

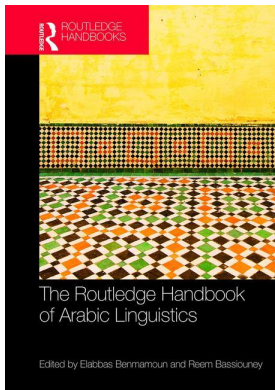
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### Arab nationalism and/as language ideology

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# ARAB NATIONALISM AND/AS LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

*Keith Walters*

## 1 Introduction

This chapter examines Arab nationalism as a political and language ideology during the last century and a half or so, arguing that it was unable to achieve its goal at least partly because of the exceedingly heavy role it assigned Arabic and more particularly the *fushaa*, or standardized supra-national variety of the language, which was given the task of uniting individuals and countries from Mauritania to Syria into a single nation. This ideology developed at a time when the Arab world sought to create a sense of political unity while struggling against outside forces, including Ottomanism, European colonialism, and Zionism, as well as internal divisions. Those living in the Arab world did not share an ethnicity or religion (though many argued that they shared a history, common myths, and historical memories) – all building blocks of nationalism for many Western theorists. Hence, this language variety was recruited to serve as the “moral glue” that held the Arab world together (Choueri 2000, p. 94). To achieve its goal, this chapter is structured as follows: section 2 offers background on Arab nationalism, analyzing it as a political and language ideology; section 3 focuses on the topics of diglossia and standard language ideology as well as nationalism and linguistic purism; and section 4 discusses directions for future research.

Before continuing, let me be clear about what I am not arguing. In no way do I question the deep and abiding sense of identity that those identifying as Arabs from one country often perceive themselves as sharing with those who identify as Arab from other countries. (Importantly, citizens in several of the countries of the Arab world do not identify as Arab, and there are those who identify as Arab whose citizenship is in a country not part of the Arab world. This reality presents immediate challenges for envisioning any Arab *nationalism*.) In my experience, the shared identity of Arabs is far stronger than any sense of shared identity I experience with native Anglophones from other countries where English is the dominant language and with whom I share many cultural traditions and value orientations. In short, there is no greater Anglophone community – and certainly no polity or “nation” – to which we belong, a situation I do not grieve. My concern is, then, how language relates to whatever exists (or fails to) in that imagined space between what native Anglophones share and the ideology of those who believed in Arab nationalism as a force that could realize a unified polity composed of what have become the nation-states of the Arab world.

## 2 Historical background and perspective

In this section, I briefly survey research on Arab nationalism before examining it from the perspective of political and language ideology. Like most vast literatures, it is contentious. Because my concern is not the history of Arab nationalism or intellectual debates about it, I trust it sufficient to summarize the major issues that arise in those debates as background for the discussion that follows. Importantly, these issues occur *mutatis mutandis* in discussions of all nationalisms.

The broadest question is that of origins, whether one should treat Arab nationalism as something existing since time immemorial or a fairly recent phenomenon. Spencer and Wollman (2002) would label the former perspective primordialist or perennialist, depending on whether its adherents argue that Arab nationalism has always existed or that something like it has recurred across history, respectively. Particularly in areas like the Middle East, where groups have lived for millennia, the attraction of primordialism or perennialism cannot be denied: it is the perspective assumed by theorists of Arab nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th century. Likewise, it continues to shape the narratives of nation-states across the region. Just as schoolchildren in France and French colonies around the world (including older North African colleagues), memorized a poem that began “Our ancestors, the Gauls. . .,” Tunisian schoolchildren today learn about the Berbers and the Phoenicians while Egyptian school children learn about the pharaohs. Significantly, citizens of each country, especially the elite, assume direct and unbroken links between these narratives of the past and the country of which they are a part. Such narratives of “territorial” or “nation-state nationalism” (also referred to as “state patriotism”) play a constitutive role in inculcating a sense of what it means to be a Tunisian or an Egyptian and how each is distinct. Ultimately, the goal is to create citizens who are simultaneously Tunisian or Egyptian, on the one hand, and Arab on the other; however, in nearly all cases, nation-state loyalty wins out. A counter-narrative of growing influence across the region would rewrite its history as having begun in the Arabian Gulf, dismissing or even erasing all other narratives as irrelevant, part of the days of *jāhilīyya*, or ignorance, prior to the revelation of the Qu’rān. Importantly, both these types of narratives – that of the nation-state and of a Muslim theocracy – stand as sharp evidence of the inability of Arab nationalism to achieve its stated goal of creating a supranational political entity that would unify the countries of the Arab world.

In contrast to those who make primordialist or perennialist arguments, contemporary theorists of nationalism generally understand nationalism to be a modern (and even modernist) ideology. Spencer and Wollman (2002) define nationalism as

an ideology which imagines the community in a particular way (as national), asserts the primacy of this collective identity over other, and seeks political power in its name, ideally (if not exclusively or elsewhere) in the form of a state for the nation (or a nation-state).

(pp. 2–3)

As such theorists remind us, we currently live under a regime of nation-states, whereby the world is perceived as being “naturally” divided into political entities called states composed of individuals who see themselves as sharing a national identity. Of course, such was not always the case.

In this context, Arab nationalism is a modern ideology. For researchers subscribing to this perspective, three intertwined sets of issues arise. One major question is whether the

movement's source(s) should be located in an individual (generally, Ṣāṭi' Al-Ḥuṣri), a group (e.g., the 19th-century reformers), or a series of events (e.g., Ottoman reforms). A second relevant issue is periodization: what specific events best delineate the major stages in its development? Key issues here include the shift from “*uruba* [or pan-Arabism], . . . a general commitment to a common national identity based on bonds woven by language, culture (religion in particular), history, and shared destinies” to “a more radical and coherent [political] movement dubbed Arab nationalism,” or *al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya*, to its relative decline following the 1967 Six-Day War (Choueiri 2005, p. 297). Such supra-national commitments, especially to that of a unified political entity, necessarily stand in conflict with the territorial nationalism of individual nation-states even as they presuppose their existence.

A third concern is the degree to which Arab nationalism is something homegrown or shaped by external forces. Here, scholars are divided on several issues, including (1) the extent to which the rise of Arab nationalism was a reaction against the reforms of the Young Turks or earlier Ottoman policies; (2) the role of the *nahḍa*, or the late-19th and early 20th-century Arab Awakening/Renaissance, and Lebanese Christians, in particular, in the formulation of Arab nationalism; (3) the role of French versus German theorizing about nationalism, the events in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the contact of educated Arabs (often fluent in a European language resulting from their educations as colonized subjects) with “modern” notions relating to science and secularism; (4) the role of the dissemination of such ideas among the non-elites, particularly the role of a diverse popular press, a growing access to literacy, and the advent of radio (especially the Voice of the Arabs); and (5) the role of colonialism or Western imperialism more broadly, including the great increase in the European Jewish population in Palestine beginning in the late 19th century. Readers familiar with the history of the Arab world over the past century and a half can immediately imagine the ways that language became imbricated in debates about each of these topics.

Thus, regardless of the perspective theorists of Arab nationalism have taken – primordialist, perennialist, or modernist – language is always an issue. Especially for those taking a primordialist or perennialist perspective, the language is linked both to Islam and “the glorious past,” these two latter being inseparable in many ways even for thinkers like Michel Aflaq, the Syrian Christian whom many see as the founder of Ba'athism. Indeed, Arabic plays a foundational role in earlier theorizing on topics like Arab nationalism, which often wrestled with the question of who is (or is not) an Arab as demonstrated in the surveys of Suleiman (2003, 2004). Grounded in the social sciences, the more recent discussions across the past few decades have often sought to analyze Arab nationalism as a historical phenomenon, focusing on understanding debates about the three sets of issues discussed earlier, including the role of language in each.

### 2.1 Arab nationalism as political and language ideology

An understanding of the role of the Arabic language in the construction of nationalisms, including Arab nationalism, across the Arab world stands at the intersection of several disciplines. Here, I draw primarily on two, history and linguistic anthropology, each of which conceptualizes ideology in complementary ways. Humphreys, a historian, notes that Americans generally conceive of ideology in negative terms, associating it with those with whom we disagree. In contrast, Europeans and those who live in the Arab world assume that many aspects of daily life are ideologized in complex ways.

In his discussion of the “strange career of Pan-Arabism,” the term he uses for Arab Nationalism, Humphreys (2001, p. 61) defines political ideology as “a broad, systematic critique

of a given sociopolitical system that both describes the system and calls on its members to defend, alter, or overthrow it.” Thus, it stands as “both analysis and a call to action.” Noting that ideologies “arise in a context of change” dramatic enough to disrupt the current social and political order, he further points out that ideologies are simultaneously “utopian” and “absolute,” based on totalizing assumptions about what reality is like. Likewise, he explains that a political “ideology is conveyed to its audience in ways that are simultaneously rational and highly emotive.” In discussing the clear conflict between what rhetoricians term logical and pathetic appeals – that is, appeals based on logic, reason, and fact, in the first instance, and the emotions of the audience, in the second, he observes:

A sophisticated ideology is quite able to support its program through elaborate rational arguments, but in the political arena it is more likely to resort to flag-waving and the chanting of slogans. . . [However,] one should never assume that a crude stump speech reflects a lack of important and complex ideas.

With this background, Humphreys then claims that Arab nationalism has no equal among the ideologies that “have played on the Middle Eastern stage” (2001, p. 61).

From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, language ideologies are conceived in narrower, but no less powerful terms. Irvine (1989) has defined a language ideology as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (p. 255). In their insightful analysis, Irvine and Susan Gal (2000) distinguish three interlocking semiotic processes by which linguistic difference comes to be linked with extralinguistic phenomena “subject to the interests of their bearers’ social position” (p. 35), that is, the processes by which language ideologies come into being:

- 1 *iconization*, whereby a linguistic feature or language variety comes to stand in for a social group;
- 2 *fractal recursivity*, whereby an opposition salient at some level of social organization is projected or mapped onto another level; and
- 3 *erasure*, whereby certain phenomena, social or linguistic, are rendered invisible (pp. 37–38).

It is not at all challenging to illustrate these processes in light of discussions of Arabic and various nationalisms across the Arab world. By the fourth century AH and perhaps earlier, Arabic was referred to as *lughat al-dād* ‘the language of /dʕ/’ because the presence of the phoneme /dʕ/ was seen as distinguishing Arabic from other languages (Suleiman 2003, p. 59). A t-shirt I own that was created in the 1990s by Tunisian immigrants to the US uses an idiosyncratic transliteration system to proclaim: *Blāsh Tunsi mānāsh Tuānsā* “without Tunisian Arabic, we are not Tunisians” (Walters 2015). Both these examples illustrate iconization in that some particular linguistic feature – a specific phoneme or language variety, here, a national dialect – stands as representing an essential characteristic of a social group: Arabs, that is, those who speak with /dʕ/, or Tunisians, those who speak Tunisian Arabic, respectively. These examples likewise remind us that languages serve simultaneously a solidarity function and an exclusionary function, distinguishing “us” from “them.”

With regard to the ideology of Arab nationalism, Arabic came to play a similar role, defining an Arab as one who speaks Arabic and proclaiming that all who do (at least natively) are part of an entity termed “the Arab nation,” which should operate at a level of integration far

greater than, say, the current European Union. As explained in section 3.2, the focus of the process of iconization was not merely Arabic but the use of the *fushaa*.

An additional example from Tunisia demonstrates the processes of fractal recursivity and erasure, which operate in tandem. In linking the French language, including Arabic/French codeswitching, with women as they commonly do, Tunisians, almost all of whom are native speakers of Tunisian Arabic, engage in both these processes. Tunisians of both sexes with any degree of education speak French and likewise frequently codeswitch using Arabic and French. However, by linking French and codeswitching with women, Tunisians project an aspect of intraspeaker variation – variability in an individual’s linguistic practices – onto intergroup differences – the behavior of Tunisian men and women, an example of fractal recursivity. To achieve this, they must simultaneously “simplify . . . the sociolinguistic field” in Irvine and Gal’s (2000, p. 38) terms by ignoring or minimizing the facts of their own practices. These processes implicitly link Arabic with men, thus rendering women *depaysées* or out of place in certain regards in their own country (Walters 2011). It is worth noting that we find similar sorts of language ideologies across the Arab world and, indeed, in all cultures and societies: there is nothing unusual, exotic, or deviant about Tunisia or the Arab world when it comes to language or language ideologies.

Such sentiments about multilingualism, French, and Arabic are not limited to comments about the gendering of French in Tunisia. Knowledge of French is also intimately linked to ideologies about nationalism, both nation-state nationalism and some grander notion of Arab nationalism. A cartoon in *La Presse*, one of Tunisia’s Francophone dailies, railed against then-president Marzouki’s call for further Arabizing of the school curriculum noting, “They marry French women, they write books in French, they send their children to study in France, and they want to impose Arabization on the people!” (Lotfi, May 28, 2014, translation mine). Both these Tunisian examples remind us of the aptness of Humphrey’s observation that ideologies are most salient in times of radical social change that often renegotiates social boundaries – or seeks to.

These Tunisian examples likewise provide evidence of a major stumbling block to any formulation of Arab nationalism that takes language – and more particularly the *fushaa* – as its foundation: the existence (and even the necessity) of other languages, especially languages of wider communication, in the Arab world. The same was true early in the last century, at a time when much of the Arab world was colonized by Britain or France and when much of the theorizing about Arab nationalism took place. Such theorizing was, of course, done by the elites, who were, by and large, bilingual and often bicultural; their focus, however, was a single language, Arabic.

At this juncture, it is worth juxtaposing these two ways of conceptualizing ideologies. Like Humphreys, the political scientist, Irvine, the anthropologist, conceives of ideologies as systems of ideas, rather than isolated attitudes. Further, these ideas presume links between language – whether bits of the linguistic system, particular language varieties, or language practices like codeswitching – and extralinguistic phenomena. These links always include value-charged assessments. Thus, it is not simply that with respect to Tunisian men, Tunisian women are said to speak French more often, to speak it “better” (that is, with an accent that takes the native speaker of standard French as model), or to engage in codeswitching involving French more – all observations that are likely empirically accurate. Rather, it is that when such observations are made, they carry the implicit or explicit assessments that such social facts are regrettable and must be accounted for (Walters 2011). Importantly, such accounts provide evidence of Humphrey’s observation that ideologies come packed simultaneously

in rationality and strong emotion. Language ideologies are accompanied by rationalizations, however flawed, even as they represent a society's narrative efforts to explain the visceral – that is, literally embodied – reactions language or language practices can evoke.

Further, although linguistic anthropologists often do not consider language ideologies in quite the terms Humphreys uses, such ideologies are, at least implicitly, calls to action that are both utopian and absolute. The complaint about Tunisian women's use of French, which erases the complexity of actual gendered linguistic practice and of history, presupposes a Tunisia where things are different, where Arabic plays an individual and collective role for women, the nation-state, and perhaps the entire Arab world that it does not currently play. It leaves unexamined the complex situation of the larger world order where languages other than Arabic, specifically French, the former colonial language and now the second language of most Tunisians, and increasingly English, are necessary for the country and its citizens in an increasingly globalized economy. It likewise erases variability within and across varieties of Arabic – including the *fushḥaa* itself.

### 3 Critical issues and topics

This section first examines diglossia in light of the notion of standard language ideology before turning to a discussion of nationalism and linguistic purism in an effort to understand the consequences of iconizing the *fushḥaa* as the prime focus of Arab nationalism.

#### 3.1 Diglossia and standard language ideology

An aspect of language ideology significant in understanding discussions of Arabic as it relates to nationalism is what Lippi-Green (1994) terms *standard language ideology*, or “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed from above, and which takes as its model the written language. The most salient feature is suppression of variation of all kinds” (p. 166).

The ideologies associated with Arabic diglossia likely represent the most complete instantiation of standard language ideology in existence, a fact that falls out from the very nature of diglossia itself as first characterized in the English-language research literature by Ferguson (1959) and the history of Arabic (Walters 2003, 2007). Students of sociolinguistics are well-acquainted with Ferguson's definition of diglossia. Traditionally, it has been described as a relationship involving the two varieties, the “primary [native] dialect” being labeled the “low” variety while the “superposed variety” is termed the “high variety,” labels that are ultimately themselves quite problematic. In the case of Arabic, the regional dialects are referred to as representing together the low variety while the *fushḥaa* is considered the high variety. In fact, such a dichotomy presents a vast oversimplification since each of the nation-states of the Arab world has a distinct spoken variety. For this reason, we speak of Tunisian Arabic, Lebanese Arabic, and Moroccan Arabic, among others. Further, each national dialect is characterized by internal regional, social, and often communal (i.e., confessional) variability. At the same time, national varieties are grouped into larger regional varieties (e.g., North African, Levantine, Egyptian, Gulf), reflecting not only dialect history, including language contact, but also the relative degree of mutual intelligibility.

Despite Ferguson's focus on the “relative stability” of diglossic situations, diglossia is inherently characterized by linguistic conflict. It is important to acknowledge, however, that an approach to diglossia as linguistic conflict is not commonly found in Anglophone discussions of the phenomenon. Rather, it derives from the work of Francophone scholars (e.g., Kremnitz

(1981) and others in a special issue of *Langages*). These researchers were deeply influenced by Fishman (1971) and Marxist conflict theory, which contrasted markedly with the Parsonian structuralism favored by US sociolinguists (Walters 1989, pp. 49–54). Such an approach is especially useful, however, when considering language ideology and language practice, both of which are relevant in understanding the links between language and Arab nationalism because as accounts of debates about language in the Arab world clearly demonstrate (e.g., Haeri 2003; Suleiman 2003, 2004), Arab elites constructed and continue to construct the *fushāa* as standing in direct conflict with the dialect – another case of erasure, since variability across dialects of Arabic is not acknowledged.

The language varieties involved in diglossia are necessarily in conflict in at least two senses. First, they compete in the mind of the individual language user. Much as most bi-dialectal and bilingual speakers demonstrate negative transfer from one of their language varieties into the other, language users in diglossic contexts do likewise. From a psycholinguistic perspective, we might posit that it is more challenging to keep two closely related varieties of a single language distinct than is keeping two languages, especially standardized ones, separate. Predictably, listeners can generally guess the national origin of a native speaker of Arabic who is speaking the *fushāa* because the speaker's phonology reflects her or his native variety of spoken Arabic, and the phonology of the *fushāa* is not standardized in the ways its syntax is. This observation likewise helps account for national differences in the use of the *fushāa*, where there is, indeed, variation, especially at the lexical level. Further, Arab colleagues who also speak French and English often claim they can frequently guess whether the writer of an Arabic text is from a country colonized by France or Britain because the rhetorical traditions of those languages have come to influence Arabic text structure written in those countries. As these cases illustrate, discussions of Arab nationalism idealize the *fushāa* as a far more homogeneous entity than it, in fact, is.

Similarly, particularly because the high variety is superposed, we can assume that in all but the rarest of cases, mastery of that variety can never match that of the native dialect, a claim further complicated in the multilingual contexts found across the Arab world. There, not only is the high variety in contact with other standardized languages, but it is also the case that less time is devoted to its mastery than might otherwise be the case because of time spent mastering other languages of wider communication. Yet, in the current globalized world order, those who would succeed have no choice but to master at least one such additional language.

Second, the varieties are in competition in the social sphere in at least two ways: each is competing for contexts of use, and each is competing for value in the larger social semiotic domain. In other words, each variety is vying to be used in speaking and/or writing, in formal and/or informal context, in public and/or private settings, in face-to-face and in various mediated forms of communication (e.g., radio, television, the Internet). Certainly, a major shift across the Arab world over the past several decades is the growing number of domains in which Arabic is used or mandated whereas earlier, the colonial language was preferred or required. In this regard, efforts at Arabization across the Arab world have succeeded greatly.

Such competition is likewise evident in the conventionalized way that media discussions traditionally begin in the *fushāa* (or something closer to the *fushāa* end of the diglossic continuum), but the longer they go on, the more likely the speakers involved engage in diglossic switching between the two varieties (Schultz 1981), increasingly using the dialect as matrix with varying kinds and degrees of embedding from the *fushāa*. Increasingly, in some countries, diglossic switching (often with limited use of the *fushāa*) is the rule, rather than the exception in many such interviews. A second social space where competition is especially evident is the



new media – the Internet, text messaging, and Twitter – where the written use of the dialect, alternative forms of transcribing the dialect using Roman script, and codeswitching with other languages have quickly evolved as the norm (Chun and Walters 2012; Walters 2015).

More important for the topic of Arab nationalism, however, is the second kind of competition in the social sphere, namely, the one that occurs in the social semiotic domain, which is where language ideologies are made manifest in terms of claims about various language varieties, on the one hand, in contrast to what is empirically true about those varieties, on the other. In every society, the disjuncture is real and often quite evident to all who examine the gap between ideologies and actual practices. As Suleiman (2003, p. 14) rightly notes, when the focus is national – or one might add, supranational – identity, one is not concerned with the truth value of ideological claims. Rather, one's focus is their symbolic power in the sense that Bourdieu (1991) uses the term.

### 3.2 *Nationalism and linguistic purism*

An especially significant aspect of competition in the symbolic sphere takes the form of linguistic purism, which has long characterized discussions of diglossia in Arabic and is intimately linked to Lippi-Green's notion of standard language ideology. Thomas (1991), rightly contending that nationalism is the greatest force behind purism, defines purism as

the manifestation of the desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve language from, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects, and styles of the same language). It may be directed at all linguistic levels but primarily the lexicon. Above all, purism is an aspect of codification, cultivation, and planning of standard languages.

(p. 12)

It is likely challenging for readers unfamiliar with the Arabic situation to appreciate the intensity of the urge toward purism that has characterized much of the discourse on Arabic by Arabs. To illustrate the degree of this intensity, it is useful to examine Thomas's seven-point scale of the development of purism across languages. The scale ranges from marginal – one – to revolutionary – seven. English, Russian, and Polish stand as examples of the marginal anchor; here, purism is part of the development of the standardized variety of the language but never extends to the entire speech community. Turkish represents the revolutionary end of the continuum (Lewis 1999), characterized by “an abrupt and violent change from one pattern [of purism] to another” (p. 159). Arabic, along with Tamil and Icelandic, is labelled “stable, consistent purism,” representing the sixth point on the scale; in these cases, purism becomes and remains a feature of the speech community. For Arabic, this means that Lippi-Green's standard language ideology is the dominant language ideology for the entire speech community. Significantly, however, though the practices continue to change – as noted earlier with language use in cyberspace, the ideology remains robust.

Much influenced by Smith's (1971) analysis of nationalist ideologies, Thomas also offers a useful analysis of the substantive parallels between nationalism and linguistic purism (Table 26.1).

These parallel taxonomies help students of language and nationalism examine the complex, overlapping, and frequently contradictory forces at work when language is incorporated into discourses of nationalism. With regard to theorizing Arab nationalism, primordialists made

Table 26.1 Substantive parallels between nationalist ideologies and purist orientations (based on Thomas 1991)

<i>Nationalist Ideology</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Purist Orientation</i>	<i>Characterization of the Purist Orientation</i>
Populist Nationalism	“Nostalgia and <i>idealisation</i> for the countryside and folk virtues” (Thomas 1991, p. 137).	Ethnographic Purism	“[Certain] rural dialects are somehow purer than city speech or the standard” (Thomas 1991, p. 77).
Integrationist Nationalism	“Nationalism as an antidote to social disintegration” (Thomas 1991, p. 137).	Elitist	“A negative, proscriptive attitude toward substandard and regional <i>sage</i> ”; like archaizing purism, assumes “language is perfectible” (Thomas 1991, pp. 78–79).
Reformist Nationalism	“Repudiation of a past age of decay” (Thomas 1991, p. 137).	Reformist Purism	“Coming to terms with the resources . . . accrued during earlier periods . . . and adapting the language . . . as a medium of communication in a modern society” (Thomas 1991, p. 79).
Traditionalist Nationalism	“Glorification of a past golden age” (Thomas 1991, p. 137).	Archaizing Purism	“Resuscitat[ing] the linguistic material of a past golden age, an exaggerated respect for past literary models, an excessive conservatism towards innovations or a recognition of the importance of literary tradition, [including that associated with sacred texts]” (Thomas 1991, p. 76).
Independence, Irredentist, and Racialist Nationalism	“Resistance to foreign domination” (Thomas 1991, p. 137)	Xenophobic Purism	“Eradication or replacement of foreign elements, whether their source is specified . . . or . . . general” (Thomas 1991, pp. 80–81).

claims about the cultural virtues that define the Arabs. The notion of Arab nationalism was for all theorists “an antidote to social disintegration” (integrationist nationalism) that had occurred across the Arab world since the end of an imagined past golden age, when the Arab world was united and controlled its own destiny – an argument associated with traditional nationalism. Another recurring theme, the desire to throw off the foreign control – whether that of Turkey, European colonial powers, or later Zionism – represents a nationalism focused on independence but tied in complex ways to race/ethnicity and irredentism.

The distinction among various purist orientations immediately highlights recurring themes in discussions of Arabic. Although the often-repeated claim that historically the “best” Arabic was that spoken by certain Bedouin tribes in the Hijāz represents ethnographic purism, this form of purism did not figure largely in theorizing Arab nationalism, a point to which I return, although there were certainly claims about the purity of Arabic itself as a language, one with tribal roots. Elitist purism is the foundation of the standard language ideology in any language and certainly for Arabic. The reformist tendency seeks to modernize the language, whether by using drawing on local, internal resources (which can be ethnographic or archaizing) or external ones – which would entail linguistic borrowing from colonial languages, whether Ottoman

Turkish or European – or indigenous ones like Berber or Kurdish. Such borrowing is anathema to xenophobic purists, who desire lexis of Arabic origin. Indeed, Thomas (1991, p. 77) notes, “perhaps the most striking example of archaizing purism . . . is to be found in Arabic.”

We see the confluence of nationalist ideologies and orientations toward language purism in Choueri’s (2000) discussion of the shifting emphasis of al-Ḥuṣṣri’s thought across the decades. Initially he conceived of language in a Herderian fashion, “a previous gift designed to buttress feelings of solidarity between its speakers” (p. 118) that served as the basis for national identity by shaping values and, hence, character. Later, language became less a symbol and more a tool for communication, particularly “carry[ing] out practical tasks related to the welfare of the individual” in the nation-state (p. 118). Thus, a “common standardized language accessible to, and understood by, all citizens” was required (p. 119). Given al-Ḥuṣṣri’s emphasis on history and language, we can see evidence of all of the nationalist ideologies in the development of his thought and that of many theorists of Arab nationalism. Given the nature of Arabic diglossia, it is little surprise that so many of these thinkers thought less about practical matters associated with realizing the tasks being assigned to the *fushḥaa*, focusing instead on defining it in abstract terms of what it was not – the dialect or a foreign language.

Particularly interesting for our discussion are the ways that diglossia and purism interact. As Thomas notes, the trajectory of Greek diglossia, one of Ferguson’s four defining cases, has developed such that two standards, one deriving from the high variety and the other from the low, coexist and are in competition (1991, p. 130). In contrast, in Arabic, debates about purism have focused (almost) uniquely on the *fushḥaa*, which must be protected from influence from the dialects and from other languages – elitist and xenophobic orientations, respectively.

Thomas (1991) contends that elites are often concerned with a need for intelligibility (cf. al-Ḥuṣṣri) and that in most cases this concern manifests itself in a focus on ethnographic purism, noting:

the perceived need for intelligibility is really a mask for a motivation based on a desire for national solidarity by removing barriers to social unity. We are reminded here of Gellner’s assertion that, strictly speaking, nationalism is a crisis in the intelligentsia, “a class which is alienated from its society by the very fact of its education” (quoted in Smith 1971, pp. 132–133). To restore intercomprehensibility between the élite and the uneducated masses removes a cause of alienation.

(p. 51)

The situation in Arabic is, of course, quite different. While we may debate the extent to which the intelligentsia who theorized Arab nationalism were alienated from their society because of their educations as colonial subjects, to which they merely sought to find ways to bring modernity to their societies, to which they experienced some deeper sense of *ressentiment*, or to which some combination of these factors was in play, it is clear that given their historical and even geographical context as well as the nature of Arabic diglossia, the *fushḥaa* was the only language (variety) available to them to serve as a potential unifying force. As noted in section 1, despite the geographic continuity of the countries of the Arab world, it was not the case that all Arabs – and certainly not all citizens of the Arab world – shared a religion or even an ethnicity (and certainly not a “pure” one). Similarly, the range of varieties of Arabic spoken across the Arab world, all derived from an earlier source but by no means mutually intelligible, obviously could not serve as a unifier. In other words, any effort to increase intelligibility or remove barriers from social unity *across* what are today the various nation-states of the Arab

world could not depend on the national dialects (or even some campaign to standardize them). At the same time, choosing the *fushāa* could not possibly minimize any “alienation” between elites and masses although it was in line with the accepted standard language ideology because all members of the society held the *fushāa* in high esteem.

Thus, at one level, for lack of better, language – and more particularly the *fushāa* – became iconized as symbolizing Arabness and Arab nationalism. At the same time, from a more positive perspective, given its symbolic links to a glorious past, to the religion of the majority of Arabs, and, more practically, its function as the written variety and the very medium in which the published theorizing was taking place, the *fushāa* was the logical choice for such a task. Such a choice involved multiple instantiations of the fractal recursivity and erasure, described in section 2.1, as allegiance to and conceptualizations of this language variety became in many ways “utopian” and “absolute,” laden with “moral and political interests” often left unarticulated.

Likewise, because of Arab nationalism’s focus on the *fushāa*, a continued concern shared by certain elites across the Arab world, national dialects have continued to develop as a result of the processes of external (contact-induced) and internal change; in other words, there has been no standard language ideology to impede their development and further differentiation. As noted in section 3.1, what we find today, especially in the contexts of the new media, are organically emerging conventions for writing the dialect (often including codeswitching with other languages, whether superposed or indigenous) in and across the nation-states of the Arab world and a growing acceptance of doing so.

This chapter has sought to examine Arab nationalism as both a political and language ideology, suggesting some of the ways that a confluence of factors impeded it from reaching its goal, including a *fushāa* not fully equipped to function as a language of modernity, especially in the context of mass education, and unable in a profound sense to escape an archaizing and xenophobic purism; a sense of nation-state nationalism that continues to grow; and a globalizing world necessitating multilingualism for those not born speakers of French or English (and, increasingly, only the latter). In these regards, the *fushāa* could not function as a “unified and unifying language” (al-Ḥuṣṣri as cited in Suleiman 2003, p. 143) – indeed, no language could. My goal has not been in any sense to pathologize diglossia, as is so often done but, rather, to explore some consequences of its nature for and in recent history and to understand why the *fushāa* was not able to bear the weight assigned to it by Arab nationalism’s theorists.

To the extent it has succeeded, the discussion makes explicit some of the often unnoticed legerdemain that language ideologies achieve. It is perhaps especially useful to think about this topic a century after the beginning of World War I, which in many ways created the current borders of countries in the Middle East, some of which are being contested today in ways unimaginable just a few years ago. What is currently being questioned is not only the notion of Arab nationalism but more significantly the viability of nation-state nationalism within the region. As is always the case, ideologies of language are implicated in these struggles in complex ways.

#### 4 Future directions

As made clear by Choueri, Gelvin, Halliday, and Lawson in their 2009 exchange on Arab nationalism, that field is undergoing significant changes, including far greater attention to the local tensions between Arab and nation-state nationalisms across the Arab world. Particularly valuable would be nuanced, historicized discussions of the role that language, specific

languages, and language practices played in these struggles, using the evolving research on language ideologies as well as a theoretically grounded model of language purism.

Especially useful would be detailed studies of the ways language practices and ideologies continue to play a role in the evolution of nationalism and national identity in each of the countries of the region; key here will be language practices involving the new media as the nature of Arabic diglossia continues to be renegotiated. Likewise important will be analyses of the ways that technology continues to provide opportunities for younger Arabic speakers to possess a far richer awareness than their elders of language diversity in the Arab world, whether spoken dialects or the distinctive ways in which the educated of each country speak and write the *fushaa*. This growing awareness and knowledge of other varieties will perhaps lead to a higher degree of mutual intelligibility among dialects than has been the case in the past even as it demonstrates that the norms for using the *fushaa* have and will remain quite diffuse (in contrast to, say, the norms associated with Standard French).

Relevant here also will be an understanding of the roles of languages of wider communication and indigenous languages in the linguistic ecology of each nation-state and the region as a whole. Such studies will demonstrate that the notion of Arabic sociolinguistics may be an outdated one in an increasingly globalized and multilingual region.

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### Further reading

On Arab nationalism, see Choueri (2009), Gelvin (2009), Halliday (2009), and Lawson (2009). Choueri (2005) is the most accessible survey of Arab nationalism while Choueri (2000) provides a thorough analysis and bibliography. On purism, see Thomas (1991). Suleiman (2003, 2004) surveys many of the debates about language and nationalism in the eastern part of the Arab world from a very different perspective than the one taken here. Despite his justification for not including North Africa in his discussions (2003:11), Suleiman ultimately reinscribes a long-standing distinction between the *Mashriq* “Arab East” and the *Maghrib* “Arab West” that belies the goal of many Arab nationalists and one that North Africans see as a case of ideological erasure.