haddad 1997: 277-278).

Beside Rida, there were also other Islamic Arab-Syrian nationalist ideologues like Abd Al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, who was born in Aleppo in 1854. He published a newspaper in which he called for reforms and later became mayor of Aleppo. Like Rida, he developed in his book *Umm-Al-Qura (Mother of the Cities)* a kind of model Islamic nation, which was fair and just, not like the Ottoman Caliphate, which he regarded as tyranny. Also like Rida, he called for a separation of the administration of religion and the government. There should be an Arab caliph in Mecca ruling in matters of religion only and politically just over the Hijaz region in his ideal pan-Islamic nation. On the side of the Caliph there should be an advisory council consisting of hundred members from all Islamic nations, which also had the function of controlling the caliph. Other Islamic countries, although being part of the bigger Islamic nation and also subjugated to the caliph's rule in religious matters, were free to elect their own political governments and rule independently; so, Syria -as being part of this scheme- would also be an autonomous political entity within the wider Islamic nation (Tauber 1994: 190-193; quoting Kawakibi 1931: 197-209).

How can we grasp now the relation between the Syrian identity, Arab nationalism and Islam in the thought of Rashid Rida and Abdulrahman Al-Kawakibi? Without doubt

both thinkers are regarded among the most important Syrian nationalists, due to their practical work for Syria, as editors of newspaper that were promoting reformist and nationalist ideas and also as politicians who fought for Syria's independence (Zisser 2011: 123-124, Farah 2011: 218-219). In their nationalist endeavors for the Syrian nation they were ready to deal with their Islamic principles in a pragmatic way and follow even a secularist agenda, like the case of the first Syrian constitution, which came into being under the auspices of Rida, clearly shows. Also Kawakibi said in one of his writings regarding the Syrian nation: "make religion rule only in the next world. Let us unite under one motto: long live the nation, long live the homeland" (Farah 2011: 218; quoting Kawakibi 1975: 206-208). With nation and homeland Kawakibi means Syria, and for its unity and independence it seems he was ready to give up on the political role of Islam.

But reading the political works of Rida and also Kawakibi, it becomes clear that their nationalist ideal was the one of a bigger Islamic nation that was led in religious matters by an Arab caliphate. There remains the question if those both ideas, the one of Syrian nationalism and of the Islamic nation, do not contradict each other. Especially Rida's life and work, the many changes in the political positions he took, lead to the conclusion that the nationalist thinking of Muslim modernists was highly pragmatic, adjusting to the political realities on the ground. Only this interpretation can explain how Rida undertook an ideological political evolution from Ottomanism to Arabism to Syrianism back to Arabism (Zisser 2011: 125-137) and also his unstable views about the caliphate and its religious and political functions (Haddad 1997: 277-278). So, in the thought and actions of Muslim modernists like Rida and Kawakibi we can differentiate between a pragmatic secular nationalism and an idealist Islamic nationalism. However, this nationalist pragmatism was only possible within the Islamic modernist framework, in which Rida and Kawakibi were operating. As they were convinced that from a Muslim theological perspective religion and politics should be separated in a limited way, it was easier for them to adopt and promote secular nationalist ideas and policies. Some scholars, like Elizier Tauber, went even that far to argue that Kawakibi and Rida were suggesting in their writings a total separation between politics and religion, as they wanted to limit the competences of the caliph to religious jurisdiction only: "He [Rida] claimed that it was contrary to the spirit of Islam, and wanted to achieve a democratic

regime of the nation by limiting the definition of the ruler to a mere caliph-that is, limiting his jurisdiction to the religious field alone” (Tauber 1994: 195). But what Tauber here does not reflect is that the religious field also encompasses the political one in many aspects. Therefore, the caliph was going to have the authority also in political matters, when there were regulations to be found in the Islamic sources. Naturally, these regulations also had to be interpreted and could be applied in various ways, but still it would fall under his authority to implement those policies. As Haddad puts it: “Actually, Rida thought that the umma should be the source of all legislation except in those cases when direct guidance would be available as an explicit text (nass) in the Qur'an or in the authentic sunna [...] he maintained that sovereignty should be exercised within the confines of the sharia, not outside it” (Haddad 1997: 274). So, in no way we can speak of a total separation between politics and religion in the nationalist constructions of the Muslim modernists. Rather they were very clear about the limitations of the elected governments, as they had to act on basis of the Islamic principles.

As a conclusion, we can say that the Islamic Arab-Syrian nationalism differs from Arab-Syrian and exclusivist Syrian nationalism in giving the Islamic religion a major role in the definition of the nation. Instead of building their nationalism on concepts like culture and language or ancient civilizations, Muslim modernist thinkers like Rida and Kawakibi saw Islamic principles and the Islamic identity as main cornerstones for their nationalist constructions. This does not mean that the idea of Syria totally vanished as we could very well see both thinkers identified with Syria in their journals and political struggle. Also, the secular idea of separation between politics and religion that we could see in Arab-Syrian nationalism and in exclusivist Syrian nationalism we can find in their writings in a rudimentary form, reflecting the modernist Islamic thought of the time. However, the Islamic Arab-Syrian nationalism meant a clear departure from Western nationalist concepts and was also clearly formulated as a counter-concept to oppose the growing Western influences. In the following decades, this form of nationalism inspired some political actors but lost influence to Arab nationalism that was gaining power in the Arab world. Nonetheless, it kept an influential nationalist construction that carried the power to challenge the prevalent political system in Syria and also returned to be influential in today's conflict.

3.4. BAATH NATIONALISM

The period under the French mandate was marked by political struggles to gain independence. There were various political factions, like The Arab Independence Party (Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Arabi), the Syrian-Palestinian Congress and later on The National Bloc (Al-Kutla al-Wataniya), which reflected the nationalist ideologies discussed in the former chapters. However, the period under the French mandate did not produce any other constructions of nationalism apart from Saadeh's Syrian Social Nationalist ideology. It could be argued that after in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, so many ideas around Syria and its national meaning were rising and being discussed. Those ideas were already disseminating throughout the Syrian society and showing their effect. Nationalism as political movement -in its exclusivist "greater Syria" as well as in its "Syria as part of the bigger Arab nation" variation- became a reality on the ground, and were mobilizing people and even leading to revolts, like the one against the French mandate that lasted from 1925 till 1927 until it was struck down by the French authorities. So, the Syrian nationalism of this period showed less in the construction of Syrian nationalisms and in the discourse of the time; rather in the growing popularity and political influence of these ideas that led to the establishment of nationalist parties and various nationalistically motivated riots and strikes against the French occupation (Khoury 1981: 449-460).

However, with the time passing under colonial rule, the political Syrian elites more and more accepted the borders drawn by the French rulers. Instead of working in the spirit of the nationalist constructions that foresaw either a greater Syria or a united Arab nation, their primary goal was to achieve independence within the newly set borders. The same applied to the other Arab countries that were forming in their borders set by the colonialists, like Iraq and Jordan. Hence, the borders set in the early 1920s were less and less contested by the political elites, and with the formation of the Arab League in 1945, the sovereignty of seven Arab states including Syria was agreed upon within the political elite. However, the genie of Arab nationalism could not be put back into the bottle that easily and persisted strongly within the Arab society, and especially in Syria. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Arabism was the creed of the time among most of the Arab people. As the specific national consciousness of the newly colonially

established Arab states was still not that developed among the average people, the adherence to the Arabic culture and religion of Islam automatically led them to follow an Arab nationalist stance. So, when the deals of the political elite with the colonial powers were getting more and more visible in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and that the greater idea of Arab nationalism was going to fail due to the political ambitions of the local elite, political resistance was forming (Devlin 1991: 1396-1400). The greatest expression of this spirit of the time we can see in the Baath movement that formed in the early 1940s. Inspired by the Syrian-Arab nationalism it developed an elaborated nationalist construction that had the strength to win the struggle for power against all other political actors and establish itself as the only legitimate party in a one-party system. In the following sub-headings, first, the fundamental elements and main ideas of Baathism are discussed. The second sub-chapter elaborates how Baath nationalism had changed when Hafiz Al-Assad got into power. The third one concentrates on the latest developments in Baathist nationalism -already under the last years of Hafiz Al-Assad and then in a stronger form under his son Bashar Al-Assad.

3.4.1. Early stages of Baath Nationalism

The Arab Baath movement was founded in the early 1940s by Michel Aflaq, an Orthodox Syrian Christian and Salah Al-Din Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. Both were born around 1910 to Damascene merchant middle-class families and thus grew up in a Syria in which Arab nationalism was gaining more and more influence. Also, the pan-Arab nationalist ideology was widely taught by fervent nationalist teachers in the schools they both attended. These factors have been influential in their adoption of the main ideas of Arab nationalism and their refining into a political program. Carried by the slogan “Wahda, Hurriyah, Ishtirakiyah” (Unity, Freedom and Socialism), the Baath movement rapidly grew -demanding the unification of all the Arab lands, the independence from all colonial powers and also a fair and just economic system that did not only favor the landowning elites. In 1945, Aflaq and Bitar tried to establish the movement as a party but the government of the time did not allow it. However, they got the permission to publish a newspaper and, from 1945 on, began to print the Baath newspaper, which they used to promote their nationalist ideas (Devlin 1991: 1398-1399).

Not as known as Michel Aflaq and Salah Al-Din Bitar, but as instrumental in the beginnings of the development of the Baath form or Arab nationalism was Zaki Al-Arsuzi, who founded in 1940 the predecessor of the Arab Baath movement which was also called the Arab Baath.

Essential for the formation of Arsuzi's national thought was the experience he gained in Alexandretta, where he originally came from, today's Hatay in Turkey, upon his return from a French scholarship in Paris to teach as a philosophy teacher in a school. During the Alexandretta Crisis which lasted from 1936-1939 and in which clashes between the Arab and Turkish population and French mandate system occurred due to the Turkish ambitions to annex the strategically important Alexandretta region (for more details on the Alexandretta Crisis see Arsuzi-Elamir 2003). In the article "‘Creating Phantoms’: Zaki al-Arsuzi, the Alexandretta Crisis, and the Formation of Modern Arab Nationalism in Syria", Watenpaugh gives a detailed account on how political developments in the Alexandretta region formed, Arsuzi's thought and with it the Arab nationalism of the time. The French policies supported Turkish politics in the region, out of fear to lose Turkey to Germany in case of another world war. Turkish politics aimed on strengthening a Turkish national consciousness through the creation of Turkish education programmes, clubs and newspapers and France allowed all these initiatives of the Turkish Kemalist government, while in the same time cracking down on similar Arab nationalist endeavors. This left Arsuzi deeply disappointed and critical of colonial designs and also the Syrian government in Damascus which turned a blind eye on what was happening in Alexandretta to appease the French government and gain advantages in their struggle for the independence of Syria (Watenpaugh 1996: 375-378).

Ironically, applying the same methods as the Turkish government to awaken the Arab national consciousness, Arsuzi founded the Arabic newspaper Al-Uruba (Arabism) to disseminate his nationalist ideas, promote nationalist consciousness and to further the fight for keeping Alexandretta within the Arab national realm. Against the French policies, which tried to use the sectarian divides to their advantage, for example creating a voting system according to ethnic and religious belonging, Arsuzi tried to stress the superiority of the Arab nation in the constitution of the identity. (Watenpaugh 1996: 371-373) It can be analyzed that Alexandretta became a symbol for the Arab nationalist fight for independence against the colonial designs and for the unity of the Arab nation,

and especially promoted the Baathist idea of one united Arab nation against the elitist content with gaining only for Syria independence from France in return for political and economic power.

Similarly to Husri, Al-Arsuzi believed in a truly primordialist spirit that the Arab nation existed for thousands of years, however that the Arab people lost their national consciousness. The only way to reestablish that consciousness for Al-Arsuzi was through the Arabic language, in which he saw the key for the unification of the Arab lands and the rise of one united Arab nation (Suleiman 2003: 148). In his book *Abqariyyat al-'arabiyya fi lisaniha (The Genius of Arabic in its Tongue)* published in 1942, Arsuzi claims that Arabic is different than all other languages in its essential conformity with the nature. According to Arsuzi, the Arabic language captures the natural essence of the objects it is describing (Choueiri 2000: 147-148).

However, Al Arsuzi differed from Husri in stressing also the importance of the Arab race and its superiority, adopting the German Romantics' idea of the importance of the blood and race in the constitution of the nation. Arsuzi even claimed that the Arab race was genetically better than other races, arguing that it originated in the myth of Adam and Eve. This stance also resulted in Arsuzi's strict opposition against intermarriages, as he saw in them a danger and cause for social and intellectual deficiencies. In "Revisiting ideological borrowings in Syrian nationalist narratives: Sati 'al-Husri, Michel 'Aflaq and Zaki al-Arsuzi", Aldoughli analyzes that the nationalist thought of Arsuzi shows many similarities to German nationalist theory, for example Fichte's assumption of the superiority of the German race (Aldoughli 2016: 26-27).

Within the nationalist thought in Syria, Arsuzi's ideas kept peripheral and were soon pushed aside by Aflaq's Arab nationalist thought that proved more attractive and successful. Arsuzi lost political importance in the 1940s, when the Arab Baath movement he founded in 1940 merged with the Baath movement that was headed by Michel Aflaq in 1947, and Arsuzi withdrew from politics and turned towards philology (Seale 1990: 34-35). Therefore, Aflaq can be seen as the father of the Baath movement since a lot of his writings became the basis of Baathist ideology and belief. Like Husri, who argued that the Arabic culture and language unifies all the Arabs, whatever ethnic background or religion they might belong to, also Aflaq believed that everybody who

spoke Arabic was also an Arab. For him, even there was no point of discussing and proving the authenticity of Arab nationality. He stated that “In itself, Arab nationalism for us Baathists is a self-evident reality not in need of special investigation or affirmation” (Aflaq 1959: 102; quoted in Salem 1994: 61) But what had to be dwelled on instead was the nature of Arab nationalism: “the meaning and content of this nationalism are in dire need of clarification, elaboration and struggle... in other words it is not our business to debate whether we are or are not Arabs – for it is evident that we are – but rather to discern and delineate the content of our Arabness at this historical juncture of our Arab nation” (ibid.). This quotation shows that Arab nationalism in Syria had reached another level, in which it seems that the Arab identity itself was not so much questioned anymore, rather internalized through the historical developments at the beginning of the 20th century, the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab revolt and also the presence of the colonial powers. We can see also from these sentences of Aflaq that rather than long theoretical and historical works that tried to prove a national identity through scholarly endeavours, like for example Husri’s, a catchy ideology was needed that could fill Arab nationalism with meaning and appeal to the people. Therefore, he wanted to take the nationalism of the time out of the books and streets, and transform it into a political movement that had the power to really bring change and development to the Arab world. Indeed, examining the writings of Aflaq we can see that he cared about the style and the poetic power of his words as much as about the content. It is difficult to convey the poetic and emotional appeal of Aflaq’s writing in the translated form, but many slogans that were short and pregnant were created, which are till now present in the wider Arab consciousness and popularly known until today, for example, the primary slogan of the Baath: ‘Ummatun arabiyatun wahida dhata risalatin khalida’ (One Arab nation, bearing an eternal message). Also, the name of the party itself Baath, meaning Renaissance and Revival, reflects this belief in the necessity of a political nationalist movement that has the potential to bring the Arab nation forward again, transforming the Arab civilization politically, economically, intellectually and morally (Salem 1994: 62-63).

Apart from this emotional and poetic new formulation of Arab nationalism to transform it into a political movement that could reach the masses, Aflaq’s ideas about nationalism were about how the Arab unity could be achieved, and how the Arab nation would

eventually look like. First, it was clear for Aflaq that nations were either in a process of growth or in one of decline, and the Arab nation was obviously in the latter state. He observed regionalism, feudalism, sectarianism and intellectual reactionism as the main diseases of the Arab civilization. All these problems could only be solved through a revolutionary movement, which had the power to uproot the political elites that consisted of a reactionary minority, which was only interested in upholding the status quo that favored them and cooperated also with the colonizers. Similar to the Communist-Leninist concept, the revolution had to be led by a political vanguard – the Baath party itself – through great commitment and prolonged struggle. Aflaq emphasized especially the role of the youth, who had to be shown a vivid image of a future just political system worth sacrificing for. For him no compromises that would only blur their ideological strength could be accepted. Hence, the Baath party played a special role in Aflaq's conceptualization of nationalism. He saw the party as the representative of what is best in the Arab nation -a miniature of the future bright Arab nation, and therefore first it should try to get the support of the educated and especially the young, who was not corrupted yet (Salem 1994: 63-65). The aim of the revolution was to realize the political and economic conditions that were going to give birth to the new Arab and an expression of the Arab Self. These political and economic conditions, which the revolution wants to establish, find their best expression in the main Baathist political slogan that also serves as a summary of their program: "Unity, Liberty, Socialism" (Wahda, Hurriyah, Ishtirakiyah).

In the Baathist thought unity and socialism are tightly bound together, so Aflaq did not share the notions of Arab unity that were common under the political elite of the time and criticized them as "illusions of kings and feudal lords who understood unity as gathering of backwardness to backwardness, exploitation to exploitation and numbers to numbers like sheep" (Aflaq 1959: 175; quoted in Salem 1994: 65). Rather, he thought of Arab unity bringing real political and economic transformation, through changing the local structures that benefitted the landowning elites. On the other hand, also socialism needs the Arab unity since only regional change towards socialism would still leave the individual countries in a hostile environment in which their political socialist goals could not be realized. But socialism in itself and the change of the material conditions into a just economic system was not the aim in itself like in communism. Rather from a

Baathist perspective, it is the necessary economic condition for people to be free and materially independent to realize the Arab spirit and the nationalist mission: “What I seek through socialism is not to augment the bounty of factories but the bounty of life. It is not my ultimate goal that food is distributed equally but that every individual may be able to unleash his talents and powers” (Aflaq 1959: 25; quoted in Salem 1994: 69). Aflaq was also eager to differentiate his socialism from the communist variation, arguing that it was a genuine Arab expression that rooted in the Arab spirit of egalitarianism.

As for the principle of liberty, Aflaq was convinced that the Arab renaissance could only evolve when the people were free from religious, economic and imperial domination. According to him, the individual freedom is not only an additional characteristic of the model nation; rather, it constitutes its basis and essence. Therefore, he saw the role of the Baath party as the enabler of this freedom, and as protector of the individual against all the authoritarian institutions that were ruling in the Arab lands. However, this notion of freedom did not apply to politics since the Baath party alone was to spearhead the revolution and lead the political and economic change for the benefit of all society. The party, in Aflaq’s opinion, knew best what was politically correct for the advancement of the Renaissance, while a lot of people were still in a state of manipulation by the political elites. As a result, the concept of liberty was essentially limited since it did not include the political realm (Salem 1994: 65-70). Additionally, the notion of liberty also meant for Aflaq that the modern Arab nation should be secular and free from religious pressure. Despite his secularism, he viewed Islam as an expression of the Arab genius and as a milestone in human history. However, he strongly emphasized that although the heritage of Islam is very important, it should play only a spiritual role and not have any say in politics. So, he saw the Islamic religion as a source of inspiration and that Arab nationalism was going to contribute to the development of the Arab lands and humanity as a whole just like Islam did (Mackey 2003: 187).

What is especially striking in the Baathist form of nationalism is the total absence of the idea of Syria as an independent national entity. Although Aflaq and also his first comrades all were from Damascus, the capital of Syria, they seem to not identify themselves at all with Syria, but instead with the Arab nation. How can we explain this shift in Syrian nationalist constructions? Again, the historical context can shed some

light on this peculiar evolution of nationalist thought in Syria. *The* Syria which Aflaq and the other Baathists grew up in, was a Syria colonized by the French and divided into several states, like one of the Alawites and the one of the Druze. In this state of colonization, the ultimate power lay in the hands of the French and some local issues were ruled by the political elite of Syria who collaborated in a lot of matters with the colonizers. Aflaq and the Baathists could see how the political elites in the several Arab countries were willing to hold on to the borders drawn by the colonizers just not to lose their own influence and power. Therefore, advocating only a Syrian nationalism at this time meant also submitting to the colonial designs, to the wishes of France and Great Britain and also to the ruling elite. In the close connection that the Baathist ideology makes between Arab unity and socialism, we can see this point very well. Following an Arab nationalist agenda meant -translated to the political reality of the time- taking an oppositional stance towards the colonizing power and the status quo rule. This explains why *the* Syria idea, the construction of a genuine Syrian nationalism declined in the following years while Arab nationalism in the way Baath formulated gained a lot of popularity and could win all the progressive forces that wanted change. This evolution in nationalist thinking can be also seen all over the Arab world, where Arab nationalism was gaining force as a medium of resistance against colonial designs and exploitation of political elites.

However, after the Baathists gained power the Baathist project of reuniting the Arab lands never materialized. The next chapter will focus on the years after the Syrian independence and show how all the traditional ideals of Baathism were betrayed.

3.4.2. Neo-Baathism

The period after the colonial rule, starting with the independence gained in 1946 was marked by inner political conflicts and instability. As the French left behind a political system that was far from politically unified or acquainted with the democratic culture, one coup d'Etat followed the other, without any coherent politics or nationalist agendas developing (Little 1990: 60-63) In the middle of this atmosphere of instability, the Baath movement as an official political party was formed in its founding congress in 1947 in Damascus. There were present around 200 attendees in the congress, coming mostly from Syria but also from other Arab countries, reflecting the Arab nationalist ideology

of the Baath. One of the attendees was then 16-year-old Hafiz Al-Assad who came from an Alawite village with his school teacher, who recruited some of his pupils for the party. In the following years, the party rapidly established branches all over the Arab world, especially in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. In the beginning of the 1950s, it gained strength by melding with the Arab Socialist Party and eventually won the second place in the elections of 1954 (Devlin 1991: 1399). Exploiting the assassination of one of its members by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party for cracking down on the SSNP, the Baath established itself as the major force in Syrian politics. But all the Arab nationalists' eyes were turned at the moment on a different stage, the one of Egypt, where a coup by the Free Officers Society in 1952 brought Gamal Abdel Nasser into power, who followed a strongly populist Arab nationalist ideology. Although the Baath leadership, headed by Aflaq and Bitar, hesitated at the beginning, they decided to propose to Nasser the unification of Syria and Egypt in one Arab nation at the end, which became eventually political reality on the first of February 1958 when Egypt and Syria transformed into the United Arab Republic (UAR). (Devlin 1991: 1400) However, before the unification, Nasser posed the condition that only one mass party would be allowed in the UAR – the National Union Party which was headed by him – and that the Baathists could stay in their political positions but had to join the party. Aflaq accepted this condition, arguing that the Baath will be presented within the National Union and that the principles of the Baath were alive within the National Union's Movement. However, as the National Union was much better organized than the Baath, the dissolution of the Baath meant also that it could not reform within the National Union. Rather all the important political positions were rapidly filled with Nasser's people, who were coming from Egypt, so dissatisfaction grew, and some of the most important units within the Syrian army declared the secession of Syria from the UAR in 1961 (Devlin 1991: 1401).

The union with Egypt set several processes in motion that concluded the traditional Baathism which was envisioned by Aflaq and the founding fathers of the 1940s, and triggered changes leading to the beginning of Neo-Baathism. First, the failure of the UAR showed that the Arab states which have been formed in the wake of the First World War had developed their own political dynamics and that the borders drawn were, in reality, more persistent than the Arab nationalists and Baathists thought. Second, the

political organization of the Baath suffered a blow it could not recover from. Formerly it operated on the basis of elected party bodies that were organized by district, branch and region, each of them with a political say within the party. But the dissolution of the Baath without consulting the party members first by Aflaq and Salih Jadid, who was general and one of the Baath leaders, let a lot of party cadres disappointed. A lot left the Baath for socialist or Nasserist parties, and the Baath party changed from the one working on a democratic basis to the one directed from the top. Additionally, while the civil body of the Baath was weakened, Baath officers organized themselves in the new military structures within the UAR -among them was also Hafiz Al-Assad- and controlled most of the Baath regional commands (Devlin 1991: 1402-1403). Even the former Secretary-General of the National Command of the Baath Munif Al-Razzaz argued that from 1961 onwards, there were actually two Baath parties, the civil and the military one, and that the power was concentrated in the latter. Also, according to him, the military Baath was only Baathist by name, and rather represented a mere military clique that was interested in gaining political power (Pipes 1992: 158).

The years after the secession proved these words to be right since the military wing seized control and the original Baathist goals like unity were only followed theoretically, as the next sub-chapter will clearly show.

3.4.3. Baathism under the Assads and the Revival of Syrian Nationalism

In 1970, Hafiz Al-Assad took the political power through a coup d'état against his former comrade Salah Jadid. The authoritarian tendencies within the Baath party were becoming more and more visible in the 1960s, and under Assad, the transformation of the Baath party into a one-man dictatorship was completed. A personal cult around Assad was created with his sculptures, pictures and his unchallenged words and practices. As it has been observed in the most dictatorships, Syria was ruled then especially by nepotism since Assad granted the most important roles in the state to family members. He was also favouring Alawites, the religious minority he belonged to, especially when it came to filling positions in the army apparatus (Korany and Dessouki 2008: 423-424). Jamal Al-Atassi, who was one of the first members of the Baath party and one of its chief ideologues, analyzed the political situation in Syria under the Assad rule in the following words: "Assadism is a false nationalism. It's the domination of a

minority, and I'm not talking just of the Alawites, who control the society's nervous system. I include also the army and the Mukhabarat (secret service). [...] And despite its socialist slogans, the state is run by a class who has made a fortune without contributing—*a nouvelle bourgeoisie parasitaire*” (Viorst 1995: 146).

However, what interests more in this study is how Syrian nationalism developed under Hafiz Al-Assad's rule. After Assad took the power, he kept the pan-Arabist Baathist ideology, including the principle of the unity of the Arab lands in one nation, a form of legitimization of his power. For example, he held on to holidays that were emphasizing Arab unity, like the Martyr's Day that commemorated the execution of Arab nationalists by the Ottoman Empire. Also, the depictions on the currency give proof to the Arab nationalism that was followed by Hafez Al-Assad despite its political impracticality. They were showing symbols frequently used by Arab nationalists to show the Arab heritage, like the Umayyad Mosque (Philips 2013: 52-53). According to Philips, there are two factors that explain this persistence of Arab nationalism. First, after decades of Arab nationalism influencing the discourse around the nation, in schools, newspapers and through political parties and organizations, it constituted a pillar of national identity in its own right and was therefore also adopted naturally by Assad. Second, although he established a dictatorship in which the Baath party was degraded to an organization of technocrats in his service, he also had to accept the party's core principles and ideology to use the established party structures and organization (Philips 2013: 30).

The idea of the Greater Syria was brought up again in the early 1980s in materials and newspapers created by the Syrian regime when Hafiz Al-Assad needed an ideological base to legitimate his intervention in the Lebanese civil war (Mufti 1991: 240). However, this idea -covering the lands that were once the Bilad Al-Sham- were too far from the reality the people were living and was not accepted by the Syrian society (Zisser 2006: 179-182). Then, in the late 1980s, Hafiz Al-Assad also introduced notions of Syrianism and tried to reconcile Syrian and Arab nationalism. As already discussed above, the aim of establishing a unified Arab nation was only hypothetical and had no chance in political reality, since all the Arab states had evolved into independent political entities. In order to comply also with these new political realities and Syria's independent position within the Arab world, Syrian nationalism experienced its revival. Because, a clear break with the Baathist ideology of pan-Arabism was not possible, the

promotion of Syrian nationalism was done mostly implicitly, for example by associating Assad in public depictions with the Syrian army, which stood symbolically for the Syrian homeland as one of its most important institutions (Phillips 2013: 52). Also, national symbols were established that carried exclusively Syrian nationalist meanings, like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1994, to commemorate all the Syrian (not Arabic!) soldiers killed in battle, like for example the ones against Israel in 1973 and 1982. Furthermore, images on the currency, while in the past only referring to the Arab Islamic heritage, now also showed Syria's ancient past, like Palmyra. The politics of Hafez Al-Assad also reflected the new stronger emphasis on Syria as an independent political entity. In a speech in 1992, Assad stated that Syria had to shift its focus on internal unity rather than following the Arab one, since the sovereign independence of the several Arab states would not be solved in favor of one Arab nation (Kienle 1995: 61).

Although also Bashar Al-Assad -Hafiz Al-Assad's son- held on to the official Baathist ideology of Arab nationalism, the pride in Syria's ancient pre-Islamic past and its usage for constructing Syrian nationalism was farther accentuated under his rule. In speeches in Syria, as well as in meetings with foreign politicians, Assad emphasized the glorious Syrian past without referring to Arabism at all. For example, in 2002 he stressed in a speech Syria's long history that goes back 10,000 years. In other occasions, he spoke proudly of Syria as the home of the ancient civilizations and modern empires, like the Roman and Byzantine Empires (Zisser 2006: 181). This emphasis on purely Syrian nationalism can be also found in the comparison of history textbooks. Bolliger found out that the schoolbooks published in 2010 convey beside the common notion of Arab nationalism also a sense of Syrian patriotism. She analyzes that Syrian identity and nationalism is promoted because it is more tangible than the very abstract idea of one Arab nation (Bolliger 2011: 96-98). Also, Bashar Al-Assad appears in public depictions together with the Syrian map and flag, unlike his father. Mostly propagated is his picture of his face in front of the Syrian map, implying the legitimacy of the territory of Syria and breaking with the traditional Baathist maps that were only showing all the Arab lands unified (Gilbert 2013: 47-50).

As a conclusion, we can say that Baathism and with it Arab nationalism was upheld first by Hafiz Al-Assad, later by his son Bashar Al-Assad, out of pragmatic reasons firstly,

and for self-legitimization secondly. After being the prevalent nationalist ideology for many decades, it could be not discarded easily, just because its main goal -the establishment of a united Arab nation- was not realizable any longer. It also can be argued that the Assads used the Baathist ideology of one Arab nation as a code for propagating the independence of Syria from outer influence, especially from the USA, as a mean for promoting the legitimacy of their dictatorship. Bashar Al-Assad said himself for example:

“Many have tried in the past to destroy the Arab national perception by attempting to position it in confrontation with feelings of 'local patriotism' which ostensibly are contaminated by separatism. Some tried to position Arabism in confrontation with Islam.... Others even tried to turn Arabism into the equivalent of backwardness and isolationism.... But none of this, of course, is correct” (quoted in Zisser 2006: 180).

By constructing the “other” as the opponent to the idea of Arabism, Bashar positions himself as the authentic defender of the principle of Arab unity against all outer threats and adds by that role to his legitimacy as unquestioned ruler of Syria (Zisser 2006: 182-183) Also in a writing of the newspaper *Tishrin (October)*, which functions as the regime’s organ, Bashar Al-Assad appears as the hero of the Arab world:

“Bashar al-Assad is the clearest and most explicit national voice today, articulating the goals of the Arab nation and its values and principles with vigor and courage but also with logic, wisdom and discretion. He represents not only Syria, which in itself constitutes an Arab and a regional force of importance, but the aspirations of the [Arab] nation wherever it is, from the [Atlantic] Ocean to the [Arabian] Gulf, its hopes and its fears” (quoted in Zisser 2006: 185).

In this context, the realization of the Arab nation does not matter much, rather the Arab nation became a symbol for a whole set of principles and values, that elevates the one who embraces it. Hence, Baathism developed from being a distinct form of Arab nationalism as a political movement with concrete ideological elements to a pragmatic cloak the Assads used to wear to legitimize their dictatorships.

On the other hand, the new political reality demanded a Syrian nationalism that reflected the growing genuinely Syrian consciousness within society. With the development of state institutions, an increasing public sector and also a nationwide expanding public transportation system the Syrian state was becoming a social reality that people could relate to in their daily lives. As a consequence the identification with Syria as a nation

grew throughout society in a natural process. As Hobsbawm argues in his book *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, in some cases nationalism grows after the establishment of the state and its institutions, like in the USA and Australia (Hobsbawm 1990: 171). This reflects why the Assads related more and more to the exclusive Syria idea, to form a legitimization of their own policies and also put the modern Syria and themselves into one line within the ancient great heritage Syria possesses. These two developments formed a new kind of specific nationalism that referred similarly to the very first nationalisms to the Syrian pre-Islamic heritage, as well as to the Arabic-Islamic history of Syria and its achievements. Looking at this special form of nationalism developed by the Assads from the lenses of the theory of the national identity of Guibernau, we can also see that it purely aims at fostering the loyalty of the people in Syria to their nation-state and its status quo political system as a dictatorship (Guibernau 2003: 134-141). All the strategies employed by nation states to create a national identity that secures the adherence of the people can be seen in the Assad's nation-state affirming nationalism, especially, the propagation of a national image based on the dominant ethnic group living in the nation and its culture, the creation of a set of common symbols and the construction of enemies.

4. NATIONALISM IN THE WAKE OF THE SYRIAN UPRISING

With the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the monopoly of the Assad regime in defining what Syria actually means broke away. People who demonstrated on the streets soon started to use alternative symbols, in order to construct a Syrian nationalism that was opposed to the state affirming nationalism deployed by the Assad dictatorship. In this part of the thesis, the various nationalist constructions from the side of the opposition will be analyzed. After a short overview of the Syrian opposition, nationalist constructions are examined through the hermeneutic analysis of political programs and manifestos.

4.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION

Before going into the analysis of several political manifestos and their nationalist constructions, a short overview of the main actors within the Syrian political opposition should be given, in order to determine which documents can be regarded as significant and represent streams of thought that are of relevance within the overall political discourse about Syrian Nationalism.

To write an overview about the Syrian opposition is a complicated undertaking, as there are dozens of groups, political parties and movements that label themselves as Syrian opposition. Therefore, it is impossible to regard all of them. Also, there are yet no scientific studies that analyze the Syrian opposition, its structure, different branches and various political streams, as well as their real political power and representativeness of the Syrian people. This implies certain limitations for this research, including the necessity to use beside academic publications also articles in newspapers and publications of think tanks etc. as sources for this chapter and overview of the Syrian opposition.

Hence, for the question who to include in the Syrian opposition, it is chosen to take as criteria the impact the political opposition group, political party etc. have on the political ground. But how can be political impact defined for the current situation in Syria? There are mainly two political arenas, in which the opposition is exercising its political impact, inside and outside Syria. Inside, it is mainly the armed opposition groups and their political representatives that have the power to influence the situation, and thus the main

armed groups and the political agendas they follow, especially with regard to their nationalist aspirations, will be in the focus of the attention. Outside Syria, it is the opposition in exile, which employs its political impact through participation in international conferences, negotiations and also by keeping communicated with the situation on the Syrian ground. Therefore, the main political groups within the opposition in exile have to be regarded too. Beside political impact, another criterion for including a political movement into the analysis or not is its identification with the Syrian nation. There are now also forces active on the Syrian ground that do not identify themselves at all with the Syrian nation, but rather aim at destroying its “artificial borders” like ISIS or the Al-Qaida affiliate Al-Nusra. Naturally, it is important to also regard those actors in analyses about Syria. However, as this research examines the constructions of Syrian nationalism, only political actors that show forms of Syrian nationalism, although it might be mixed with other forms of nationalisms like Arab and Kurdish, will be included in the analysis.

The most important institutional body of the Syrian political opposition that unites the main branches of opposition parties and movements and therefore enjoys wide international recognition is the *National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces* (Al-Etilaf Al-Watani Li-qua Al-Thaura wa Al-Muarada Al-Suriyyah), which was formed in November 2012 at a conference of opposition groups in Doha (<http://www.thejournal.ie>, 31.01.2017). As the Syrian National Coalition includes many different branches of the political opposition, the political manifestos and aims are mostly held very general, without revealing a lot about specific nationalist constructions. For example, in the rubric “Mission Statement and Goals” on the homepage of the Coalition, only four political aims are pointed out in a very general way, like creating a transitional government and funds to support the Syrian people (en.etilaf.org, 31.01.2017). Therefore, we should look at the specific components of the Syrian National Coalition for a deeper analysis of nationalist constructions.

The strongest political element constitutes the Muslim Brotherhood Syria (Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun fi Suriya). From the beginning of the Syrian uprisings, the Muslim Brotherhood has engaged strongly within the National Coalition through various organizations and also took a big part of its seats. Founded by Hassan Al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, the main aim of the Muslim Brotherhood is the establishment of a nation on

Islamic principles. It spread fast all over the Islamic world and represented the main Islamic political force in the 20th century and continues to play a crucial role in the present times (Tadros 2012: 3-5). In Syria, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was formed at the end of the Second World War, but played only a marginal role because of the strength of the Arab nationalist parties. The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed after the Baathist coup in 1963 and it constituted one of the major opposition forces against the Syrian regime since then. Especially after Hafez Al-Assad launched the occupation of Lebanon in 1976, the Muslim Brotherhood started an armed campaign against the regime, killing many Syrian officers, soldiers and government servants, which lasted until 1982, when Assad sent the Syrian Military to Hama, which was a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, and crushed the movement by force (Patrick 1989: 336-337). In what became known as the “Hama Massacre” around 20,000 were killed, among them a lot of civilians (Güçtürk 2014: 25). After this brutal crackdown, the Muslim Brotherhood lost all its force within Syria and its members were either imprisoned or went into exile. But they emerged again with full political force after the 2011 Syrian uprisings, although the demonstrations were initially not motivated or organized by them. Because of this, some political commentators say that they appeared out of the ashes, hijacking the Syrian revolution (foreignpolicy.com, 01.02.2017).

Another political party within the National Coalition is the Democratic Arab Socialist Union Party of Syria ASU (Hizb Al-Ittihad Al-Ishtiraki Al-'Arabi fi Suriya), which bases its political ideology on Nasserism and Arab nationalism. It was founded in 1964 as a coalition of nationalist and Nasserist parties to resist the separation of the Syrian-Egyptian Union and work for its re-establishment. After Hafiz Al-Assad gained all the power, the Socialist Arab party constituted one of the main actors within the Syrian opposition and was forbidden under the Syrian dictatorship (carnegie-mec.org, 01.02.2017). Nonetheless, it remained its influence especially in the suburbs of Damascus and in the capital city itself. It was one of the main political actors to embrace the Syrian revolution and was one of the founding parties of the National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change, which formed a coalition of Syrian opposition parties within Syria. Also, a lot of its members were active in various demonstrations and civil society activities from the beginning of the Syrian uprisings (en.etilaf.org, 01.02.2017). Although it is clearly Arab nationalist and Nasserist in its

symbols – the logo of the party shows the unification of all the Arab lands and also the picture of Gamal Abdel Nasser is shown prominently on its official homepage – the party also claims to follow wider political aims, like the realization of a democratic plural system and also the protection of the cultural rights of minorities (www.ettihad-sy.com, 01.02.2017).

One other strong political party can be found on the left spectrum, the Syrian Democratic People's Party (Hizb Al-Sha'ab Al-Dimuqrati Al-Suri), which was previously known as the Communist Syrian Party since its foundation in 1973 till 2005, but later changed its name to reflect its abandonment of a strict Marxist-Leninist ideology in favor of more democratic socialist ideals. Like the Muslim Brotherhood, the party took a critical stance of Hafiz Al-Assad's policies from the very beginning, condemning his military intervention in Lebanon and also speaking out loud against the brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and thus got itself a victim of Assad's repressive politics against any opposition. Most of its members, ahead of them its president and founder Riad Turk, were imprisoned or went into exile. After the 2011 Syrian uprisings, the Syrian Democratic People's party reacted fast and under its initiative the first coalition of Syrian opposition forces formed under the umbrella of the Syrian National Council, which is now still active within the new National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (Haddad/Wind 2014: 402-403). The party is observed by political commentators as one of the most liberal and secular ones within the opposition, as it stresses its adherence to secular values, like the separation of the state from religion, etc. As for its communist heritage, it still claims to be loyal to communist ideas like the equality of everybody, but that it wants to work for these goals through the establishment of a democratic system first that guarantees the plurality of political parties and all the liberal freedoms, like the freedom of opinion and expression (www.syria-sdpp.org, 01.02.2017).

Different than the aforementioned political parties, the Democratic Union Party, PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), operates mainly from the Syrian ground and not from the exile in the de-facto autonomous and Kurdish dominated the North-East of Syria. It was founded in 2003– according to some observers as a branch of the PKK (Gunes/Lowe 2015: 4) (<http://carnegie-mec.org>, 02.02.2017) - and worked since then in fierce opposition against the Syrian regime. For example, during the March 2004 Kurdish

uprising in Qamishli, a statue of Hafez Al-Assad was toppled down and the huge demonstrations were brutally stopped by the Assad forces. During the crackdown by the regime forces a lot of Kurds were killed and also thousands were forced to flee to Iraq. In 2007 again, big demonstrations were organized by the PYD in Qamishli and Kobane in order to protest against Turkish threats to intervene militarily in Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq and against Syria's support of these politics. Again the Syrian military reacted with full force using live ammunition firing on protestors and detaining a lot of PYD political members (Gunter 2014: 3-6). With the beginning of the Syrian uprisings in 2011, the PYD joined in forming the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change and also participated in several opposition activities. In the mid of 2012, the Assad regime decided to withdraw its military and security forces from most of the Kurdish areas, which left a power vacuum that was rapidly filled by Kurdish political parties, ahead of them the PYD. In the following an armed wing of the party was developed, the YPG – People's Protection Units - and the PYD seized the control in the most parts of North-Eastern Syria, establishing ministries, courts and police forces (Gunter 2014: 67-69, www.hrw.org, 02.02.2017). In November 2013, an interim government was pronounced and three regions were declared as autonomous, Afrin, Jazira and Kobani. According to some commentators, the PYD is successful in establishing bottom-up community governments, in which people from all ethnic backgrounds rule through local councils (Gunter 2014: 70-71; www.nytimes.com, 02.02.2017). But, the PYD is also criticized for human rights abuses; for example, it is reported that they arbitrarily arrested political opponents and subjected them to unfair trials, and -according to Human Rights Watch- there are also cases of torture leading to death (www.hrw.org, 02.02.2017) (Gunes/Lowe 2015: 5).

However, what interests in the framework of this thesis is the role of the PYD in the construction of Syrian nationalism. At this moment, the question what an obviously Kurdish political party can possibly have to do with Syrian nationalism might easily come to one's mind. The PYD does not only identify itself ethnically, but also shows in this respect a commitment towards the Syrian nation through its territorial presence, as it will become clearer during the analysis of its political program in the coming related heading. Recently, in October 2015, the PYD formed a new military alliance that was consisting mainly of its own military forces from the YPG including also other brigades

that were ethnically Arab, Turkmen and Assyrian and called this alliance Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Later on, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC/MSD) was established as the political wing of the Syrian Democratic Forces, also including political parties that were ethnically not Kurdish (Barfi 2016: 2-3). The name of this alliance and political coalition itself shows that there is also a national identification with Syria. Additionally, the logo of the SDF and the MSD shows a map of Syria in its current borders, although one internal border is drawn that marks the Kurdish dominated territory. Therefore, it can be observed here a form of Syrian nationalism to be included into the analysis.

4.2. ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL PROGRAMS OF THE ACTORS OF THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION

For the study of Syrian nationalism in modern times, the political manifestos of the main actors are analyzed by using content analysis and a hermeneutical approach. The manifestos are scrutinized for their hidden meanings and concepts. The following approach has been adopted to guarantee a scientific analysis that excludes the personal opinion of the researcher and a subjective interpretation of the manifestos in the best possible way: Out of the theory, some main concepts have been used for the interpretation as codes, like for example the concept of national identification, and these concepts have been scrutinized in all political texts of the various actors. Beside that deductive perspective on the political manifestos, also an inductive method has been implemented by coding the text according to the concepts, metaphors and ideas that have been found. Eventually, the interpretations of the political manifestos have been conducted based on this double coding from the deductive and inductive perspectives.

The analysis of the various nationalisms will be fully based on the political programs of the actors and does not take additional sources -like interviews with political leaders, press statements, etc. into account for a number of reasons. First, a key audience of the political programs are the members of the political movements themselves. As Harmet et al. show in their study *Manifestos and the "two faces" of parties: addressing both members and voters with one document*, one of the main purposes of political programs is to communicate ideals and values in a very clear way to motivate and encourage the

political community members and also attract new members. Therefore, political programs constitute the ideal source to analyze nationalist identities and constructions, as well as imagined communities. World views, political convictions and identifications are communicated without self-censorship, like it is often the case in media interviews etc. (Harmet et. Al 2016: 278-288). Second, as interviews, press releases are mainly targeting a wider audience, for example the international community, other political actors that are needed for cooperation etc., values and principles of the political party are shaped according to the wider audience's expectations, nationalist ideas and images are blurred in that way. As a consequence and in order to ensure methodological consistency, only political programs were taken into account as source of the analysis.

4.2.1. Islamic Arab Syrian Nationalism of the Muslim Brotherhood

On the Arabic homepage of the Muslim Brotherhood Syria, the political program *Al-Mashru Al-Siyasi Li-Suriya Al-Mustaqbal* (The Political Project for the Future Syria) can be downloaded under the “documents on ideology”. It consists of more than 100 pages and is very detailed, containing a wide range of topics -from fundamental ideas on the principles of the nation and on which ideals it should be built upon, to explanations on specific policy fields like education and healthcare. The program was already published in 2004; but, since it is still presented on the homepage as the first document on the Muslim Brotherhood political ideology, we can assume that the core political values and ideas still prevail. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood Syria has worked on this document for more than three years and many of its members discussed it until they agreed on the final version (Becker 2013: 6). Also, the Muslim Brotherhood keeps referring to this document in recent declarations on its policies, like for example in *A Pledge and Charter by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood* that was published in March 2012 (carnegie-mec.org, 23.09.2018). At the end of this document, it is stated: “We have [already] presented [this view] openly in the 2001 Charter of National Honor, in our 2004 political platform (platform referring to the programme), and in official documents approved by the [Muslim Brotherhood] on various social and national issues” (www.memri.org, 2017). Thus, it still serves as a source to examine and understand the political positions and values of the Muslim Brotherhood Syria in depth.

The content analysis has shown a number of key concepts that altogether constitute the nationalist construction of the Muslim Brotherhood Syria. These key concepts are “Syria as Arabic-Islamic Nation”, “Islamic Identity of Syria”, “Sharia as basis for national politics”, “Modernized Islam”, “Syria as Islamic Civic Nation” and “Application of Western concepts within boundaries of Islamic values”. In this heading, the identified concepts will be discussed and analyzed in depth.

Syria as Arabic-Islamic Nation

Already the first sentence in the introductory chapter tells a lot about the nationalist conceptualizations of the Muslim Brotherhood: “Our view on the future of the Arab Syrian land within the Arab Islamic System is based on our absolute belief in our renewed Islam...” (Muslim Brotherhood 2004: 10). Hence, “Syria” becomes “The Arab Syrian land within the Arab Islamic System” in the Muslim Brotherhood terminology. The Arab identity is of crucial importance for the Muslim Brotherhood and is even of a defining character for the Syrian identity, which explains why “Arab” comes before “Syrian”. Also, the Islamic identity has the same constitutive meaning for the Syrian nation as the Arab one, actually is intertwined with it, and therefore also mentioned in the very beginning. By enforcing that the Arab Syrian land is part of the Arab Islamic system the Muslim Brotherhood reveals that its nationalist construction does not stop at the actual Syrian borders, but is wider than that including also the Arab-Islamic system. Eventually, by basing their whole view on Syria on the “belief in our renewed Islam”, it becomes clear that Islam builds the basic premise for all their nationalist constructions. While the Muslim Brotherhood already believes in the Arab Islamic identity of Syria and its being part of a bigger Arab Islamic system, the main questions are: What does this actually mean in concrete terms? What are the arguments they bring forward for substantiating this claim? What does “Islamic” mean for the Muslim Brotherhood and for their nationalist construction of Syria?

Islamic Identity of Syria

In the first chapter titled “Essentials of the Project”, the Muslim Brotherhood argues that Islam in its guidelines and rules for the individual and for the society constituted the

main identity of the Syrian people for centuries and continues to do so in modern times too. Therefore, also the rules of Islam -what is right and what is wrong, good and bad- are accepted by the absolute majority of the Syrian people: “Islam is for the individual and for the society like an inner compass that shows what is right for all, good and beautiful, and whoever goes out of this compass feels that one has to bring up apologies to himself and to the society” (ibid: 13) Furthermore, it is argued in this chapter that there exists a basic consensus for Muslims about what is good and bad based on the Islamic religion, and that even people who reject Islam are in fact deeply influenced by it and share its set of values. Also, it is mentioned that Christianity shares a lot of the Islamic values, which makes the acceptance of the Islamic values among all the Syrian people -Muslim and Christian- easier. Eventually, another argument for the acceptance of the Islamic values and identity among the Syrian people is brought forward, saying that Islamic moral principles are within the natural predisposition of every human and therefore widely shared. Furthermore, the history of Syria serves as an additional argument for the Islamic character of Syria. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, the history of Syria is basically a history of glorious Islamic civilization, as it was the home for many prophets and later Damascus had been the capital of the Islamic empire, from which Islam spread throughout the world. Through all these centuries, Syria kept its important position within the Islamic world (ibid: 26-29). Even the civilizations that settled before Islam in Syria are mentioned with proud, as having invented the alphabet and having been monotheistic in their beliefs (ibid: 37).

On basis of these premises – the Islamic identity of the Syrian people and their feeling of belonging to the rules that are set by Islam and the historical reality of the Islamic influence in Syria for more than thousand years – the Muslim Brotherhood derives to the following principle for its nationalist construction of Syria: “The Islamic Sharia in its two sources, the Quran and Sunnah, is the main source for our civilizational project...” (ibid: 13). So the Islamic identity of the nation is undoubtedly the most important principle of their nationalist construction for Syria, and comes before all other principles, as the following sentence also clearly reveals: “The modern nation-state we are calling for stands on a set of principles, most important of all the Arabic Islamic identity, after that citizenship, representativeness, diversity, institutionalization and justness” (ibid: 10). So the Arab Islamic identity builds the supra identity, the core of

the Syrian nation, and all the other principles that will be analyzed later on, like diversity etc. have to be regarded within the framework of this identity.

Sharia as Basis for National Politics and Modernized Islam

In the chapter titled “The Islamic Nation” the Muslim Brotherhood further elaborates what the Islamic identity of Syria practically means for its nationalist construction. It is emphasized that Islam is a religion that encompasses all aspects of life, setting not only rules for the relationship between the human and God, but also for the societal life: “Islam’s rules embrace all aspects of human life, spiritual, cultural, economic and political.” Therefore, there is also no separation between the state and religion for the Muslim Brotherhood. The wider goals of the Islamic nation are summarized in three points. First, freeing the minds of the people from all wrong beliefs in order to guide them towards the belief in God. Second, the moral reform of the individual by guiding it towards the good through promoting the belief in punishment and reward in the afterworld so that he could be in constant awareness about his deeds. Third, the reform of the society to ensure that justice, security, human dignity and freedom prevails: “Summarized, the aim of the nation-state is to build the common framework for a human life in dignity, in the shadow of the program of God” (ibid: 29). “The Islamic nation protects the religion, takes its identity, and works on the establishment of its rules and its promotion” (ibid: 30).

But what exactly means Sharia now for the Muslim Brotherhood? A precise definition of what the term means exactly and how it is to be implemented is missing; however, the short explanations the text gives about Sharia indicates that the Muslim Brotherhood follows a moderate understanding of it (ibid: 17). It is emphasized that Sharia law does not only contain laws for the punishment of crimes but should be regarded in a wider sense, including its provisions for a just society, in which life and property of people are protected and a fair economic and social structure are being realized. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood stresses that a basic principle of the Sharia is to make people’s lives easier, not harder. Therefore, the Sharia should not resemble a codex of restrictions, in the opposite be a law that widens the place for mercy and forgiveness and restricts the space for bans and punishments (ibid: 18). In the chapter titled “The Modernized Islam”, the understanding of Sharia and Islamic law is further expressed. For the Muslim

Brotherhood, the Islamic beliefs -like the one in God and the prophet Muhammad, as well as the religious rituals, like the five times prayer, cannot be subject to change. However, when it comes to rules that concern the social life, the relations between people, as well the relationship between the nation and its subjects, Islamic laws should be drafted in consideration of the social and historical context. This means in concrete terms that the aims of the Sharia (Maqasid Al-Shari'a), like for example the protection of religion and the human life, should be taken into consideration when developing legal frameworks, but importantly not the exact realization of these aims hundreds of years ago. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim civilization suffered from a lack of innovation and adaptation to modernization and should catch up now by finding renewed approaches to Islamic sources (ibid: 20-21).

This modernizing approach of the Muslim Brotherhood finds also expression in their emphasis that an Islamic nation does not mean a theocratic, but a civic one. They make clear that according to the Islamic religion, all the people are equal among each other – meaning that there is also no religious caste that can determine laws for the people. Rather, the Ummah, meaning the Islamic community, constitutes the source of the governorship and rule. Therefore, the program comes to the following definition of the Islamic nation: “The Islamic nation is a civic nation, which is characterized by its Islamic open-minded background” (ibid: 29-30).

Syria as Islamic Civic Nation

Here comes another question: What exactly does the Muslim Brotherhood understand under the “civic nation”? Does it include democracy? In the chapter about the division of powers, in which the Muslim Brotherhood supports the idea of division of the legislative, judicial and executive powers based on an argumentation out of the Islamic sources, the Muslim Brotherhood explains his view on democracy within the discussion of the legislative power and how it should be organized in the Islamic nation. First, the Muslim Brotherhood Syria points out that the political rule belongs ultimately to God. However, in the light of its moderate understanding of Sharia, this does not mean that there are divine rules for everything that should be implemented blindly: “But the whole of the divine laws is represented in general rules, which leaves place for interpretation and to build on them” (ibid: 26). Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood emphasizes that

parliamentary elections are a legitimate modern application of the Islamic “Shura” principle, which says that the ones affected by the decision should consult each other. Also, political diversity is regarded as elementary: “Political diversity is a natural result of the freedom of thinking and belief” (ibid: 27). It is made clear that the political authority should be freely elected and chosen by the people. It is also said that self-rule and the representation of people through councils constitute the best system for the expression of the will of the nation and that already in the time of the Prophet people from the different tribes were choosing their representatives. But, the Muslim Brotherhood states also that there are disadvantages of democracy, arguing that the opinion of the masses can be easily manipulated sometimes and therefore there should be a mechanism in place that corrects the masses, when they decide in ways that could harm the society: “However, democracy does not always lead to the best way of studying the right decision and policies that serve the people. Therefore, in our civilizational project – even though favouring democratic procedures for the expression of the will of the people [...] - we stress the necessity of the possibility of interventions by experts of the field” (ibid: 64). Based on this, the Muslim Brotherhood suggests that there should be two chambers, one for legislation in which the Shura (consultation) takes place and another for the realization of the needs of the population in which its representatives gather. However, the text does not further elaborate on the specifications of this two-chamber system and how members of the first chamber – apparently the one composed of experts- are going to be elected (ibid: 64).

Application of Western Concepts within Boundaries of Islamic Values

To understand the conceptualization of democracy of the Muslim Brotherhood further, it is important to also analyze the related concepts like individual liberty as well as ethnic and religious diversity. Both concepts are outlined in related chapters in the program of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The freedom of the individual is underlined as one of the principles of the Islamic Sharia: “The Islamic religion guarantees the freedom of thinking and belief and forbids the enforcement of any religion on anybody [...] and therefore freedom is one of the most important values in the Islamic society” (ibid: 15).

However, it becomes apparent through many sections in the text that the Muslim Brotherhood has a different understanding of individual liberty. For example, right after the cited sentence above about freedom, it is written that the Muslim Brotherhood sees freedom as “first fruit of monotheism” since worshipping God frees the individual from worshipping the human” (ibid: 16). According to this statement, since freedom is a consequence of monotheism, it becomes questionable if it includes actions that are in contradiction to the Islamic religion. This notion of freedom -which does not include the freedom to act against Islamic values- becomes also very clear in their explanations about media policies. The following aims for the media are mentioned on their political agenda: “The media should serve the freedom of thinking and expression and fit with the basic principles of the Islamic community and the human moral values [...]. The freedom of thinking and expression, creativity and development in the political, cultural and artistic realm should be promoted, where it does not contradict the principles of the Islamic nation” (ibid: 110). Freedom of expression is mentioned, but with the constraint that it fits within the Islamic framework and does not contradict the principles of the Islamic religion. It is emphasized that there should be a media control agency that follows the compliance of the media with the Islamic principles: “The media control observes that the limits set by the principles of the Islamic nation are not breached [...] and resists the ideological and civilizational globalization, which aims on the elimination of the identity of the Islamic nation and its message” (ibid: 110). Furthermore, the media should promote the Arab Islamic identity of the people and work against the Western domination of the global media (ibid: 111). It can be summarized that although the freedom of the individual is mentioned in several contexts and chapters of the program, it is always under the premise that this freedom complies with the Islamic values and principles of the Islamic nation.

The issue of ethnic and religious diversity is especially crucial in Syria, as it constitutes a mosaic of religious and ethnic communities, including among others the Christian, Druze, Alawite and Kurdish communities. In the beginning of the program, ethnic and religious diversity is pointed out as a positive factor that enriches the society (ibid: 16-17). The program also reminds of the first Islamic society that was founded by the prophet Muhammad and in which Muslims and the people of the book (Christians and Jews) were living peacefully together (ibid: 33-34). In the chapter “Syria and the Syrian

People” it is stated that there are ethnic minorities, like the Kurdish, Turkmen, Tatar and Armenian, as well the religious minority of the Christians that form ten percent of the Syrian people. This diversity is described as having positively attributed to a civilization living together in peace, till the colonizing powers tried to incite sectarianism within the society (ibid: 36-37). Therefore, in a paragraph about citizenship, it is explained that belonging to the nation is guaranteed to all ethnic and religious minorities within the nation-state through citizenship and that everybody carrying the Syrian citizenship will share the same rights and duties (ibid: 32). However, in personal relations, like for example marriage and inheritance, the religious regulations of the citizens should apply, so in these cases religious minorities should have their own laws according to their religious beliefs, while the civil law should apply to all citizens regardless of their religious and ethnic background – a legislative concept that reminds strongly of the Ottoman Millet system (ibid: 74). However, it does not become clear from the text to which extent and in which fields different religious law should apply.

In another chapter, the Muslim Brotherhood lies out its specific policy for minorities: The freedom of belief should be respected; the dialogue between the different ethnic and religious groups should be strengthened; and, the meaning of citizenship should be enforced, so everybody regardless of his/her background enjoys the same rights within the state (ibid: 60-61). However, from many sections in the text it can be interpreted that the Muslim Brotherhood is taking only a tolerating stance towards minorities that enables coexistence without including them and their cultural heritage as factors that contribute to the identity and structure of the Syrian nation, which is Islamic in the view of the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, right after the elaborations on citizenship regardless of the ethnic and religious background, a warning is formulated:

“When we say that we are all citizens of this nation, equal in our duties and rights, this does not mean that we allow anybody to use this citizenship to defame the religion of this nation, and ridicule its history and civilization, to realize with this behavior hidden sectarianism” (ibid: 32).

From these words, it becomes very clear that the Islamic Arab identity of Syria is unquestionable in the perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood - a view that does not surprise, since it builds the core and basis of the Syrian nation for them. Furthermore,

directly after the presentation of the statistical facts on minorities in Syria, the Arab-Islamic civilizational background and the Islamic identity of Syria are emphasized in special chapters (ibid: 37-39). It is argued that the Islamic identity of Syria encompasses all the citizens of Syria, also the non-Muslims: “We want Syria to be a country with Arab-Islamic identity because Islam is a religion and civilization for the Muslim citizen and a civilizational identity for the non-Muslim citizen” (ibid: 125). Arguing that Islam builds the main civilizational identity of every Syrian including the non-Muslims, all the other influences and cultural heritages within Syria are blended out.

To sum up, the consequence of this strong identification with Islam and Arabism is that the Muslim Brotherhood puts less focus on Syria in its nationalist construction, while focusing more on the Arab and Islamic nation: “The Syrian region belongs geographically and socially to the Arab world and the Arab nation. Our Islamic perspective on regional states that are within the Arab world is that they form parts of one body and that they have to come together in one political framework” (ibid: 39). They continue to stress on Islam by going further: “The belief that connects more than one and a half billion people forms a real ground for the building of an Islamic nation, in which its citizens are like one body” (ibid: 39). It is argued that only in unity the Arab and Islamic people can rise again and win their independence and strength. On the other hand, the actual Arab states -part of them is also Syria- are described as being weak and artificial: “The regional country (Syria) is internally weak, as a result of a project of foreign dominance that is known in its aims. There were also factors that further enhanced the colonial partition, like tyranny in all its forms, the absence of a project of unification, the following of selfish regional advantages, and absence of the active role of the people, additionally foreign interventions and plans” (ibid: 40). It is also emphasized that only because all efforts for Islamic and Arab unification failed in the 19th and 20th century, the general aim of unification should not be dropped since it is absolutely necessary for the rise of the Islamic nation. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood lines out its practical plans for the promotion of Arab and Islamic unity: First, the reintroduction of the culture of unity; second, the enhancement of dialogue between the people and political elites of the different Arab and Islamic countries; and third, convincing politicians on the necessity of unification and the motivation of any integrative initiatives (ibid: 40-41). When there is the talk of Syria as a political entity,

then it is always mentioned as part of the bigger Arab and Islamic nation and its special role within this wider framework: “Syria is the cradle of civilizations; from it the religions spread into the world, the principles of the Islamic civilization were set in the East and it constituted the bridge of Islam to the West and Andalusia” (ibid: 117). However, the present political reality of Syria and also other Arab states as independent political entities are accepted, which explains also why the program was called “The Political Project for the Future Syria”, and not, for example, the future Arab or Islamic nation. Therefore, also unification in stages is suggested, starting from cooperation and gradual integration in some political fields, like the economy and military defence (ibid: 121).

It can be summarized that the nationalist construction of the Muslim Brotherhood creates a Syria that is defined absolutely by its Arab-Islamic identity and therefore is seen as part of a bigger Arab and Islamic nation. Therefore, Syria by itself does not provide the source for the national identity. In the whole program not once the history, culture and civilizational achievements are described as genuinely “Syrian”. For the Muslim Brotherhood, Syria gains its meaning absolutely from the role that it played within Arab Islamic history as the starting point for the wide conquests of the Islamic Empire all over the world. Also, pre-Islamic times are only mentioned to affirm the monotheism of the civilizations that settled in Syria and its importance as the home of many prophets. However, the Muslim Brotherhood is aware of the political realities of the twenty-first century and that an Arab and Islamic unification is far from realizable in the near future. Therefore, the policies outlined and the aims formulated are clearly targeted on Syria in its present borders and current populace. So, it can be analyzed that the Muslim Brotherhood follows a pragmatic Syrian nationalism and an idealistic Arab Islamic one. Since the political realities of the region do not allow the sketching of ideas and aims that include political entities that are totally different from each other, the Muslim Brotherhood contents itself with the Syrian reality in its nowadays form, without giving up on its Islamic Arabic supra-identity that guides all its views on the construction of Syria as a nation.

This pragmatic Syrian nationalism could also be clearly seen in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war. In 2012, a time in which the Syrian civil war started escalating, the Muslim Brotherhood Syria published the pledge and charter on Syria. In this charter the

Muslim Brotherhood does not mention any of the aspects that were analyzed above, neither the Islamic character of the state, nor the importance of Arabism. Instead the charter presents the Muslim Brotherhood as fully adhering to all the values of the modern civil state.

It says in the beginning of the text:

"The Muslim Brotherhood pledges to strive for a future Syria that will be:

A modern, civil state with a civil constitution rooted in the will of the Syrian people and based on national consensus. [The constitution] will be drafted by a founding assembly that will be chosen in free and fair elections. It will protect basic individual and collective rights from any exploitation or violation, and will ensure just representation for all elements of society.

A democratic, pluralistic state [that operates on the principle of] transition of power, based on the loftiest [ideals] that modern human thought has achieved. [A state] with a parliamentary republican regime, in which the people elects its representatives and rulers in free, fair, and transparent elections". (carnegie-mec.org, 26.09.2018)

The charter continues stressing the importance of citizenship, equality, dialogue, separation of powers and national reconciliation. As already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, interestingly the charter refers to the analyzed political program, stating that the charter is reflecting what was already delineated in the program. Therefore, it cannot be concluded from the charter that the Muslim Brotherhood changed its vision and perspective on national identity and state concepts. If that was the case, it wouldn't have placed the pledge as being in one line with other publications on its perspectives on the nature and character of the Syrian state. Rather, this confirms that the Muslim Brotherhood utilizes the terms democracy, pluralism etc. to create a self-image of a moderate and modern political actor that can be trusted and worked with. Furthermore, usage of these terms does not mean that the Muslim Brotherhood shares the Western understanding of these concepts. As the analysis of their political program clearly showed, the Muslim Brotherhood adopts modern state and nationalist concepts, however in a limited manner and within the boundaries of Islamic values.

4.2.2. Kurdish-Syrian Nationalism

While there is a range of Kurdish political parties in Syria, like for example the KNC (Kurdish National Council) - “an umbrella body, based in Erbil, made up of smaller Syrian Kurdish political parties that are ideologically linked to the KDP and the PUK in Iraq” (Gunes/Lowe 2015: 5) - the PYD gained dominance during the Syrian civil war and established itself as the most influential and powerful Kurdish actor in the country. Gunes and Lowe analyze that the PYD was one of many Kurdish political parties at the start of the uprisings in 2011, but that the PYD’s greater organization, strategic planning and links to the PKK, which facilitated direct access to training, experience and arms, enabled them to assert control over the Syrian territories with a majority of Kurdish populations. (Gunes/Lowe 2015: 5-7) Because the PYD is the most influential actor on the ground in Syria, their political programme was selected for the analysis of their constructions of Nationalism.

On the official homepage of the PYD, <http://pydrojava.com>, their political program *Al-Barnamij Al-Siyasi Li PYD (Hizb Al-Ittihad Al-Dimuqrati)* (The political Program of PYD – Democratic Union Party) can be downloaded. The program consists of 26 pages that contain the views of the PYD on all kind of political and societal aspects, from their perspective on the worldwide political situation and the role of the Middle East to concrete policy proposals for a future Syria and the autonomy of ‘West-Kurdistan’ they are trying to establish in the northeastern Syria. Therefore, it serves as an ideal source for analyzing the nationalist construction of the biggest political Kurdish actor within Syria, which evolves within the tension of their identification with the Kurdish cause on the one hand, and their belonging to Syria on the other. Throughout the PYD program, it becomes very clear that they mainly identify themselves with the Kurdish nationality, while territorially accepting or rather tolerating the Syrian reality and developing a form of pragmatic Syrian nationalism. How the PYD tries this balancing act in its nationalist construction between these two forms of nationalism, how they interact and relate the two concepts to each other, will be in the focus of this analysis.

The content of the political programme of the PYD is analyzed by taking a number of key sub-headings. These are “The Kurdish Cause”, “Identification with Syria”, “Ethnic

Plurality”, “Realization of Kurdish nation through confederalism” and “De facto Kurdish Independence”.

Kurdish Cause

From the very first words we can see that the PYD primarily has the Kurdish cause in mind: “With the beginning of the third millennium the Kurdish people – one of the oldest people in the world - entered a new stage in their history, which is full of heroism and pain, without a real solution for their nation, democracy, and freedom, but they developed the necessary tools for solutions, since they started to build a crucial factor, and take a strategic place and role within the regional and international politics and the changes in the Middle East” (PYD 2016: 1). By introducing the political program referring to the Kurdish people and emphasizing the common nationalist assertions of the historicity of the nation and the heroism and pain that was endured, it is signaled that the focus of attention does not lie on Syria as a whole, but rather on the Kurdish regions within Syria and their political and national status. Also in the rest of the program, the accent on Kurdish nationalism comes forward. When addressing the Kurdish regions within Syria, the PYD talks for example of ‘West-Kurdistan’ and not Northern-Syria: “With the beginning of the 21. Century the Kurdish people possess in Western-Kurdistan material and immaterial abilities that cannot be neglected, which they developed through their great struggle that they led for more than thirty years, in the framework of the fight for the national liberation in all Kurdistan...” (ibid: 1). The PYD views the Syrian territories as ‘West-Kurdistan’, and therefore as an integral part of the Kurdish nation. In addition, the identification with the overall Kurdish cause including also non-Syrian territories is clearly outlined, since it is claimed that the abilities of the Kurdish people in ‘West-Kurdistan’ are directly tied to the fight that was led in ‘all Kurdistan’. ‘West-Kurdistan’ is also a term used by Kurdish nationalists, with the other parts being located in Turkey, Iraq and Iran (Bengio 2014: 65). But what does ‘Kurdistan’ actually mean for the PYD? In the chapter “The Kurdish Situation” a definition is given: “The words Kurdish and Kurdistan express about the oldest people and country in history [...] Kurdistan, which is more than 500 thousand square kilometers big, it stretches between the Persians, the Arabs and the Turks of Anatolia, and is special in its mountains, woods, plentitude of water, fertile lands and its valuable resources, as it possesses a rich culture that cannot be reduced to the Middle East” (ibid:

6-7). In the tradition of nationalist constructions, also the historical roots of the Kurdish people are explained. According to the PYD, the Mesolithic age started 20 000 years ago and the Neolithic one 12 000 years ago in the region of 'Kurdistan', while other regions in the world were still backward. Therefore the Kurdish people played the role of the "nation of the sun for all humanity for 20 000 years" (ibid: 7). The PYD argues that however from the 19th century on the Kurdish people were repressed and denied in their societal identity through colonization, a time in which they suffered a lot and in which the name 'Kurdistan' was only common in its geographical meaning, devoid of any political or social dimension. The PYD talks about "nationalist Turkish, Arab and Iranian colonization" (ibid: 8) when they refer to the term colonization.

Based upon the above-mentioned paragraphs of the program we can observe a classical nationalist narrative in the political program of the PYD that includes all common elements of nationalism, from the pride in the character and beauty of the Kurdish lands to the drawing of an ancient history full of civilizational achievements and the account of suffering and heroic resistance. It is important to note that within this narrative 'Kurdistan' as a nation and the Kurdish people as a whole emerge as the main actors, not only the Kurdish people who live in Northern-Syria. This explains also why the text of the political program refers many times to the Kurds of Iran, Iraq and especially of Turkey. The PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) and its political leader Abdullah Öcalan are referred to often as the main fighters for the Kurdish cause (ibid:7), while Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria define the PKK as a terrorist organization. In the chapter "The Kurdish cause in Syria and West-Kurdistan" it is clearly stated that the PKK and its political and philosophical outlook – especially as it is manifested in the ideology of democratic confederalism that was developed by Abdullah Öcalan - constitutes the main inspiration and heritage for the PYD and its work in Syria (ibid: 17). In one phrase even it is implied that the PYD views itself totally in the tradition of the PKK and its political aims: "In this historical moment, in which the solution of the Kurdish cause forces itself as absolutely necessary, the Kurdish people and its liberation movement (PKK) plays a crucial role in the overcoming of the crisis in the Middle East, Kurdistan and Syria. And our political party PYD, which forwards its program on the basis of the democratic solution, builds an essential core in the realization of the freedom of the Kurdish people in West Kurdistan and the democratic development in Syria generally" (ibid: 18). Hence,

in these sentences, it is openly claimed that the PKK itself is crucially important for the solution in Syria, and right after this statement the PYD's role is emphasized, which strongly suggests that the PYD views itself a branch of the PKK and its wider aims for 'Kurdistan' including the Syrian region. The PYD is also described as being a "material and immaterial bridge" that reaches to the other parts of 'Kurdistan', another indicator that the PYD identifies with the wider Kurdish cause that goes beyond the Syrian borders (ibid: 19). Eventually, it is made clear in the chapter "Political Aims" that one of the goals of the PYD is the unification of the Kurdish people under one Kurdish nation: "The realization of the national Kurdish unity, without touching the present political borders" (ibid: 20). When the talk is of Kurdish national unity, it is always asserted right after that current national borders will not be affected. What is meant by these seemingly contradictory statements will be analyzed later on, when the pragmatic political views of the PYD are examined.

Pragmatic Identification with Syria

After this strong identification with Kurdish nationalism in all its aspects, it is hard to imagine that there is any space left for Syrian nationalism. But throughout the paper, we can see that also Syria and Syrian nationalism plays a role in the nationalist construction of the PYD, although a more pragmatic and less emotional one that clearly comes after the identification with the Kurdish cause. This perspective that the PYD takes on Syria, which is dominated by Realpolitik, gets visible already on the first page, when a political analysis of the current crisis is given: "Syria takes an important place within the conflict of the region [...] the realization of democratization in Syria and the finding of a democratic solution for the Kurdish cause will have positive effects on the whole procedure of democratization in the region. On the other hand, if Syria insists on holding to its current status, and neglected solutions for the democratic issues in general and the Kurdish cause specifically, it will transform to a target for foreign interventions, which will create problems in the whole region" (ibid:1). Hence, the contrast between the pragmatic tone used when talking about Syria and the emotional language when the Kurdish cause is declared is especially striking. This brings us to the question what Syria means actually for the PYD. Is it only a geographic and political entity the Kurdish people happen to be part of and therefore have to deal with it in a politically pragmatic way or is there any identification or nationalist construction that goes farther than that?

In the chapter “The Syrian Situation”, we can find a continuation of the analytical language used already on the first page. The situation in Syria is described as being riddled with crises and huge societal and political problems. People are cut off from their historical and cultural heritage, they are used and exploited by corrupt politicians, poverty in the immaterial and material sense has taken over all aspects of the society and the political authority is taking brutal measures to suppress all demands for change. The whole history of Syria is analyzed as being one of suppression and exploitation for thousands of years: “For more than 5000 years the culture of authoritarian rule was established, starting with the Sumerian priests and their godlike kings, to the divine Egyptian kings, to the Persians, continuing with the patriarchs of Rome and the Muslim Sultans and the European monarchies [...] coming to the military coup d’états of younger history and the Baathist coup and their seizing of power to this very day” (ibid: 11). But also people who seem to be against the current political repressive system in Syria, religious and cultural leaders, as well as the political opposition in all its wings, the religious, the nationalist, the liberal and the leftist are still convinced of the nation-state and its sovereignty and authority as a mean for change and a solution or at least see in it a pragmatic way as useful in solving the crisis (ibid: 10). When the PYD criticizes the loyalty of groups, which oppose the regime, to the concept of the nation-state, they mean the nation-state as a home for only one nation – the Arab one in the case of Syria. The politics led in the name of Arab nationalism, carried by the Baath ideology – have not only led to the suppression of all non-Arab ethnicities, especially the Kurdish one, but also helped to form authoritarian politics that led the exploitation of all the Syrian society – Arab and non-Arab – as a consequence. As the ideology of Arab nationalism, which denies the existence of all the non-Arab ethnicities, is absolutely confrontational to the Syrian reality, it led to the huge societal crises Syria is living at the moment: “The societal and economic crisis the Syrian people live today comes from the solitary nation-state, which does not fit with the nature of the Syrian society, and from the exploitation of authority, and the spread of Arab nationalism within the society” (ibid: 13). Therefore, in the chapters “The Syrian Situation” and “The Societal Structure of the Syrian People” a dark picture is drawn, in which for thousands of years the people lived under exploitative conditions, additionally to the nationalist suppression in the name of Arab nationalism that came with the Baathist rule.

However, in the chapter “Possibilities for a Solution of the Situation in Syria” a more positive picture is drawn by emphasizing the historic achievements and virtuous characteristics of Syria before it entered into the historical stage of exploitation: “And despite all this the social phenomenon that was created and developed in the Fertile Crescent still exists in the daily life, if only in its wider sketches [...]. Still there are the high individual and family values from the Neolithic age, and also the societal values that give the life more meaning and the society more strength, starting from the respect and love, to the relations based on mutual support and the help of the one in need [...] and these values build the inspiration for all the social resistance today” (ibid: 14). Furthermore, it is remembered with pride in more than one section of the text that Syria hosted a lot of different civilizations and cultures that were living peacefully together (ibid: 18). In those sections, it becomes clear that the PYD sees the Kurdish people as part of these ancient civilizations that lived in Syria, and therefore a feeling of belonging to Syria is communicated. This feeling also shows in their emphasis on being an essential part in the history of modern Syria as well. First in their endurance of the Ottoman Empire together with the Arab people with whom they shared a relation of friendship, brotherhood and mutual support against the Ottoman occupation. Then in their heroic fight against the French occupation that they also led together with the Arab people, and eventually in the establishment of the modern Syrian nation-state, in which Kurdish people took over highest positions and constituted one of its essential elements (ibid: 8-9).

Ethnic Plurality

In these parts of the text, it becomes evident that the PYD also identifies with the Syrian cause and views the Kurdish people as elementary part of the Syrian society. However, they make clear that their image of the Syrian society is one of ethnic plurality, in which the Arab identity only takes the place of one in many within a pluralist nation that establishes equality between all the ethnic identities. Therefore, it can be analyzed that the PYD develops a Syrian nationalism that is defined by ethnic and religious pluralism with an image of Syria as being a shelter for all the ethnic and religious communities for which Syria as a territory served as a homeland. In stark contrast to its Kurdish nationalist image, this form of nationalism is nearly devoid of emotionally laden images or heroic narratives – only showing once in the pride of establishing Syria as nation and

being part of the resistance against France, but then also mainly to stress the fact that the Kurds are on an equal standing with the Arabs when it comes to the achievements for Syria. Also, the Syrians as an ethnic collective are never mentioned in the text, rather the Syrian people are imagined as a mosaic of people that share a common land. But how does the PYD conciliate the emotionally strong identification with the Kurdish cause and Kurdish nationalism, which is based on the imagination of one united Kurdish nation including all the Kurds and the regions in which they are in the majority, with their belonging to Syria? How is it possible to claim the belonging to two nations, the Kurdish and the Syrian in the same time? For answering these questions, the political proposals of the PYD -in other words, the pragmatic political translation of their nationalist views- should be examined.

Realization of Kurdish nation through confederalism

The PYD sees the concept of democratic confederalism, which it took from Abdullah Öcalan, a solution for the Kurdish people and their establishment of a Kurdish nation without changing current political borders and keeping their belonging to Syria. Although this concept is not explained in all its details, within the program its main ideas are laid out in the following sentences: “It is a wide social project that shows the will of the people and is based on it in all aspects of life, the economic, social and political and its institutions, and the most important issue is the organization of the people and its activities in an efficient way, starting from the councils in the villages, continuing with the parliaments of the cities and their districts and the general national assembly, so the people can express themselves freely. This solution forces itself by democratic and peaceful means, and does not depend on the state, nor strives for its destruction” (ibid: 8). In this approach, we can see that the PYD wants to follow a bottom-up process, in which the organization in smaller political entities that are independent of the state is enforced. Through this bottom-up organization, the PYD aims at circumventing the traditional state structures – this circumvention of the state is strongly implied when saying that the political processes within democratic confederalism do not depend on the state, but also do not strive for its destruction. It is made clear that current political borders are not to be touched: “It is absolutely necessary to follow a policy that does not touch the current political borders, and does not endanger them, with the aim of avoiding new tragedies and pain.” (ibid: 8) So in the view of the PYD, the establishment of the

Kurdish nation without threatening the current political borders can be realized by basing the political system in the Kurdish regions on an ideology that does not demand traditional state structures, but works alternatively through bottom-up democratic organization: “Through preparing the ground for organizational and cultural diversity, which helps the organization of the whole society in the form of confederalist unions [...] the democratic unity for the Kurdish people, who are separated and dispersed all over the world will be realized without an alteration in the current political borders. On this way, the democratic Kurdish nation will be built and the estrangement of the individual from his environment and his society will be overcome because the construction of a new, free and creative concept for citizenship is the first aim of the system of democratic confederalism in the West of Kurdistan” (ibid: 18). Hence, by establishing an alternative political system to the state through democratic confederalism, the PYD believes that a new and creative conceptualization of citizenship can be developed. However, the political program lacks explanations for the question how the belonging to two nations at the same time, the Kurdish and the Syrian one, can be realized practically. The most basic question is: Who will rule as political authority, as sovereign, within the Kurdish regions, the Kurdish national authorities or the Syrian one, or will there be shared responsibilities? No clear answer is given to this question. However, the praising of democratic confederalism and local self-rule, additionally to the continuous critique of the traditional nation-state strongly suggest that the PYD strives for the establishment of a political system in which the Kurdish regions act independently from any centralized Syrian authority and this means the de facto alteration of political borders and independence of the Kurdish regions of Syria.

De facto Kurdish Independence

This de facto striving for Kurdish independence, despite all the assertions that the unity of Syria and current political borders should be upheld, becomes also apparent in the plan of the PYD to materialize the ideology of democratic confederalism through autonomous self-rule in the Kurdish regions. In the chapter “The Solution of Autonomous Democratic Self-Rule”, it is explained what an autonomous ‘West-Kurdistan’ actually means (ibid: 20-22). First, there should be a parliament or a democratic assembly of the people, as well as local councils. Second, the political rights of the Kurds should find expression in the legislation of ‘West-Kurdistan’ and its

constitution. Third, the PYD demands 'West-Kurdistan' also to be autonomous in its economic policies, including the right to extract raw materials, like the minerals and oil in the region, and use it independently. Fourth, cultural policies will be enacted to end the cultural repression and promote the Kurdish culture in all its aspects, for example through making Kurdish the main language taught in schools. Eventually, the PYD also strives on establishing independent defense and security policies in order to protect themselves of any aggressions based on ethnicity. Through these points, it gets quite evident that although the PYD claims to aim at autonomous-rule without parting from Syria, the realization of all these aims would actually mean the de facto independence of the Kurdish regions from the Syrian nation-state. After the achievement of independence in political, judicial, economic and security matters, the question what competencies should remain within the Syrian nation-state poses itself. The PYD also is not clear about its political conceptions about the rest of Syria, which is not Kurdish dominated. It only vaguely states that the autonomous self-rule in 'West Kurdistan' can serve as a model for all Syria. Does this actually mean that the different regions within Syria should establish their own political, economic and defense structures? If it is, then this view is diametrically against the assertion of the PYD to work for the unity of all Syria.

However as discussed before, the PYD also identifies with the Syrian cause to a limited extent, and this identification can be also seen in the clarification done after the elaborations of the PYD on what an autonomous 'West-Kurdistan' would actually mean politically: "... And these points are open for discussion within the Kurdish people, as well as they must be discussed with the democratic forces within the general Syrian society, and even with the state agencies that are responsible for the Kurdish cause." Therefore, we can see that also regarding the pragmatic political aims of the PYD, two forms of nationalism appear: the strong and emotional Kurdish, and the pragmatic Syrian one. The formulation of the political agenda of the PYD that moves within the tension between these two forms of nationalist constructions can lead us to more than one interpretation. First, it could be suggested that the identification with Syria, the claim of working for Syrian unity and the sacredness of the current political borders are not more than PYD's political tactic that recognizes the political difficulty of openly admitting the work for the establishment of a Kurdish independent nation and the

partition of Syria, and therefore it cleverly argues that the ideology of democratic confederalism and autonomous self-rule would not change current political borders and also guarantee the unity of Syria.

With Brubaker (Brubaker 1996: 4-7) we can also make the differentiation in the PYD Program between the imagined Kurdish homeland and the Syrian nation state. While the belonging to the homeland is emotionally underlined in several parts of the text, the Syrian nation state is described mostly as a reality that needs to be dealt with in pragmatic ways.

However, in some parts of the text, the feeling of belonging to the Syrian nation can be clearly detected. For example, in the above-analyzed parts, the Kurdish resistance against the French occupation and their role in the establishment of the Syrian nation is accounted with pride. Even in one part of the program, ‘West-Kurdistan’ is described as being a constitutive part of Syria and crucially important for its existence:

“West-Kurdistan, which represents the pulsating liveliness of the values of the Fertile Crescent, and its people, who represent one of the oldest people in the region, make of Syria today a place of civilization, in another meaning if West-Kurdistan did not join present Syria, Syria would not be even called Syria, and if the Kurds would not have defended Syria and participated in the building of its unity, probably more of the Syrian land would have been part of Lebanon” (ibid: 17).

Here, we can clearly see that ‘West-Kurdistan’ is imagined as being an elementary, even defining part of Syria.

The PYD clearly identifies with the Kurdish cause on the one hand, but also views the Kurdish people as a constitutive element within the Syrian nation, on the other. They are themselves aware of the tension that this hybrid national identification bears since they try a difficult balancing act of translating their multi-nationalist constructions into a practical political program that has to deal with the fact that the main political organizational principle of the modern world is the solitary nation-state. By proposing an alternative political organizational principle – democratic confederalism – the PYD tries to circumvent the traditional singular nation-state structures, in order to find a political solution for their identification with more than one nation.

4.2.3. Arab Nationalism of the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party

Although the main aim of the Arab nationalists – the unification of the Arab lands – proved unrealistic through the last decades, Arab nationalism and the identification with the Arab cause kept powerful and influential into the modern days. The main Syrian political parties on the left spectrum still hold on to Arab nationalism and Nasserism, as the political programs of the *Arab Socialist Union Party of Syria ASU (Hizb Al-Ittihad Al-Ishtiraki Al-'Arabi fi Suriya)* and the *Syrian Democratic People's Party (Hizb Al-Sha'ab Al-Dimuqrati Al-Sury)* clearly show. On the homepages of the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party, their political programs, which include detailed descriptions of their policy proposals and their nationalist constructions, can be downloaded.

The key concepts that have been found during the content analysis of both parties' programs are "Artificialness of the Syrian Nation", "Unity of the Arab Nation" and "The Other".

Artificialness of the Syrian Nation

Like in the programs discussed before, the main national imagination of the ASU shows in the opening sentence: "In the context of the conditions, which Syria and our Arab nation..." (ASU 2004: 4) In the following paragraphs of the program the talk is very rarely of Syria and most of the Al-Ummah Al-Arabiyyah. Ummah is the most emotionally laden word within the Arabic language for referring to the nation, meaning "a community of people of mainly common descent, history, and language" (almaany.com, 25.03.2017) Syria is mentioned in very pragmatic ways, for example to criticize the current political situation that is described as being full of corruption, exploitation and suppression of basic human rights through the Baath regime. In the beginning of the program it is analyzed that even now after the formal existence of Syria for many decades, most of the Syrian people do not accept the reality of the Syrian state and do not identify with Syria as a nation: "Syria, as a state and as people still did not accept their regional entity [...] refusing the state borders that were forced from the organizers of Sykes-Picot – to the Arab unity" (ASU 2004: 6). This feeling of the artificialness of Syria in its current borders and the argument that it constitutes merely a colonial design comes often through in the text.

Unity of the Arab nation

Based on their belief in the Arab nation – a belief that is seen as self-evident and therefore not substantiated by arguments of any kind – the ASU sees it as a priority to work towards the unification of the Arab lands. In the subchapter “On National Unity: The Insistence on the Protection of National Unity” (ibid: 9) the principles and policies of the ASU for the realization of the aim of the unification of the Arab lands are laid out. As a first principle, it is stated that Syria constitutes a part of the bigger Arab nation that cannot be separated from Al-Ummah Al-Arabiyyah (the Arab nation) and that a unified political Arab movement encompassing all the Arab lands should be established on the basis of this principle. The primacy of the Arab nation also means for the ASU that the Arab national cause has primacy over all regional considerations; therefore all the regional parties working for the Arab cause should put the benefit of the Arab nation over any regional aspirations (ibid: 9-10). Another political principle is the demand for the respect of the unity of the Arab lands in its territory and population, including the refusal of any attempt to doubt this unity or work against it under any slogan. Here it is implicated that any political movement that does not share the belief in Arab nationalism, for example, regional nationalist political actors or political movements that define themselves through their non-Arab identity, are seen as suspicious (ibid: 10-11).

On the basis of these principles, the ASU suggests a set of practical political measures, in order to realize the unification of the Arab lands step by step. First, the equality in rights and duties for all citizens should be guaranteed without any differentiation on basis of religion, gender or belief. The Arabic language should be the official language in all the Arab lands and learning it should be a basic right and duty of all the citizens. However, it is also mentioned that the cultural rights of all the citizens should be established, including the protection of the ethnic groups – the only moment the ASU seems to recognize that there are also non-Arab ethnic groups within their imagined unified Arab nation and that they have to be given at least the assurance of being free to express their ethnic belonging and cultural specifics. In terms of practical political proposals, the program suggests a range of measures that could lead to Arab unification: A common Arab army should be built up including the production of arms. Also, a common Arab economic policy is envisioned, starting with the border-free movement

of people and goods. Furthermore, Arab organizations, like the Arab League, should be strengthened in their meaning and gain more competences (ibid: 9-11).

However, the ASU is aware of the fact that the identification with the Arab cause and the strength of Arab nationalism within the population is not as strong as in the days of Nasser anymore: “The national enthusiasm decreased due to the weakening of the will of the citizens through exploitation and suppression, so the higher national aims were lost out of sight and the regional state structures got stronger” (ibid: 4). Therefore, the ASU sees it as essential to work for the rebuilding of the Arab national consciousness through various channels: First, through education in schools, by teaching the absolute necessity of Arab unification, then through the publication of books and novels that support the ideas of Arab nationalism, and eventually through the public media, televisions and newspapers (ibid: 18-20).

The Other

Another powerful way of winning the people for the Arab nationalist cause is through the construction of the “Other”. In the Arab nationalism of the ASU, the “Other” is Israel and its main supporter -the USA. In many parts of the text, Israel is mentioned as the main enemy of the Arab cause. Already the first sentence of the program refers to the Zionist aggression: “In the shadow of the situation Syria and our Arab nation goes through and the dangers that it is facing from the continuous Zionist aggression with its occupation of Southern Syria, parts of Lebanon and all of Palestine, and the humiliating agreements with more than one Arab country; also the American spreading of its domination in the name of globalization...” (ibid: 4). In the following, it is emphasized that the Arab-Israeli struggle has to be led with great effort and enthusiasm: “The Arab-Zionist struggle (a struggle of existence and not a struggle of borders) and the work for the ending of the Zionist project is a national duty, and the Palestinian cause has to be regarded as the cause of the whole Ummah that cannot be given up” (ibid: 10). Furthermore, the text states that any agreement with Israel can be only taken under the condition that the Palestinian cause is not betrayed, meaning that no agreement can be taken that does not include the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories after the 1967 war and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. Not only Israel is targeted as the “Other”, but also American imperialism in several sections: “The work against American imperialism and the dominance of unipolarity through

strengthening of relations with other international blocks, especially the European Union, Russia, China and Japan [...] and the advancement of the role of the UN and its institutions and the activation of the role of the South in it, as well as the expansion of the right for veto to all members of the Security Council” (ibid: 12). In the construction of the “Other” – mostly after assertions of the Arab unity and Arab nationalism - a stronger consciousness of the Arab people as one is created. As the aggression of Israel include not only Palestine but more than one Arab country and as the US policies are described as being imperialist, dominant and exploitative targeting the whole Arab region, the Arab countries appear as part of one wider Arab nation that is united by the same enemy. The ASU follows here a common strategy of constructing a national consciousness not through describing the own “national” unique characteristics, but through the projection of an “Other”.

Beside Arab nationalism, the main principle emphasized in the program of the ASU is democracy. The current Baath regime is criticized for having acted radically against its actual main political agenda manifested in their slogan “Wahda, Hurriyyah, Ishtirakiyyah” (“Unity, Freedom, Socialism”), since the regionalism of the Arab states only deepened. Furthermore, there was no freedom of opinion, rather the state authorities could enforce a detention and socialism was far from being reached, because the new elites developed into a capitalist class that exploited all the state resources. Therefore, democratic change is heralded: “The democratic change of the political system through the constitution of a new societal contract is necessary, in which the political authority gets its legality directly from the people as actual owners of the authority” (ibid: 7). In the following, the details of the democracy are elaborated as envisioned by the ASU. Among others, it favours a representative system, in which everybody has the right to be represented through political parties that participate in free elections. Furthermore, a reform for the presidential system is suggested, including the provision that one person can be candidate for maximum two terms (ibid: 7-9).

The political program of the Syrian Democratic People’s Party is in many points identical with that of the ASU. Like in the ASU program, the unity of the Arab nation constitutes the highest principle and aim, and it is stressed that the independence of the Arab people and a just system can be only established through the unification of the Arab lands. (Syrian Democratic People’s Party 2004: 2-4). Democracy is seen in their

program as directly bound to the goal of Arab nationalism, since only through democracy the Arab people can evolve, end the corruption in all aspects of social life and find the strength and independence that is needed to get the project of unification ahead (ibid: 5). The construction of the “Other” through Israel and the USA can also be found in this program (ibid: 10). The only difference is in one subchapter of the program dealing with religion – a theme that was not considered in the program of the ASU. According to the Syrian Democratic People’s Party, religion has a purely spiritual dimension and loses its deep meaning when it is used for politics. Therefore, they argue for a strict separation of state and religion and the freedom of belief and thinking in all realms (ibid: 8-9).

As a conclusion, we can say that in the nationalist constructions of the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People’s Party, the identification with the Arab cause is strong to such an extent that the whole Syria idea vanishes. In both programs, even the name Syria is mentioned very few times for only describing the status quo that should be changed. It is clearly stated that the Arab nationalist cause has priority over any regional ambitions, and therefore, it is only logical that the Syria idea has no place in both texts. In their clear rejection of Syria in its current borders, the leftist Arab nationalist parties are different than the Muslim Brotherhood that takes a more pragmatic stance and also the PYD which partially identifies with Syria as a nation. Another difference lies in their treating of the Arabism of Syria as self-evident fact that does not need any elaborations. Different than the Muslim Brotherhood and the PYD, which both dedicated long sections of the program to the legitimization of their Islamic respective and Kurdish nationalist constructions, no equivalent for those typically nationalist writings that refer to the history, the achievements etc. of the claimed nation can be found. Rather, the claim of unity is built strongly on the construction of the “Other” as the main opponent of the whole “Arab nation”.

Another main crucial factor for all the nationalist constructions in Syria evolves around minorities and how to deal with the ethnic and religious diversity within the Syrian territory. Different than the other programs, the point of minorities is dealt with only very shortly in very few sentences that affirm the cultural rights of the minorities. However, against these Spartan assertions stand vast sections in which the necessity of Arab unity, the promotion of Arabness in education, literature and media are

emphasized. At one point, it is even clearly stated that the Arab unity is not to be questioned by anybody and has to be respected. This statement indicates that the Arab identity of Syria and the other regions regarded as Arab is sacred and to be treated as dogma that cannot be violated. How does this fit with the claims of democracy and its values, like freedom of thought and expression that are affirmed many times throughout the text? Obviously, there lies a contradiction. This contradiction can be better understood when regarding that democracy and Arab unity go for the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party hand in hand, as democracy guarantees the development of the societies and provides them with the potential that is needed for the unification process and the fight for "Arab independence". Therefore, we can speak also here of a concept of limited democracy, as only the parties are allowed into the political arena, that agree to the principle of the Arab unity and are ready to work for it.

5. Conclusion

Following the analysis of historical constructions of Syrian nationalism through the interpretation of the main ideas of Syrian nationalist thinkers and the content analysis of the political programs of actors currently active in the Syrian context, this chapter summarizes the findings and provides answers on the research questions. In the first part of the chapter, the research questions relating to the historical development of Syrian nationalism are examined, shedding light into the different paradigms. The second part discusses constructions of Syrian nationalism in modern times. To answer the research questions various theoretical approaches of nationalism studies have been taken into account and utilized.

Answers are provided on the questions how the Syrian national identity was constructed historically, which paradigms of Syrian nationalism developed, how nationalist imaginations changed over time and eventually also how Syria is imagined today as a nation by the Assad regime and the main political movements. Three historic paradigms were analyzed: Arab-Syrian nationalism, exclusivist Syrian nationalism and Arab Islamic Syrian nationalism. In modern times various other forms of nationalist constructions rose and gained influence, namely Islamic Arab Syrian, Kurdish Syrian and Arab nationalism.

The analysis of nationalist constructions in Syria over more than the last hundred years has shown that we cannot talk of one Syrian Nationalism. Rather, there are different forms reflecting the various national identifications of the inhabitants of Syria. After the name Syria was revived through French missionaries in the 19th century it was used first by Christians living in Beirut, like Butrus Al-Bustani, in order to express a feeling of national belonging that was opposed to the prevalent form of national identity through religion, which was the most spread one within the Middle East. Several factors for the rising of nationalist sentiment were discussed, among them the hope to unite a religiously fragmented society around one common identity and the economic reason for expanding the market through the creation of one national consciousness. In this phase, the main principle of nationalism as formulated by Gellner (2006: 1) “that the political and the national unit should be congruent” still did not apply. Rather this earliest stage of the evolution of Syrian nationalism was still characterized by proto-

nationalism, which means that the cultural and ethnic unity was being emphasized without deducting from this unity the claim of political independence and sovereignty. The earliest constructions of nationalism, as expressed by Butrus Al-Bustani and Khalil Al-Khuri can be termed as Arab nationalism on the one hand as they stressed the Arab culture, especially the language, and worked for its renaissance by promoting it through publications and education. However, it was also Syrian nationalism, since they did not include the whole Arab world in their nationalist imaginations, rather only what was part of the Bilad Al-Sham and also referred to the Syrian identity as such, for example in talking about Al-Jumhur Al-Suri (The Syrian people) in their periodicals. In this period falls also the building of historical nationalist narratives with Zaydan's *Kharabat Suriyyah (The Ruins of Syria)*, in which the glorious past -including the times in which Syria was under Greek and Roman control- is recalled with pride.

When the Ottoman Empire began to crumble, Syrian nationalism evolved from the cultural to the political phase. Mainly two variations of Syrian nationalism can be observed in this period: the Islamic-Arab and Exclusivist Syrian nationalism. In the first form, the main national identification is through the belonging to the Islamic religion and thereby to the Al-Ummah Al-Islamiyyah (the Islamic Nation). In the works of Rashid Rida and Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi, a Caliphate built on Islamic principles is envisioned that unites all the Islamic lands. However, they also argued for limited democratic state structures for fields in which the Islamic Sharia does not provide any provisions. However, it would fall short of the mark to see them only as Islamic thinkers, as both of them showed through their political work their identification with the Arab-Syrian cause. They worked for the independence of Syria from the French colonizers and were ready to put all their Islamic ideals aside and work pragmatically for the constitution of a unified Syrian nation. Therefore, we can see an ideal Islamic nationalism and a pragmatic form of Syrian nationalism in the works and lives of Rida and Kawakibi.

In strong opposition to constructions of nationalism that include Arabism and Islam in their conceptualizations, adherents of exclusivist Syrian nationalism believe that Syria itself is an independent nation that has nothing to do with the Arabs or Islam. Henri Lammens was the first who reinterpreted the Arab and Islamic history of Syria as one of occupation and foreign rule. In his book article "Syria and its Geographic Importance"

(1904), he argues in a truly primordialist spirit that Syria as a nation has developed already thousands of years ago before the first Arabs set foot on it and even Islam was born through the traditions and cultures of the ancient civilizations that settled in it. Later thinkers like Nuaimah and Gibran also emphasized the independence of Syria from the Arabs and that only because Arabic was the most widely spread language within Syria this does not make Syria also an Arab country, just as Belgium was not French. These strong sentiments against the Arabs and the feeling of belonging to an ancient Syrian nation were further elaborated by Antun Saadeh in his main work the *Genesis of Nations*. In it, Saadeh makes the case for an independent Syrian Nation that goes back to the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Arameans who lived there thousands of years ago and developed, according to Saadeh, one harmonious social unit – the ancient Syria – through their interactions and traditions. Furthermore, he sees the Syrians as being not an Eastern, but rather a Mediterranean nation that bears the soul of modern civilization. In the 1930s, Saadeh formed on the basis of his Nationalist views Al-Hizb Al-Suri Al-Qawmi Al-Ijtimai, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which worked for the realization of Saadeh's imagination of a greater Syria. Saadeh's territorial definition of Syria is the widest one since it is based on his historical narrative of Syria as an ancient nation. He included the whole Fertile Crescent, meaning also Iraq and Kuwait and even Cyprus (since it was lying within the "Syrian" sea), into his Syria.

However over the time, the Syrian nationalism of Saadeh and the SSNP lost the struggle for power against Arab nationalism as it was promoted by Baathism. After the colonial partition of the Arab lands that were accompanied by deals, which local political and feudal elites made with the former colonizers, Arab nationalism was the creed of the time among the masses since it symbolized most sincerely the rejection of the status quo colonial designs and suppression of the masses by a small elite. Michel Aflaq, the founder of the Baath movement, expressed this form of nationalism ideologically and emotionally most convincingly with the slogan "Wahda, Hurriyyah, Ishtirakiyyah" (Unity, Freedom, Socialism), demanding the unification of all the Arab lands, the freedom of the individual and a fair and just economic system. In the middle of the 1950s, the Baath party became the dominant party within Syria and in 1958 the Baath, under the leadership of Michel Aflaq, agreed on forming the United Arab Republic (UAR) together with Egypt that was under the rule of the Arab nationalist charismatic

leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, thereby following its goal of unification of the Arab lands. However, the union proved to be short lived, since there was a lot of dissatisfaction among the Syrian side with the dominance that Egypt was exerting through the only allowed political party -Nasser's National Union Party. In 1961, Baathist officers - among them the later dictator Hafiz Al-Assad- declared their secession from the Union with Egypt. The unification of Egypt was decided authoritatively by Michel Aflaq and Salih Jadid and therefore started a process within the Baath that changed the political party from being a mass movement, in which its members enjoyed relatively high equality and decisions were taken by party votes, to a party that was ruled by a few. As a consequence, the military wing of the Baath won influence, while the civil block got weaker step by step. The last stage of the authoritative evolution of the Baath regime was reached in 1970 when Hafiz Al-Assad took over the power and installed himself as the sole dictator of Syria and transformed the Baath party into a mere organization of bureaucrats and powerless functionaries.

In these stages the constructions of nationalism were developed under the auspices of the dictatorship that held on to the official ideology of Baathist Arab Nationalism. There are two factors explaining the embrace of Baathist Arab nationalism by Hafiz Al-Assad: First, Arab nationalism and Baathist ideology was the leading thought and could not be just discarded and replaced that easily, and second, Assad needed the structure of the Baath party to govern and therefore had to commit to its principles, also if only superficially. After the aim of Arab unification became less and less realistic, Hafiz Al-Assad also propagated Syrian nationalism - in an implicit way to not contradict the Baathist official ideology – by using specific Syrian symbols like Palmyra on the banknotes and promoting the status of the army as specifically Syrian, in order to adjust to the political reality of the time and legitimize his rule over Syria. This development was further strengthened after his son Bashar Al-Assad came into power in July 2000. In many speeches inside and outside, Bashar Al-Assad referred proudly to the ancient past of Syria and constructed a national image that was strongly connected to the non-Arab past. However, he also kept referring to the Arab national cause, as a code of resistance against neo-colonial designs and to promote himself as a strong and independent leader. Hence, the nationalist construction of the Assads can be termed state-affirming nationalism and is targeted on securing the loyalty of the citizens by the

creation of an image of a united nation, common symbols and common enemies. Both Arab and Syrian nationalism proved useful for securing the loyalty of the Syrian population and therefore were used accordingly.

Observing the evolution of Syrian nationalism from its beginnings in the middle of the 19th century, main ideas of the Syrian Arab nationalism developed by Butrus Al-Bustani and his compatriots in Beirut kept influential over the centuries and coined the discourse around nationalist constructions in Syria. The first phase was one of proto-nationalism in which the common culture was emphasized, in order to create a form of national consciousness. In this phase, we still cannot differentiate sharply between Arab and Syrian nationalism since both of these characteristics were used synonymously. Also, the first nationalists saw in the Arab language and culture the main unifying element of the Syrian people, but at the same time viewed the promotion of the non-Arab Syrian past as essential for the creation of a unique Syrian consciousness. With the increasing politicization of Syrian nationalism, three different camps developed: Islamic-Arab Syrian, Exclusivist Syrian and Arab nationalism, most prominently in its Baathist form.

Another striking result when looking at the development of nationalist constructions in Syria through the history is that exclusivist Syrian nationalism was a short living phenomenon and today does not play any role in the political scene of Syria. After having lost the battle for power against Baathist Arab nationalism, the SSNP disappeared and did not play any crucial factor anymore. However, during the Lebanese civil war, it shared the Hezbollah friendly position of the Syrian regime and thus it came to a process of rapprochement, and in 2005 the political party was even legalized and got part of the National Progressive Front, which is the Baath led umbrella for all political parties within Syria (foreignpolicy.com, 30.03.2018). The SSNP agreed to become part of the Baathist political system and by that lost their meaning as an independent political actor. It can be analyzed that the Syrian nationalism as formulated by Saadeh was too far removed from the social and political reality the people lived in Syria, especially his propagation of Greater Syria that even included politically and culturally totally different entities like Iraq and Kuwait, had not the slightest chance of being realized. Also, his preoccupation with the proof of the ancient Syrian Nation through primordial mind maneuvers had nothing to do with the reality of Syria and its people that were as a matter of fact mainly influenced by the Arab culture and the Islamic

religion. This explains also why exclusivist Syrian nationalism died, while the idea of Arab nationalism kept alive, although it could not be realized for many decades. In the place of exclusivist Syrian nationalism, a modern form of Syrian nationalism developed, promoted by the Assad regime that focused on the stance of the Syrian army and common national symbols, like the flag and the ancient glorious past as well as common enemies, especially Israel and the USA.

Turning to the constructions of Syrian Nationalism from the Syrian opposition in recent times, three political streams could be observed, all with their specific national imagination of Syria, Islamic Arab Syrian, Kurdish-Syrian and Arab nationalism. The Muslim Brotherhood bases its nationalist views on its historical perspective of a Syria that constituted the heart of the glorious Islamic civilization for many centuries. Departing from this historic narrative, the Islamic and Arab national identity of Syria is unquestionable for the Muslim Brotherhood, and on the ground of this strong nationalist identification, it is argued in their political program that the Syrian nation has to be built on Islamic principles that can be derived from the Quran and Sunnah. Therefore, their nationalist construction does not recognize a separation between the state and religion and sees the main aim of the Islamic nation in the reformation of the individual and his guidance towards the right belief in God through the implementation of moral laws in all fields of life. However, concepts of the modern nation-state like diversity, democracy, freedom etc. are also mentioned frequently and it is asserted that they will be respected within the Islamic nation. But, the analysis of their political program showed that all these liberal concepts are only embraced with the condition that they do not contradict the Islamic religion and no Islamic principles are hurt. Similarly, it is emphasized that the rights of minorities are to be protected, but at the same time the Muslim Brotherhood makes clear that the Islamic Arab identity of Syria is sacred and not to be questioned and that the Islamic identity of the nation also includes non-Muslim minorities since it constitutes also a civilizational identity for them. As a result, Syria is mainly regarded as part of the wider Islamic Arab nation and not as an independent political and cultural entity. However, the Muslim Brotherhood realizes the current impossibility of Arab unification and therefore suggests its political program is only for the Syrian lands and also shows a limited form of pride with Syria when referring to the civilizational achievements before Islam (e.g., the first Alphabet that was created in

Syria). Therefore, it can be analyzed that the Muslim Brotherhood follows an ideal Islamic-Arab and a pragmatic Syrian nationalism.

In strong opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat – Democratic Union Party) does not believe in a Syria defined by the Islamic religion and Arabism, rather it imagines the Syrian nation as a mosaic of ethnicities and religious communities that share one common territory. In its political program, it develops a strong Kurdish nationalism that shares all the characteristics of traditional nationalist narratives. The Kurdish people and nation are described as the oldest on the earth with a glorious history - while the rest of humanity was still living in the stone ages ‘Kurdistan’ already was developed and constituted the nation of the sun for all humanity for more than 20 000 years. Furthermore, it is claimed that the Kurdish people showed great heroism in the face of continued aggression and colonization. On the basis of this emotionally laden Kurdish nationalism, the PYD clearly states the unification of all Kurdish people in one common nation as one of its main goals. However, the PYD also identifies with the Syrian cause since it recalls that the Kurdish people participated in the fight against the French colonizers and also were one of the main actors in the building of the Syrian nation. It is stated that without ‘West-Kurdistan’ – North-Eastern Syria in the Kurdish nationalist terminology – Syria would not be the Syria we know today and probably more of its territory would belong to Lebanon. However, the PYD makes clear that it is against the Arab nationalist conceptualization of Syria that insists on the Arab identity ignoring and denying thereby all other ethnicities that live on the Syrian territory. Rather the ideal Syrian nation is viewed as shelter and homeland for many ethnicities that lived there for thousands of years together, each one free to express their ethnic and religious belonging. How does the PYD reconcile its strong identification with the Kurdish cause and its feeling of belonging to the Syrian national mosaic? In a multi-nationalist construction that tries to circumvent the traditional solitary nation-state structures through the ideology of “democratic confederalism”, the PYD tries to reflect its multinational identification into a politically workable construction of nationalism.

Against the conceptualization of Syria as a mosaic, the ASU (Arab Socialist Union) and the Syrian Democratic People’s Party see the Arab national identity of Syria as a self-evident fact that does not even to be further elaborated on. In their texts, Syria is only

mentioned rarely and then only to describe and criticize the status quo. In their conceptualizations, Syria as a nation is still not accepted by the people who live on its territory, since it constitutes an artificial creation that goes back to colonial times. Rather Syria is described as being an undividable part of the bigger Arab nation and therefore the unification of the Arab lands has absolute priority for the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party. In the political program of the ASU, it is clearly emphasized that regional ambitions come secondary to the wider Arab national cause. Therefore, the Arab nationalist spirit that was dampened by the hardening of the regional Arab states has to be revived through publications, education and the media. Different than the Muslim Brotherhood and the PYD, the Arab nationalist parties do not construct their nationalism out of a historical narrative or the characterization of the uniqueness of the Arab identity, they rather try to construct an image of Arab unity by concentrating on common enemies – Israel and the USA – that is mentioned frequently in the text as the main danger and threat for the Arab world. As for minorities, it is stated that they should enjoy cultural rights, however it is also stressed that the Arab identity of Syria is not to be questioned and that it has to be respected, which means in fact that political actors that do not comply in their imagination with the picture of Arab nationalism are not to be tolerated, although both the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party claim that they are for democratic change, which they see also as essential for the development of the Arab lands and eventually their unification.

In today's political discourse, we still can see the historic Islamic-Arab Syrian nationalism reflected in the nationalist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. It can be analyzed that, like in the work of Rashid Rida, they believe ideally in the Islamic nation, but are ready to work pragmatically for Syria, since the unification of all the Islamic lands is totally unrealistic. However, it seems that the Islamic nationalist imagination of the Muslim Brotherhood is way more far-reaching, targeting directly the individual and working for his "reformation" according to Islamic principles. In many sections of their political program, they make very clear that they do not believe in the separation of religion and state and that Islam is a religion that encompasses all aspects of life. Rashid Rida on the other hand seems not as radical in his Islamic nationalist perceptions. This becomes clear in his assertion that there are many societal fields in which no Islamic regulations are to be found. Furthermore, in his insistence that there should be a basic

separation between the religious and the political power, and eventually in his pragmatic work for the first constitution of the Syria nation. So, it can be concluded that Islamic Arab Syrian nationalism got more radical over the time and that the reformatory spirit of Muhammad Abdu's time seemed to have faded away and given space to more radical conceptualizations.

Analyzing the various forms of Syrian nationalism, we can conclude that no civil and liberal Syrian nationalism developed, which recognized the supremacy of the Syrian identity. This means all the citizens of Syria as being Syrian by their citizenship, no matter what their ethnic and religious belonging constituted, imagining a nation in which no ethnicity or religious belonging should stand over the other. Islamic-Arab Syrian nationalism emphasizes the Islamic national identity and Arab nationalism the belonging to the Arab one. Therefore, these nationalist constructions are similar in their emphasis on one ethnic or religious identity that comes before the Syrian national identity and is claimed to have primacy within the Syrian nation. Kurdish Syrian nationalism differs in its imagination of Syria as being a mosaic of different ethnicities and religions that all should be treated equally. However, it also emphasizes the Kurdish national identity on the expense of the Syrian one, demanding the unification of the Kurdish people in one Kurdish nation and autonomy for the parts of North-Eastern Syria, which are termed 'West-Kurdistan'. The case of Kurdish Syrian nationalism is also hard to grasp from a theoretical perspective since multinationalism seems to contradict with the main principle of nationalism as formulated by Gellner (2006, 1) "which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". In the principle of Gellner, it is implied that there is only one national unit that seeks political independence. But, what if there are two national belongings like in the case of the PYD? The PYD tries to find for their two national identifications also two political units within the Syrian nation and the Kurdish one, by affirming their loyalty to the current borders and at the same time demanding autonomy and the unification of 'Kurdistan'. Therefore, we can theorize it as state independent multinationalism.

Hence, it can be concluded that the constructions of nationalism among the various political movements differ strongly in their imaginations of Syria, especially when it comes to the question what constitutes its main psychological national identity. However, the differences show not only in their different perceptions of the national

identity of Syria but also in their political views. While the Muslim Brotherhood favours a system in which religion plays a big role, the Arab nationalist parties and the PYD are strictly secular, demanding a separation of state and religion. Also, they do not agree on the political system. The Arab nationalist parties demand a democratic one, the Muslim Brotherhood a form of limited democracy that is based on Islamic principles and the PYD democratic confederalism that works through bottom-up processes. Therefore, the nationalist constructions and imaginations within Syria are very confrontational, differing in the most basic questions about national identity, imagined communities and political structure.

Departing from the conceptualization of national identity by Guibernau (2004: 130-141), we can come to the conclusion that the analyzed political movements differ in all aspects of their construction of national identity, the psychological, cultural, historical, territorial and political one.

Psychologically and culturally, the Muslim Brotherhood identifies with Islam, Kurdish Syrian nationalism mainly with the Kurdish cause and the Arab nationalists with the Arab culture. In their feeling of territorial belonging there are also differences since the PYD claims a multinational territorial identity that includes Syria and imagined 'Kurdistan', the Muslim Brotherhood ideally imagines the nation that unites all Islamic countries and the Arab nationalists aim at the unification of all the Arab lands and see Syria as only a regional part that cannot be divided from it. Furthermore, it can be analyzed that all the significant political movements share very different imagined communities. The Muslim Brotherhood imagines all the Muslims as being part of one community that has to be reflected also politically in one national unit, the PYD all the Kurdish, and the ASU and the Syrian Democratic People's Party all the Arabs. These different constructions of national identity and various imaginations bear a conflictual potential since they cannot be easily reconciled with each other. While the nationalism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the one of the Arab nationalists agree about the significance of the Arab identity and differs mainly in the question of the importance of the Islamic religion as a source of political authority, Kurdish Syrian nationalism obviously strongly contests the notion of the Arab identity of the Syrian nation and rather imagines it as a mosaic that includes many different ethnicities and religious groups.

These very different and confrontational nationalist constructions, additionally to the absence of a Syrian nationalism that puts the Syrian identity first treating all the ethnic belongings and religions within Syria as equal, raise the question how a united Syrian nation can be even imagined. The fact that there is no nationalist conceptualization that imagines a Syrian community as such, that includes all the different ethnicities and religious belongings in one national and political unit may play a crucial factor in the complexity of the current civil war and the seeming impossibility of finding a solution on which all the conflicting parties could agree. However, the limited framework of this study does not allow researching on the relation between different confrontational nationalist constructions and the civil war further. It is up to further research to look at this relationship in detail.

Another field for future research about Syrian nationalism has to look at national identifications and constructions of nationalism apart from the major thinkers and political movements. As Hobsbawm (1990: 134-136) very rightly criticized, most of the nationalism studies analyze it as a phenomenon from above that is promoted by some elites and trickles down to the masses. The limited frame of this study does not allow also examining the national identification of people in Syria that are not part of any political parties and their imagined communities. The open question is if the majority of the Syrian population also identify themselves like suggested in the political programs as Muslim, Arab or Kurdish first and only then as Syrian, or imagine themselves belonging accordingly to different national communities.

It can be assumed that a major shift occurred within the Syrian national consciousness after the Syrian uprising. The decades long official version of Baathist nationalism was suddenly being questioned openly and a political discourse on the meaning of Syria broke out that changed the perception of what Syria meant for the Syrians. Especially for Syrians in the diaspora, being Syrian suddenly meant also being a refugee, being from a state with which they politically could not identify, that was maybe in the emotional sense of the word still their homeland, considering the concept of Brubaker, but could not any longer serve as their state, as their place of living, which offered them protection and shelter.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians started feeling the weight of being Syrian, whether if it was due to the restricted access to enter any foreign country – especially after some

years of the crisis, as the migration policies of neighboring countries and the EU tightened - or whether it was the difficulties they faced as internally displaced people within Syria, having left their own cities and hometowns. Being Syrian means today for almost half of the Syrian population to be displaced, either being a refugee (5 million) or internally displaced (6 million). How did the national consciousness change with this drastic change in the lives of millions of Syrian people, who were forced to leave their homeland? An own study needs to look into this question, however a preliminary observation in the social media, newspapers and the public opinion reveals that similarly to what was analyzed in this thesis, the national identity in Syria is deeply fragmented. Although there is a sense of being Syrian in an emotional sense, which is mainly constituted through Arabic as a common language (also a common dialect) and a distinct culture, the Syrian national identity is devoid of a unifying political element.

It can be analyzed that the historic divide in the constructions of nationalisms in Syria carried on into the present day and developed a strong permanence that could not be easily replaced by a civic nationalism with the power to unify the Syrian people under one national political consciousness that put the Syrian identity politically first, before any ethnic or religious belonging. A look into the social media suffices to detect the radical rhetoric when the talk is about Syria, on the one side an Islamic Sunni nation is being hailed that needs to resist the violence that is deployed by Assad and his allies, which is interpreted mainly as an Alawi/Shiite complot against the Sunna in the country. On the other side, radical forms of identification with the own sect and ethnicity have developed that put the own community first, while totally ignoring a common Syrian national identity.

Returning to the historic evolvement of nationalist thought in Syria and its roots, we can come to the conclusion that the main purpose of the nationalism of Butrus Al-Bustani and his compatriots – replacing the *usba diniyya* (religious solidarity) with the *usba wataniyya* (national) has greatly failed throughout all the 20th century and also today is far from sight. Syria today is a fragmented state and society with an identity that is deeply influenced by the various conflict lines that are drawn through its fabric.

However, to understand the evolvement of the Syrian national identity and Syrian nationalist constructions in the wake of the Syrian uprising in depth, sociological studies are needed, which take into consideration the changing dynamic political and social

context. This master thesis can serve as a first orientation for the conceptual framework Syrian nationalist constructions are operating in, the main concepts and ideas that formed through the history until this very day around the Syrian nation and its meaning. What does Syria mean today after the civil war and the diaspora experience of millions of Syrians? Is it still identified as the homeland or has an assimilation process begun, in which the receiving states are taking the place as a new nation? What about the Syrian people that made the experience of internally displacement? How their experience of internal displacement did change their perception of the Syrian nation? Finally, also the Syrian people who did not displace, how did the crisis and the civil war influenced the Syrian nationalist discourse and outlook. These and other questions will need to be addressed by future research.

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